

Chapter 7

Historical Roots of Exploration – Through a Fröbelian Third Space



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Gerd's Story of Exploration in a Fröbelian Kindergarten

Let us introduce Gerd,¹ who as a child went to a Fröbelian kindergarten in the 1930s.

I went to a Fröbelian kindergarten, and Fröbel had the idea of shaping something from a variety of materials, like paper clips, clay and sewing on paperboard and fabric. In my kindergarten it was called working hour, but the idea was still the freedom and joy of the opportunity to choose material and to shape something. We did not have toys in kindergarten; so, what we had were the things that we made, like little baskets and paper cups. We used templates, which were easy, and the point was to learn to use the tools, like scissors, needle and thread. There was a closeness to nature; the songs that we sang had content that followed the year's cycles. In this way, we could more easily pay attention to natural phenomena. We learned to live with nature, which was also important to Fröbel. Just outside the fence was this little pond; it was a freezing pond during the wintertime, and we were allowed to slide on the ice. We did not have ice-skating shoes, but when entering the ice, we could look down under the ice. I remember very clearly, one cold winter day on the frozen pond, we discovered an ice-covered straw on the ice. I lay down to study the straw and discovered that the stiff straw also was down under the ice. I could see it clearly through the glassy ice. I was completely fascinated by the phenomenon. It was exciting to see straws being both under the surface and coming through the ice surface. This was quite an experience for me.

¹Gerd Wicklund-Hansen (1927–2015) was a former kindergarten teacher who, as a child, went to the only Fröbelian kindergarten in Bergen, Norway. Later she was educated at the Fröbel Institute in Copenhagen, Denmark. The vignette is developed from the transcripts and from a series of life story interviews for a project on the Norwegian kindergarten pioneers.

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7.1 Play and Exploration in Friedrich Fröbel's Educational Philosophy

The vignette introduces us to a local and historical reception of a Fröbelian pedagogy. Through memories, we get closer to the experience of the child's exploration of her environment surrounding her kindergarten in the 1930s in Norway. She remembers how cold ice and a straw in a freezing pond fascinated her. This memory is located in an institution, so we need to consider the teachers who were close by when the child explored the phenomenon of a straw being in the freezing pond at the same time as being above the ice surface. Even if teachers are invisible in Gerd's story, a teacher will have created the conditions for these explorative activities that she remembers.

References to Fröbel are often seen in early childhood educational research, especially in topics such as play, learning and pedagogical ideals, and in the origin of early childhood pedagogy, even if there is not much empirical research directly inspired by Fröbel (Johansson, 2018). It is timely to revisit Fröbel's texts to look for qualities. He left behind rich material, some of which is well known as his play gifts, and the rest of it not yet having been elaborated. When taking on the task of tracing the early roots of exploration as a pedagogical approach, starting with Fröbel was an obvious choice and point of departure. A special focus in this chapter is on how conditions for children as explorers are articulated and how the teachers' practices are described. We have used the pedagogy of *the third space* as a lens for discussing the space for exploration in an institutional pedagogical practice.

Play is not an activity belonging to childhood alone, rather it is a fundamental human activity (Karoff & Jessen, 2014; Sutton-Smith, 1997). In our context of early childhood education (ECE), however, a historical perspective of a play-based curriculum is relevant for the purpose of tracing the roots of exploration as a concept and practice. In this chapter we approach this search by combining text analysis and personal accounts as illustrations from a life story project.² The aim is to understand exploration from a Fröbelian *third-space* perspective through and beyond a textual analysis.

A play-based curriculum entails joy that can drive exploration and learning. In a Norwegian context, play is often linked to notions of nature where childhood is a time of innocence and purity. Often, when looking at broader international discourses on play, this view can be traced back to philosophers and pedagogues such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Fröbel (Ailwood, 2013; Sutton-Smith, 1997). This chapter will add to that body of knowledge by going beyond such labelling of historical pioneers. We will give special attention to how activities are articulated and proposed as explorative practice in classical texts by Fröbel, and we will also draw on the narrative of a Norwegian kindergarten teacher who grew up attending a Fröbelian kindergarten as a child – later to become a Fröbelian kindergarten teacher

²Excerpts can be viewed on the webpage Kindergarten Pioneers; <http://prosjekt.hib.no/barnhagepionerene/>

herself – in order to illustrate exploration as a pedagogy of a *third space*. We will trace and discuss how Fröbel's ideas and ideals meet past and current educational challenges for the kindergarten teacher and we will argue for *exploration* in early years' pedagogy for the future.

