

Thinking Slow: taking the longer view about young children, early childhood education and the planet

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The seaweed workshop (Orkney)



A photograph of a narrow, wet cobblestone street in a town. On the left, a light blue building with a red wooden bench is visible. In the distance, a group of people, including children in bright jackets, are walking. On the right, a dark car is parked. The wet pavement reflects the surroundings.

Connecting to place



‘Holding time’

‘Education in the early years is a powerful arena for the development of values, attitudes, and behaviours. It holds space for creating understandings of ourselves in the world, our relationship to ourselves, other humans but also the more-than-human world (Taylor, 2017; Wals, 2022), p. 5

Engdahl, I., Furu, AC. Early Childhood Education: A Vibrant Arena in the Complex Transformation of Society Towards Sustainability. *IJEC* **54**, 1–12 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-022-00323-0>



Thinking
about
time

Photo credit:
Glaitness ELC,
Orkney

What is of value in ECEC?

What do we give time to?

What do we find time for?

What is seen as a waste of time?

What is viewed as a valuable use of time?

Are we making best use of children's time?'

Chloe Kerr, Quality Improvement Officer, ELC, Shetland.

Local context and time

‘Living on an island you might imagine there is a natural unhurried approach to life but this is not always the truth. We are constrained and dictated by time and rushed in many ways – What time does the fresh milk arrive in the shops? When is the next ferry off/onto the island so that we can access public services and clubs? What time does the shop close for the weekend? With all of these additional schedules imposed upon us as adults it is even more important that we, as a staff team, are mindful of the importance of time and that we ensure children are unhurried as they learn’.

Michelle Sandison, Whalsay ELC, Shetland, September 2023

The language of time

Naming time





‘....the ways we experience, name and interpret time contribute to the kinds of communities we imagine and inhabit’
(Badyer-Saye 2006: 96)

‘Golden time’



Saving time

Jennie Odell (2023) Saving time: discovering a life beyond the clock. Bodley Head, p. 224

‘to garden time’?

‘Would it be possible not to save and spend time, but to garden it- by saving, inventing and stewarding different rhythms of life? And wouldn’t this simply be an acknowledgement and use of the chronodiversity that already exists for all of us on some level, individually and communally?’

Jennie Odell (2023) Saving time: discovering a life beyond the clock. Bodley Head, p. 224

The Slow movement

'Its time to start the Slow School Movement'2002

The "slow food" movement began as a protest against the global proliferation of McDonald's restaurants. Mr. Holt calls for a similar backlash against today's "hamburger" approach toward education, which emphasizes uniformity, predictability, and measurability of processes and results.

Maurice Holt (2002) It's Time to Start the Slow School Movement, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84 (4) 264-271

Fast, take-away pedagogies

fast, take-away, virtual, globalized, downloadable uptake versions of electronic pedagogy - a technology or technics of increasingly abstracted experience' (p.17)

(Payne, 2006) in Payne, P. G., and B. Wattchow, B. (2009) 'Phenomenological deconstruction, slow pedagogy and the corporeal turn in wild environmental/outdoor education'. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 14 (1), 15–32.

Key elements include:

- Prioritising first-hand experience
- Giving students the opportunity to revisit the same environment in depth
- Allowing the time to pay close attention to feelings and senses.

Payne, P. G., and B. Wattchow, B. (2009) 'Phenomenological deconstruction, slow pedagogy and the corporeal turn in wild environmental/outdoor education'. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 14 (1), 15–32.

Are we asking young children and those who work with young children to run ever faster to maintain their place and ours in the world?

What alternatives are there to be reclaimed, rooted in early childhood traditions?

Slow knowledge and the unhurried child: time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education

- In depth interviews with early childhood researchers, practitioners and advisors in England, Scotland, Wales, Norway, Japan, Denmark, Portugal, Israel, USA, Canada and Australia.
- Exploration of slow pedagogies; seeking definitions of slow knowledge and examples of slow practices?
- How can slow practices be taught in early childhood teacher education?

A two year study funded by the Froebel Trust.

The background of the slide is a close-up photograph of water ripples. Several concentric circles of varying sizes are visible, created by droplets falling into a body of water. The water has a light blue tint, and the ripples create a textured, wavy pattern across the entire frame. The lighting is soft, highlighting the peaks and troughs of the waves.

Slow Pedagogies

Slow pedagogies: interconnecting themes

'Being with'

Going 'off track'

Diving deep with children and

Taking the longer view

‘Being with’: valuing opportunities to give children undivided attention



‘This means that when one re-encounters an everyday experience, such as mopping the floor, folding the washing or serving lunch, the resonance of past moments persists and through potentiality of the present, care is born *in the moment*. Moments offer us a way to re-examine the overlooked aspects of care.’ p. 91.

