

# Froebelian Leadership Project

## Introduction:

A “leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way” (Denehy, 2008, p. 107). Friedrich Froebel demonstrated clear characteristics of a leader through conveying a strong vision, a clear and coherent set of principles (Bruce, 2019; Liebschner, 1992), and a strong sense of community (Tovey, 2016; 2020).

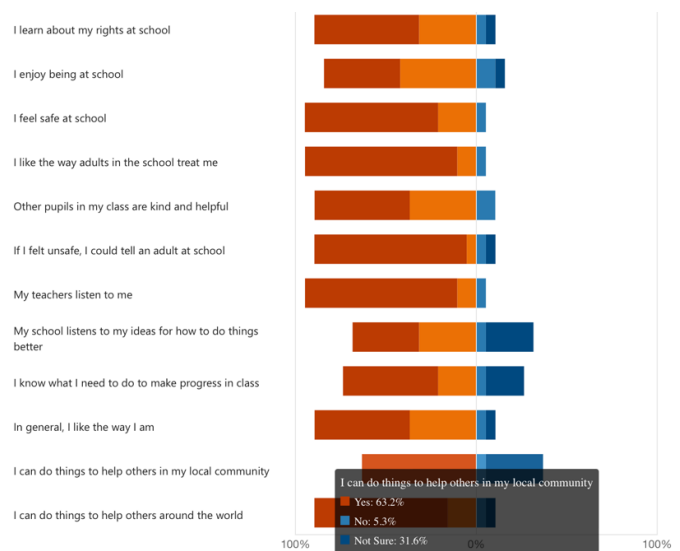
I will begin my assignment by briefly describing my setting and why my team chose to focus on ‘community’ for this project (Tovey, 2020). Next, I will describe our project focusing on Froebelian leadership characteristics and the distributed leadership model (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2006). Finally, I will then discuss the feedback received at the time of writing and provide a reflective account of how my own leadership has developed.

## Context:

I currently work in a very small, rural primary school in Scotland. I job-share the role of head teacher (HT) and then work as a class teacher (CT) the rest of the working week. Unfortunately, we have had difficulties with staffing this academic year and at the time of writing the only pupil-facing staff were myself, a part-time HT that I job-share with, and a pupil support assistant (PSA). One could argue that the very nature of a job-share naturally facilitates distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Spillane, 2006) but on the other hand, opportunities are limited due to the number of staff.

This academic year, 2022-2023, we had decided within our setting that we would begin the process of working towards the UNICEF (2023) Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA). When the children in our setting undertook the Pupil Questionnaire (UNICEF, 2021) we found that nearly 37% of our pupils either felt they could not help or were not sure how they could help in their

Figure 1: Pupil Questionnaire Results



(Own screenshot, Microsoft Forms)

local community. Thus, we decided to focus on the developing the sense of ‘unity and connectedness’ (Tovey, 2020) within the school community through distributing leadership responsibilities between the children and staff.

**Project:**

Current guidance from the Scottish Government (2020) states that a “Froebelian approach is applicable wherever adults work with children and families. This means that it can be used by practitioners working in rural and urban settings, in outdoor settings, and by child-minders looking after children at home and even in the early stages of our primary schools” (p. 103).

Froebel highly “valued the uniqueness of each individual but he also placed great emphasis on the community. He argued that individuality and community are not opposites. Rather, the community is enriched by the diversity and uniqueness of individuals. So, in turn individuals gain a sense of belonging and connection from the community” (Tovey, 2020, p. 6). He “rejected the tradition of teacher-led education which viewed children as passive learners. Rather he believed in education through activity and enquiry” (Tovey, 2020, p. 3) and “wanted to educate people to be free, to think, to take action for themselves” (Froebel in Lilley, 1967, p. 41). These views reflect key features of the distributed leadership model such as giving leaders “the autonomy to make key decisions in their areas of responsibility” (Solly, 2018, para. 13) and to take appropriate action (Heikka et al., 2013; Spillane, 2012).

Distributed leadership is becoming increasingly commonplace in several organisations (Torrance, 2015), with Bolden (2011) reporting “a rapid growth in interest since the year 2000” (p. 251) within educational establishments. Additionally, this change is also reflected in the documentation from Education Scotland (2015) and the Scottish Government (2019).

On reflection of the results of the Pupil Questionnaire described in the previous section, we decided to focus on raising the pupils’ awareness of how they could help both the school and wider communities. We decided to implement the following through a distributed leadership model:

- Restart and revamp the pupil responsibility groups.
- Get involved in community projects as a whole school.

**Pupil Responsibility Groups:**

On reflection, I regret that we never restarted our pupil responsibility groups after the restrictions on classes mixing were lifted following the COVID 19 pandemic (Sharratt, 2021). The results from the Pupil Questionnaire gave us the push we needed to make this a priority. Pupil Responsibility Groups provide pupils with “opportunities in which to develop their personal, organisation, leadership and communication skills further through rich and meaningful contexts” (Estyn, 2019, para. 8), with a clear focus on the school community (Walk, 2019).

Due to the small number of pupils (21) and pupil-facing staff (3) we decided to have three groups, each with one member of staff and seven pupils. This meant every pupil and pupil-facing member of staff were part of a Pupil Responsibility Group to facilitate a feeling of belonging and purpose within the school community (Tovey, 2020).