Ideas of children as explorers and other ideals in ECE can be traced to European educational philosophy and early ideas about the child in educational settings. Herein, we will study the conditions for *children as explorers* in kindergarten, the child's activity and the practice of the teacher in milieus inspired by Fröbel's philosophy. We have selected two texts for this purpose: *The Education of Man* (Fröbel, 1885, 2005) and *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (Fröbel, 1909). As a first step we analyse *The Education of Man* (Die Menchenerziehung; Fröbel, 1885, 2005), first published in Germany in 1826, over a decade before Fröbel opened his first kindergarten. Fröbel had an eclectic background with studies in surveying, topography, mathematics and crystallography, and he also worked as a teacher for the children of the von Holzhausen family (Bagger, 1916) prior to this publication. He was influenced by the new political winds in Germany and France, driven by a desire to change the way of thinking about children and their upbringing (Wulff, 1947). This book was an early attempt to address the role of the teacher and the role of the child in kindergarten didactics in European philosophy concerning ECE. In this writing process we have used two different English translations of the book, one by Jarvis (1885) and another by Hailmann (1987), in order to validate or data, as time and translators can change the meaning of texts. The second text, *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (Fröbel, 1909), first published in 1861, is a collection of publications by Fröbel, meant to educate kindergarten teachers about key elements of practices in kindergartens.

A *kindergarten* can be seen as an institution structured by existing historical knowledge. Educational institutions will be structured by the knowledge based in the ways of thinking that can be articulated in texts such as theory, policy documents, frameworks and curriculums. Texts can therefore create conditions for what kindergarten teachers and children are allowed and encouraged to do and what kinds of activities are possible in a kindergarten. Some texts such as Fröbel's have had an impact on practices to a larger or smaller extent for over 190 years. A text is thus a mediated artefact that creates conditions for thinking, understanding and practice. The aspects of children as explorers and how this will relate to cultural meaning-making, activities, play, learning and the use of artefacts are of interest when studying exploration as a concept with historical roots. The main question we explore in this chapter is: *How does the practice of 'exploration' appear in Friedrich Fröbel's texts from the perspective of a Fröbelian 'third space'?*

7.2 Tracing Exploration Through Friedrich Fröbel's Educational Philosophy

The history of early childhood educational philosophy and education influence contemporary understandings of ECE. Even if the history of education in Western countries can be traced back to ancient and medieval times, it is relevant to cover one of the most influential early years' philosophers in modern times when tracing educational roots for exploration. We lean on a perspective where play-based learning in kindergarten is in a historically-located place in time and space, which gives meaning to the social practices and to the professional task and mandate. Persson and Tallberg Broman (2017) suggest that history is mediated in what is referred to as a vertical (i.e. contemporary) and a horizontal (i.e. historical) complexity. The *vertical complexity* is made up of the material, mental and social dimensions in a place that is shared in the early childhood educational settings of today, while the *horizontal complexity* is the historically-located place (Persson & Tallberg Broman, 2017, p. 190). We try to overcome the simplification of seeing history primarily as a background for contemporary practices and understandings. Since play often comes to the forefront in the early childhood research of today, especially in the Nordic tradition, and because we consider exploration as a process connected to play, we started our study with the expectation of finding early traces in Fröbel's texts.

We are not alone in such an expectancy. Among others, Nina Lieberman (2014) writes about playfulness as a kind of light-heartedness found in children's activities, especially in their imagination and acts of creativity, behaviours that do not necessarily disappear when humans grow up, as a sense of humour, manifest joy and spontaneity also belong to adulthood. She describes how Fröbel's philosophy is a central historical clue to understanding how play and playfulness are fundamental for human growth (Lieberman, 2014). Fröbel's (1782–1852) philosophy of education and his didactics for kindergarten teachers are commonly and globally understood as a play-based and child-centred approach for learning activities under the guidance of a trained teacher in a child-friendly institutional setting (Prochner, 2017). Even if his philosophy of education has been a travelling idea where local varieties may cause confusion about whether to adapt the didactics to existing educational cultures or to oppose them, Fröbel's ideas are widely seen as a play-based approach in opposition to educational cultures of recitation and strict discipline (Wollons, 2000; Wulff, 1947).