(Mitchelmore, S., Degotardi, S. and Fleet, A. (2017) The richness of everyday moments: bringing visibility to the qualities of care within pedagogical spaces. In E. White and C. Dalli, eds. Under three-year-olds in policy and practice. Policy and pedagogy with under three year-olds: cross disciplinary insights and innovations. Singapore: Springer.

Exploring Slow pedagogies: 'Going off track'

...making time to follow
children's questions..

'You could say a *fast pedagogy* is one where you know you have to get somewhere, you know *what* the somewhere is and you know *when* you have to get there and there isn't any time to go off track. So slow pedagogy is about being open to exploration, to looking for somewhere new, those sort of metaphors like 'lines of flight' , the idea of emergence.....where people are saying 'lets see where this takes us';' That's really interesting, we need to understand that'; 'we need to go deeper into that' or 'I've never thought of that connection before 'so it would be somewhere where people were digesting rather than just getting indigestion! Actually having time to work on things and think about things.'

Peter Moss, Interview May 2020 in Clark (2023: 43)

Diving deep with children's interests

‘Slow pedagogy...it's kind of the opposite of fast, hurry, it means to take time. And then in reading and thinking through it's not just concerning time. It's more about the deeper things. So at this moment defining slow pedagogy is first of all about listening to and respecting every child's way of learning and living. Again, having dialogue with him or her, which means participating in the living world of the child. And to explore and go beyond the horizon of the existing world together , which means solidarity.’

Mari Mori, interview, September 2020, in Clark (2023: 46)

‘Working theories are children’s expressions of inquiry acts, representing children’s ways of knowing and learning. They show ways children deal with their everyday knowledge from life experience, and use this to evaluate new information useful for further knowledge and action. Working theories also represent children’s curiosity and efforts to connect understandings and experiences they are interested in. ’p. 130

Hedges, H. (2022) Children’s interests, inquiries and identities: curriculum, pedagogy, learning and outcomes in the early years. Routledge.

The longer view of young
children



Active, engaged thinkers not
passive receivers of
information

'Both these notions of freedom from something, freedom from rote learning and freedom from inappropriate teaching led Froebel to a more positive notion of freedom, namely freedom for children to participate, to choose, to act, to observe, to play and above all *to be allowed time to absorb new knowledge at their own speed of learning.*'

Liebschner, J. (1992) *A Child's Work: freedom and play in Froebel's educational theory and practice*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 66.

The longer view of ECEC

The impatient look

“ I am inclined to argue that what we find here is predominantly an impatient look. Not only do we find a desire to put as much world as possible into the child or student. We also find a desire to do this as quickly and cheaply as possible, to constantly monitor and measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the operation, to make teachers' salaries dependent on the extent to which they succeed in producing pre-specified “learning outcomes.” Biesta (2012)

“Working theories are evidence of the nature and content of children’s interests. They require knowledgeable, patient and reflective teachers to engage with children’s theorising, and make efforts to interpret these built on a solid foundation of relational pedagogy and related professional knowledge.’ p. 131

Hedges, H. (2022) Children’s interests, inquiries and identities: curriculum, pedagogy, learning and outcomes in the early years. Routledge.



Slow and patient, unhurried kindergarten.....

A slow and patient kindergarten

- Make time, place and materials to explore what they think through play
- Create opportunities to deepen and extend children's learning through 'being with' and revisiting moments through pedagogical documentation
- Make time to listen to children's ideas and experiences through a range of expressive languages
- Prioritise time to listen to multiple perspectives from families and colleagues
- Be a place for resistance, unafraid to encounter uncertainty and difference and to challenge policies that sit uncomfortably with pedagogical principles
- Be a place where taking the longer view is valued: about children's lives, about education and the planet
- Value the 'here and now and': pay close attention to the present whilst recognising children's past knowledge and experiences and being mindful of their future (Clark, 2023: 132)

The longer view of the planet

Forest food garden and slow pedagogy

Each year, second-year university students design an aspect of a two-hectare forest food garden, situated on the campus, which they then handover to the next year's cohort to plant.

