

Freedom with connections ...

James Boddey

Hopes for Future Early Years Care and Education

I have always been fascinated by a person-centred, humanistic approach to Early Years Care and Education (EYCE), taking inspiration from Rogers' (1961) person-centred approach and Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of needs. In developing our kindergarten's Person/Child-Centred Approach to EYCE, I began to feel that the ethos focused too much on individuals, failing to highlight how individuals are interconnected, how others help us to develop and flourish, and how we can support others to do the same.

So, our ethos changed. We still draw upon much of Maslow's and of Rogers' works, but have added a new goal and central focus - *'Freedom With Connections'*.

Freedom With Connections ...

... incorporates the main aspects of our philosophy and our aspirations for everyone. Children must feel safe, comfortable and supported in the physical and emotional environments we have created, because only then will they be able to explore, take risks, develop relationships, and grow emotionally. We want children to be free to develop in their own uniqueness and experience the freedom to flourish.

Each child has a unique, full potential and only when in a supportive environment will they achieve this. We share our world with others, plants, animals, for no one is an island. If we all focus on ourselves, no one would ever truly achieve their full potential.

James Boddey is the Director of Busy Bodies Child Care Centre, Ludlow, Shropshire.

He studied Early Years at the University of Worcester, completing his Foundation Degree and gaining accredited Early Years Teacher Status.



Ubuntu's "I am me because you are you" reflects all aspects of an individual's life, and one's development and achievements result from interactions with others. **Individuals are unique, offering different skills and knowledge, and it is only when we connect that all our full potentials are achievable.**

The challenge for all educators, not just us in EYCE, is to support learners to recognize the importance of connections in adding meaning to, for example, the notion of freedom, and the responsibilities such a benefit brings.

Hopefully, individuals are free to be who they wish, to become the best person possible. However, not at the cost of harming others or our planet. Individuals cannot act in ways so as to stop or inhibit others reaching their full potential. Our actions have implications for others.



Connection With Nature ...

... which is the ideal classroom and the perfect place for young children. No other place can both calm and stimulate the senses, no other place can ignite the imagination and silence us with wonder in the same moment. Nature changes with the seasons and is different every minute of the day, just as we are. It is growing, adapting and in a continual state of flow. When we walk peacefully through a forest, turn over a rock to find the insects underneath or see our seeds growing, we have the opportunity to connect with nature. Time spent in and surrounded by nature has benefits besides contributing to learning, for example, about where food comes from and how to care for our planet and wildlife.

Connection With Self and Others ...

... is vital in learning to value oneself and treating others fairly and equally, and reflects Ubuntu values. Recognizing and valuing others is one of the most important skills learned in the foundation years of life and connecting with others through Active Listening, sharing and communication is vital to success. Knowing oneself is the first step in feeling comfortable with who one is and the unique value each of us adds to the world.



Connection With Community ...

... is, one could argue, becoming more difficult in a time when the internet and social media makes it seem easier. Connections with others in our community are vital if we want children to grow up to have a say in their community and shape their future – if they are to function in Ubuntu's Open Society. The local community is full of wonders, inspirational people and opportunities. Through regular and frequent visits into the local community, children experience being part of a wider family.

Education must contribute to developing a sense of “freedom with connections” - more freedom to explore our own unique full skills and potentials, whilst recognizing that we are connected to each other and have a vital role to play in supporting everyone to become the best they can be.

Only then will we become the best we can.