Even if Fröbel's transnational influence has been strong, only limited amounts of Fröbel's works are available in English or in other languages (Johansson, 2018). In Germany, Helmut Heiland has made substantial contributions to the field (e.g. Heiland, 1992, 1998) and there has also been Fröbel-inspired research and advocacy in Anglo-Saxon countries (May, Nawrotzki, & Prochner, 2017; Wollons, 2000).

Fröbel's philosophy and his emphasis on both play and a holistic approach to the education of young children might be understood historically as being born between two revolutions. He lived in a period of transition between a feudal society and civic society. The ideas influencing Fröbel were individual freedom and social equity.

From biographical accounts, we know that Fröbel had a childhood with strict home-schooling and little experience of parental care and love. His drive and motivation for freedom and joy for the child comes through in his philosophy and didactic with the Fröbel gifts (Rockstein, 2015; Wulff, 1945). According to a recent Fröbel interpreter, Tina Bruce (2012), play and communication can help children transform experience from movement and sensing into abstraction and symbolic possibilities. Play is a natural behaviour for children; in the great outdoors, they seek out and enjoy the challenging experiences, where risk, uncertainty and adventure are central elements (Bruce, 2012). Let us read about *play in childhood* in Fröbel's own words: 'Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and, at the same time, typical of human life as a whole – of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things' (Fröbel, 1885, 2005, p. 55). Fröbel was concerned with the freedom to learn, in combination with appropriate guidance. His view of play was that teacher guidance – creating curiosity in the play activity and for the experiences of a child – is critical for children's learning and development (see e.g., Fröbel, 1885; Moore, Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie, & Boyd, 2014; Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006). To put it in Fröbel's own words: 'And then the play with the ball, in harmony with the bodily and spiritual development of the child, is seen by us to be a means of education, training, teaching, and learning, altogether as a genuine means of life' (1909, p. 141).

7.3 The Holistic Approach and *the Invisible Third*

As Fröbel clearly has pointed out in his life's work, attending kindergarten is part of a child's holistic education. As pointed out in the foreword by Hailman, the translator of one of the editions of *The Education of Man* (Fröbel, 1885, 2005), Fröbel's aim was to educate the child through self-activity. He wished to cultivate selfhood and repress selfishness (Hailman in Fröbel, 1987, 2005). His idea of a kindergarten did not take departure in the parents' need for supervision, as seen in political argumentation in many countries (Hultqvist, 1990), rather it was a place for holistic education based on children's premises.

Fröbel considered play, joy and nature as central to education and as a way of being and becoming a member of society; creating social bonds and acquiring knowledge and skills are part of early childhood. Education can, in this sense, be seen as both a cultural-historical and a social-relational phenomenon. This view of education explains a process where the child is living in cultural (i.e. ideological, relational, geographical and material) and societal (i.e. governed) worlds, both by exploring their *inner selves* and by exploring the world they live in.

Fröbel states in *Pedagogy of the Kindergarten* (1909, p. 239):

The knowledge of isolated and external phenomena may occasionally be a guidepost pointing our direction, but it can never be a path leading to the specific aim of child culture and education; for the condition of child education is none other than comprehension of the whole nature and essence of humanity as manifested in the child, and the most complete

possible realization and representation of the same, from the first appearance of the man as child and throughout the whole course of life. No education which fails to hold this aim consciously and persistently in view can, strictly speaking, claim to be an education worthy the nature of man.

In this statement, Fröbel formulates a holistic approach to ECE by stating that isolated knowledge and external phenomena cannot be the dominant route for young children because children comprehend wholeness. Links can be made to the contemporary wholeness approach seen in childhood-inspired cultural, historical and pedagogical approaches. How a child explores the world, continuously develops as a person and learns and influences the world are simultaneous and relational processes (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008; Ødegaard & Koreponova, 2013). The term *cultural formation* embodies children's and teachers' activities, their use of artefacts and their practices of meaning-making and learning (Ødegaard & Koreponova, 2013). The word *play* might be connected to exploration because exploratory and active play is central in children's learning and participation in society (Fleer, 2013; Hedegaard, 2016).