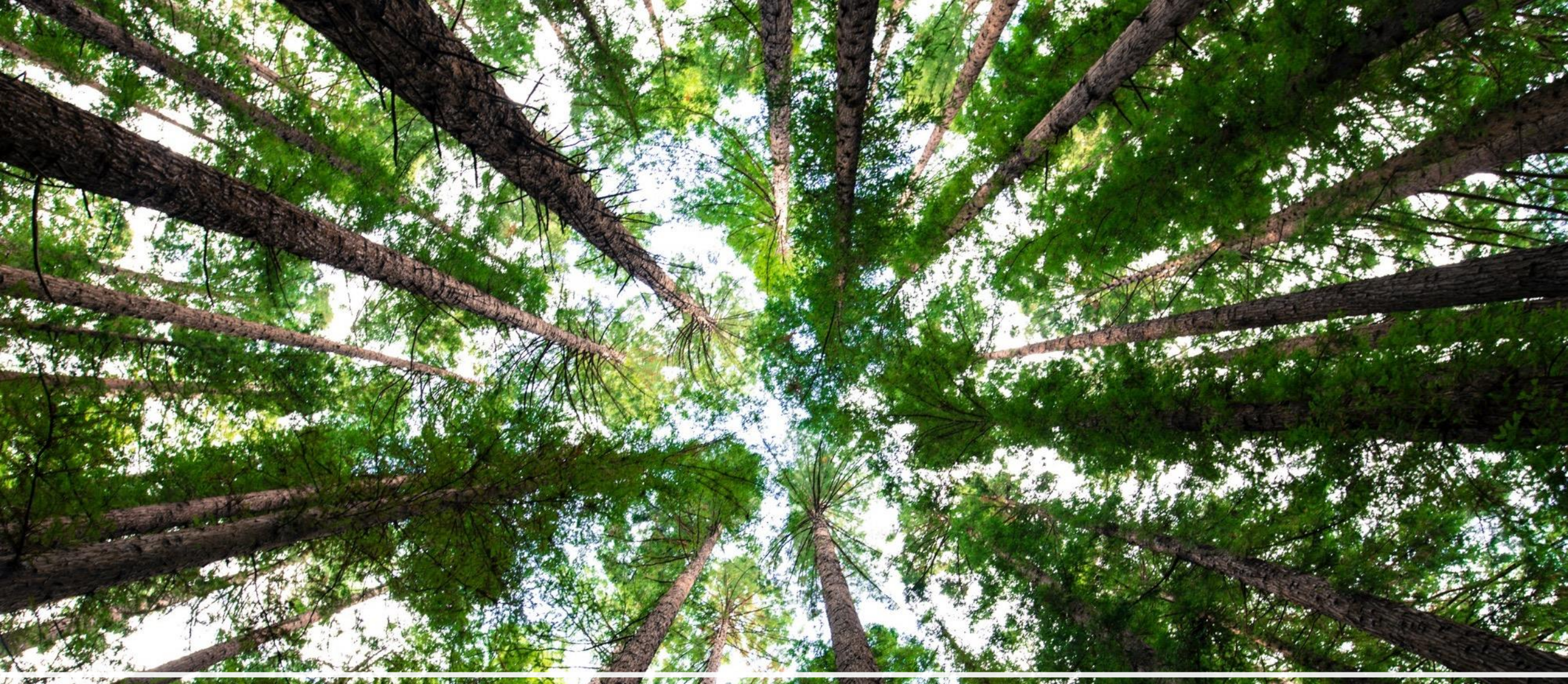
Perpetua Kirby, John Parry and Daphne Lambert (2021)

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/creating-a-forest-food-garden-higher-education-that-is-disruptive-by-design>

A paradox of slow

‘recognising that climate change is differentially experienced and entangled with everyday lives, we experiment creatively with the multiple ways of knowing, including the intuitive, experiential and emotional, as well as the rational. Paradoxically, this requires a slowing down to attend to feelings and perspectives as a means to identify what to transform together in response to the urgency of the environmental crisis (Kirby, Parry & Lambert, 2021).

<https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/creating-a-forest-food-garden-higher-education-that-is-disruptive-by-design>



Taking the long view



Photo by [Arnaud Mesureur](#)
on [Unsplash](#)

‘This is the long view of culture. We are about cultural change, cultural realignment, creating a culture of caring for people, and caring for the planet. That’s the ultimate thing’ he says. ‘That’s what we do in our work: let children have adventures , and grow up to be courageous, confident people.’ Robin Moore

The future is a playground, Washington Post, Caitlin Gibson, June 30, 2023, [Washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com)

Resources

- Clark, A. (2023) *Slow knowledge and the unhurried child: time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education*. London: Routledge.
- Clark, A. (2020) 'Towards a listening ECEC system: valuing slow pedagogy and slow knowledge' in Moss, P. and Cameron, C. (eds.) *Transforming early childhood in England*, London: UCL Press, 134-150.[Open access- free download).
- Froebel Trust website- links to several recorded talks
<https://www.froebel.org.uk/events/meet-the-author-professor-alison-clark>
- Podcast interview about Slow pedagogies in the early years. Future learning design.
<https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/futurelearningdesign/episodes/On-Slow-Pedagogies-in-the-Early-Years---A-Conversation-with-Prof--Alison-Clark-e26frvj>
- Research Blog about slow knowledge:
<https://alisonclarkinthemaking.wordpress.com>

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