**Table 1:** Pupil Responsibility Groups Action Plan

Date	Activity	Responsible (initials)
07/03/23	Froebelian Leadership Assignment issued	Writer (HT & CT)
10/03/23	RRSA Pupil and Staff Questionnaires	
17/03/23	<del>Whole-school circle time</del> CANCELLED (Red Nose Day)	
24/03/23	Whole-school circle time	
30/03/23	<del>Commence Pupil Responsibility Groups (Thursday afternoons)</del> CANCELLED (following a discussion with all staff involved, it was decided it would be better to start after the Easter Holidays).	Writer (HT & CT) HT PSA All pupils
Easter Holidays (03/04/23 – 14/04/23)		
20/04/23	Commence Pupil Responsibility Groups (Thursday afternoons)	Writer (HT & CT) HT
27/04/23	Pupil Responsibility Groups	PSA
04/05/23		All pupils
05/05/23	Submission due	Writer (HT & CT)

Froebel recognised individuals’ own unique interests, the importance of a community and his leadership style empowered children and adults with the autonomy to operate freely (Cooper et al, 2022; LeBlanc, 2012; Wood & Attfield, 2005). I wanted to replicate this within our own Pupil

Responsibility Groups ensuring both staff and pupils within each group felt they had autonomy to plan for and facilitate the work within their respective groups.

We began with a whole-school circle time to facilitate planning and collaboration between staff and pupils. We discussed everyone’s skills and interests and arrived at the following groups:

- Pupil Voice Group (HT, 0.8 FTE)
- Eco Group (PSA)
- RRSA Group (Writer, 0.2 FTE Acting HT & 0.8 FTE CT)

For example, the staff member and pupils in the Eco Group had useful skills and experiences such as living and working on a farm.

***Community Projects:***

As discussed above, the results from the Pupil Questionnaire highlighted that nearly 37% of our pupils either felt they could not help or were not sure how they could help in their local community. HT found a local project focused on sustainability linked with secondary school transitions. This project focused on fishing in a local river. HT also found another community project that involved planting trees, as the local area lost hundreds of trees last year during storms. Unfortunately, pupils had not yet participated in either project at the time of writing.

**Table 2:** Community Projects Action Plan

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responsible (initials)</b>
13/03/23	Email to parents/careers to ask about community projects	HT School Administrator
14/03/23	Liaise with other HTs within the cluster to find out about community projects available.	HT
16/03/23	Tree planting project and river community project arranged for Term 4	HT
05/05/23	Submission due	Writer (HT & CT)

**Feedback:**

Feedback specific to this project is limited at the time of writing due to the short timeframe which has been further shortened by the school holidays. As a general observation both staff and pupils

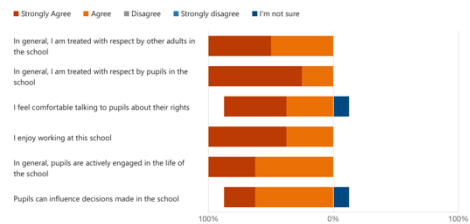
appear to be enjoying the Pupil Responsibility Groups, however we did not feel a formal questionnaire was appropriate at the time of writing as groups had only met twice. Thus, I have provided examples of more general feedback from colleagues and families since I began my senior leadership role in August 2022.

**Figure 3: Parent/Carer Feedback**

1. Please add any comments/feedback related to the BIG BREAKFAST.			2. Please add any comments/feedback related to the OPEN AFTERNOON.		
ID #	Name	Responses	ID #	Name	Responses
1	anonymous	Was great	1	anonymous	Was great kids singing was great too
2	anonymous	Would have been good if the two dates could have been combined into one.	2	anonymous	Nice to see the kids work and be back into school. Like the informal atmosphere. Would be great to see the P7s staying a bigger part perhaps thanking everyone for coming, announcing the songs.
3	anonymous	Well attended by many family members, couldn't personally attend but it was a step forward to welcoming families back into the school.	3	anonymous	Well attended nearly every pupil had a family member present. Possibly suggest a donation from those having tea/coffee similar to the community cafe.
4	anonymous	The big breakfast was a nice opportunity to chat to other parents and the free food and flowers were appreciated	4	anonymous	We loved seeing the children's work and their performance. Another good opportunity to speak to other parents

(Own screenshot, Microsoft Forms)

**Figure 4: Staff Questionnaire**



(Own screenshot, Microsoft Forms)

**Reflection:**

Through undertaking this project and the Froebelian Leadership course, I have significantly developed my own leadership skills. Prior to commencing this project, I only had a theoretical knowledge of distributed leadership from previous pieces of professional learning, but facilitating this project has allowed me to develop a working knowledge of the distributed leadership model. I recognise that I find it challenging to distribute responsibility to other members of staff and need to continue to actively work on this (Bass & Bass, 2008).

I have particularly enjoyed the collaboration with early years colleagues during the course and have decided this is something I would like to pursue. I plan to apply for a peripatetic ‘Principal Teacher - Early Years’ (Aberdeenshire Council, 2021) position when my HT secondment comes to an end.

**Conclusion:**

Froebelian practice and distributed leadership are becoming increasing commonplace within the Scottish education system (Education Scotland, 2015; Scottish Government, 2019; 2020). I have provided an account of how I have begun to develop these within my own setting and provided a reflective account of my own learning and next steps.

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