Fröbel explains how the shapes in nature inspire children to sense and reflect on their world in a direct way so that they can make sense of their experiences. This laid the foundation for the well-known *Fröbel gifts*, a philosophy and didactic approach that originated in Germany and later spread globally. Fröbel imagined that the gifts would teach the child to use location as an educational aid and inspire the child to discover the connection between human life and life in nature. Also, similar to other cultural-historical understandings, the gifts create a bond between the adult and the child who play with them; this bond is called *the invisible third*.

The invisible third is a formulation in which we have taken a special interest. It occurs in Fröbel's texts as central to pedagogical views and we will show how he articulates it.

The word *explore* was not found explicitly in the texts we have looked at; however, that does not necessarily imply that words meaning *connected to* or being synonymous with the word *exploration* were not there. However, the words *play* and *activity* were the most common words in the book *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (Fröbel, 1909), while *activity* came up in *Education of Man* (Fröbel, 1885) as the most common of the chosen associated concepts we searched for. We searched for connections between the concepts of *play* and *exploration* and discovered that *exploration* was not mentioned explicitly as a concept; hence, *play* was most prominent in his vocabulary. In *The Education of Man* (Fröbel, 1885), the word *play* is used 87 times in 288 pages. In *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (Fröbel, 1909), *play* occurs 994 times within 400 pages. This indicates that the kindergarten was certainly a place for play, according to Fröbel. We will now turn to the question of how a kindergarten is also a place for exploration and how such a practice is articulated in Fröbel's texts. Let us further study how Fröbel writes about play in *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (Fröbel, 1909). The book is divided into themes according to types of play (e.g. movement plays). Fröbel writes a poem as an instruction for playing with the ball (Fröbel, 1909, p. 240):

The ball may now be set in motion, either by the activity of the child or that by the mother.

Let it, therefore
 Its power to prove,
 Stir and move,
 Go and come,
 Roll and run,
 Hop and swing,
 Go low, then high,
 In circle fly,
 Go far, come nigh.
 From one place to another then
 The little ball can roam again.
 But it can also hide itself,
 To tease the little one;
 Away into dark can go,

Or fly towards the sun. All this the little child can learn, Can gladly in the ball discern, And learn to trust his strength in turn. What rich, what active life and thought, the ball to this young child has brought! The life in both but one life stays. Though it so many forms displays.

We can read this poem as an illustration of how the child strives to make his or her inner life outwardly, objectively perceptible. He claims that the child tries to do what the child sees done. As we read it, Fröbel illustrates all the varieties he sees possible in play with a ball. He writes: ‘As the ball stirs, moves, goes, runs and rolls, the child who is playing with it begins to feel the desire to do likewise’ (1909, p. 241). He establishes a connection between the material (outer) world and the human (inner) world. We could say that Fröbel, in this poem, suggests the pedagogy of exploration through the illustration of all these varieties and possibilities for playing with a ball, which is often stated as a holistic approach to pedagogy. The ball was considered the first ‘gift’ for a child. He also claims that ‘all of these perceptions should all be fostered at the same time’ (Fröbel, 1909, p. 241). In the introduction to the poem, Fröbel writes that the ball may now be set in motion, either by the activity of the child or the mother.

Activity is a word associated with exploring and *the invisible third*, which could be found in the two texts. But the word search was only an indication of what phrases and words we could find in the texts. While doing the initial reading, we found elements of *creativity* and *imagination* as central points in the texts that were describing the relationship between the artefact and the child. The imagination used when playing with the play gifts is clearly a central point in the pedagogy of exploration for Fröbel. In *The Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (Fröbel, 1909) he writes about the importance of the consideration of the presence and the absence of an object and its utilisation for play. Fröbel argues for repetitions, that the mother (or teacher) repeats the same experience in different ways with the same object. For example, by hiding a cube in her hand while she sings to the child: ‘I see now the hand alone. Where, oh, where can the cube be gone’ (Fröbel, 1909, p. 84). With gaze and attention, the mother (teacher) leads the child to her hand and the child’s hand. The mother (teacher) continues by concealing hand opens and sings ‘Aha! Aha! – My hand has hid the cube with care, while you looked for it everywhere. See

it is here! Look at it dear!’ (Fröbel, 1909, p. 84). The play continues by only concealing parts of the cube and in these ways, by singing, hiding and concealing, Fröbel argues that the mother (teacher) is bringing the child into more intimate connections with the expression of a cube (Fröbel, 1909). We can see how the song, the playful attention, the encouragement of imagination, the close relation between the mother (teacher), the child and an object are described. These relations occur in other texts through the metaphor of *the invisible third*. Fröbel (1885) gives attention to the importance of self-activity in the pedagogical setting:

But the answer partially found by himself is more to the child, and of more importance to him, than half hearing and half understanding it: this last causes indolence of thought and mind. Therefore, do not always answer your children’s questions directly, but, as soon as they have sufficient power and experience, give them the conditions to find the answer by their insight. (p. 51).

In this excerpt, we see traces of the invisible third. There is a bond between the adult and the child, and it is invisible. This excerpt could also be read as an argument for agency and participation, a recommendation to give children the space to find answers, to explore. The pedagogy found in Fröbel here points to the pedagogical approach of exploration and the teacher’s practice of dialogical engagement as proposed by Ødegaard (Chap. 6, this book).

7.4 Exploring Conditions for *the Third Space*

Our close reading of Fröbel (1826, 1885, 2005, 1909) makes it clear that the central pedagogical elements of conditions fostering children’s exploration can be found in his texts after all. Before we present some close readings, to illustrate this point we will turn to some contemporary readings about the third space.

There is a variety of research about the pedagogy of the third space (see e.g. Bhabha, 1990, 1994; Gupta, 2015; Gutiérrez, 2008; Williams, 2014), but these theoretical frameworks are not directly connected to the theory of the invisible third presented by Fröbel in 1885. Our aim in our literature research has therefore been to find research that explicitly combines the theory of the pedagogical third space, ECE and (if possible) Friedrich Fröbel. Kindergartens create conditions for children’s formative development,³ the content of what happens in kindergartens and how kindergarten teachers shape their practices (Ødegaard, 2012). It is in these practices and conditions that the third space can appear. This can be further illustrated by selected elements and aspects in this model, proposed and presented by Ødegaard (Chap. 6, this book).

Kafai, Peppler, Burke, Moore, & Glosson (2010) write specifically about Fröbel’s gifts and their importance in a digital age when connected to construction in textiles

³ *Formative development* is one of many translations of the Norwegian concept of *danning*. Other translations are *cultural formation*, *becoming* and *bildung*.

(sewing) and digital tools. In their findings, they find a third space between the play space of design (online and offline) where the playground is around a computer, the virtual play space where design can be shared online in groups and, finally, a third space where digital tools such as *LilyPad* open a public space because the design can literally be worn in public (Kafai, Pepler, Burke, Moore, & Glossoon, 2010). Here, the interpretation of the third space is connected to personal, digital and physical community with others during play. The space is online and the materiality is digital. The aim of using *LilyPad* might differ from kindergarten to kindergarten, and the relations between the *players* are different than if you created a physical design in a kindergarten.

Akhil Gupta (2015) writes about the pedagogy of the third space in a different context:

Educators have to stop feeling compelled to side with one particular approach and begin to acknowledge the fact that both experiences are equally important. Educators have to begin to feel comfortable with pedagogical hybridity, and the notion of a pedagogy of third space. (p. 269)

This is an acceptance of how educational ideas from both India and the West are starting to co-exist in an empowering way for the teachers using this approach in a direct way. In Gupta's (2015) text, Fröbel is not mentioned by name, but the origin of Euro-American ideas of ECE (e.g. Montessori and Reggio Emilia) is stated as a basis for the *hybrid model*. While Maria Montessori (1870–1952) was affected greatly by intellectuals such as Pereira, Itard and Seguin, it would be 'absurd' to suppose that she was unaware of Fröbel's works (Standing, 1957, p. 40). Gupta's (2015) theory about the third space and pedagogical hybrids is grounded in the colonisation and globalisation of India, and in strong influences between the coloniser and the colonised. Here, the hybrid – the third space – manifests inside the classroom practice. Gupta (2015) describes how teachers experience the debate of academic versus child-centred pedagogy every day and how this debate is not resolved. A public debate such as this might affect the discourses in both culture and the system, as we know policy is built on both. May (2016) points out that this debate and the swinging pendulum between these two approaches has been going on for years. In the pedagogy of the third space, Gupta (2015) concludes that one universal pedagogy for all children may not exist, but we, rather, need to create conditions for a curriculum that integrates expectations, aspirations and the struggles of those who actually experience it intimately, and that teacher education needs to prepare and guide teachers in 'diverse way of teaching and learning' (p. 270). With this in mind, we move on to Fröbel's texts about the pedagogy of the third space.

What is formulated as *muss unsichtbar ein Drittes*⁴, in the original manuscript of *The Education of Man* from 1826 (pp. 20–21), translated by Josephine Jarvis (Fröbel, 1885, p. 9):

⁴He formulates: 'Alle wahre Erziehung und Lehre, aller wahre Unterricht, der echte Erzieher und Lehrer muss in jedem Augenblicke, muss in allen seinen Forderungen und Bestimmungen also zugleich doppelendig, doppelseitig sein: gebend und nehmend, vereinend und zerteilend, vorsch-

All true educators must at each instant, in all their requirements and designs, be at the same time two-sided, giving and taking, uniting and separating, dictating and following, acting and enduring, deciding and setting free, fixed and movable; and the pupil must be so also. But between the two, educator and pupil, demand and result, there must be an invisible third – to which educator and pupil are alike and equally subjected – to choose the best, the right necessarily proceeding from the conditions, and voluntarily expressing itself. The quiet recognition, the clear knowledge of the choice of this third, and the serene submission to the choice, are what must express themselves in the educator undeviatingly and purely but must often be firmly and earnestly expressed by him. The child, the pupil, has such a correct discernment, such a right feeling for recognizing whether what the educator or father expresses and requires is expressed by him personally and arbitrarily, or generally and as a necessity, that the child, the pupil rarely makes a mistake in this.

We see through the translation of *The Education of Man* (Fröbel, 1885) what conditions a third space: the close and engaged relationship between the child and the teacher. The dialogical role of the teacher is described in the relationship with the child: giving and taking, deciding and setting free, being fixed and being movable. *The invisible third* is described as a choice – a place between the teacher and child where they are equals – and they both choose to move in the right direction according to the conditions around them. We interpret this *movement in the right direction* as an opening for exploration. As Fröbel describes, this happens in *instants* – situations where the teacher and child explore together. They can move towards a place of exploration through dynamics such as opening a participatory space (Ødegaard, 2007) for multiple ways of knowing.

Gerd Wicklund-Hansen's narratives, as presented in the vignette of this chapter, can exemplify what this *invisible third space* can contain and how this is connected to the practice of exploration. Wicklund-Hansen's story explores the third space in Fröbelian kindergartens. She shared her experience from a study trip to the Netherlands in 1947:

There I discovered that the interpretation of Fröbel varied. I got a shock when I saw how the pedagogues used the Fröbel gifts. I was used to a playful approach to the boxes with the wooden shapes. I believed the pedagogue should create a curiosity; they would shake it to make sounds, asking what is in here, use facial expression to support the curiosity and slowly, slowly removing the lock, revealing what was inside the box, but in the Netherlands children were sitting by the table with a box in front of them and on the teacher's order, the children were allowed to move the lock and take out the wooden shapes to build with them. This was not what we had been taught in Denmark and not at all what I remember from my childhood kindergarten.

reibend und nachgehend, handelnd und duldend, bestimmend und freigebend, fest und beweglich, und ebenso muss der Schüler, Zögling gesetzt werden; aber zwischen beide, Erzieher und Zögling, Forderung und Folge, muss unsichtbar ein Drittes: - das aus den Bedingungen notwendig hervorgehende und willkürlos sich aussprechende Beste, Rechte walten, ein Drittes, das Dritte, welchem Erzieher und Zögling gleich und ganz ebenmäßig unterworfen ist. - Das stille Anerkennen, das klare Wissen und das ruhige heitere Hingeben an das Walten dieses Dritten ist es ganz besonders, was sich in dem Erzieher und Lehrer schrankenlos und rein aussprechen, oft aber auch wohl durch, ihn sich fest und ernst aussprechen soll.'

The shock that Wicklund-Hansen is communicating (i.e. what she explains as a misreading of Fröbel) can be explained by new historical research about the international varieties of Fröbelian pedagogies' implementation in local contexts. According to Nelleke Bakker (2017), not much is documented in the Netherlands when it comes to the international knowledge base about Fröbel's influence on ECE around the world. The Fröbelian kindergarten philosophy, however, was introduced by Elise van Calcar in her books representing the Fröbel philosophy and didactics (Bakker, 2017). Bakker describes this version of Fröbelian pedagogy as a conservative, maternalistic version of feminism, whereas van Calcar puts more emphasis on learning to think than Fröbel did in his original texts. Wicklund-Hansen expected to see the pedagogue creating conditions for curiosity by engaging with the children.

7.5 Roundtrip to the Future: Through a Fröbelian-Inspired *Third Space*

As we have shown, by tracing some historical roots, both philosophically and through personal accounts, the pedagogy of *the third space* is a room of exploration that the kindergarten teacher and the child must enter together. Exploration as dialogical engagement, as first enunciated in Chap. 6, was a pedagogical practice, also revealed in Fröbel's texts as illustrated in this chapter. Our claim is that the pedagogy of the third space found in Fröbel's texts (1826, 1885, 2005, 1909) echoes contemporary pedagogical research and pedagogical approaches that take heterogeneity and diversity seriously, as for example as proposed in Gupta (2015). We need the emergent space and the dialogical engagement of teachers to create participatory spaces for children (Ødegaard, 2007). The classic dilemma of the teachers' aim for education and the involvement and agency of the child will always play out in practice. To let a child examine a straw in a freezing pond (as in Gerd's story) instead of rushing to the next activity embodies the teacher's knowledge of the pedagogy of the (invisible) third space.

In the practice, leadership and aims of the kindergarten, we can open up for routines that include this approach of 'deciding and setting free' (Fröbel, 1885, p. 9). An approach and pedagogy of pure instruction only includes deciding, while with an approach of pure freedom, there would be no learning within kindergartens. A pedagogical hybridity, where teachers manoeuvre between goals and letting emergent activities be manifested through exploration, can be suitable in pedagogical contexts where children's participation is a right of the child. In the 1800s, children were preparing for serious adult life, work, family and community responsibility. Fröbel seems to have been ahead of his time, focusing on the natural play and ways of the child that can occur when conditions are made right for play and exploration. This influences the conditions for exploration which are indirectly described in his texts.

Following Fröbel's approach and drawing connections to contemporary cultural-historical approaches, we argue that exploration gives children opportunities to take part in the regulation of what is going on and to decide which routes to further follow up. It gives space for initiatives and negotiation between and among children and teachers. It allows them to explore together with peers and teachers and, hopefully, exercise self-control as individuals. Through exploration, they can expand their understanding and develop what they already know. In dialogical engagement with teachers and peers, we can see that exploration will imply the necessity of taking turns, being sensitive not only to the dialogue itself, but also to the material world, the places where activity takes place, the artefacts, the shapes of objects and the landscape, movements, the participatory space given and developed, and the manifestations that can be experienced. By exploring, they will be given opportunities to symbolise and use objects in a way that is meaningful and thrilling to them. There will be aspects of emergence as well as manifestations, some of which will often be invisible in children's self-organised play and activities as well as in pedagogical, organised activities. This is not a conflict-free zone or a problem-free pedagogical approach, as we have also briefly pointed to in the examples. Texts and practices can be read and implemented in many local and personal ways. Such a search for traces to the historical origins of a pedagogical approach to exploration in ECE can show how early years' pedagogues have, for centuries, opposed what then – and still today – can be experienced in settings where education is either teacher-centred or child-centred only. A pedagogical hybridity is necessary in diverse groups of children. The need for hybridity is not lessened with the digital technology that is entering the early years. Our challenge is to find new and innovative ways to engage with children in the practice of living, learning and formation.

From the nineteenth century until today, technology has evolved and is an integrated part of our daily lives. The integration of digital skills and knowledge in the kindergarten and school context is providing us with new areas of exploration in digital space that require a knowledgeable and skilful kindergarten teacher. According to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018), in the era of digital transformation with all its consequences, children today need digital literacy as an essential life skill, which is just as important as physical health and mental well-being. If this is true, it is essential to ask ourselves what the consequences for the pedagogy of the third space are when we add a digital dimension to it. Does it have the potential for creating a new hybrid and will it affect the conditions we provide for kindergarten practice?

Appendix



Scan this qr-code to get access to a short movie about the researchers' journey to Germany in search of the historical roots of *exploration*.

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