

## Froebel Gifts

In 1905, teacher Kate McCracken compiled her teacher notes on using Froebel Gifts whilst working at the Froebel Demonstration School in Kensington. These bound loose-leaf papers, now worn with age, offer insight into their pedagogical use in the early twentieth century. Ms McCracken ardently emphasises the physical, mental and moral effects of incorporating Froebel Gifts into the curriculum:

*Physical: Manipulating power is increased. The eye is trained. Mental: The child learns new words in describing etc. The child's knowledge of numbers is increased. The aesthetic sense is trained in making forms of life, beauty and knowledge. Observation, imagination and creative powers are developed. The child's knowledge of geometry is increased. Moral: Habits of order are increased. Perfection, accuracy, neatness are increased.*

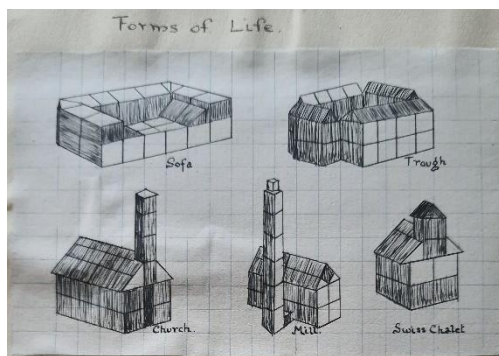


Figure 1

Further pages of Ms McCracken's notes share how the Gifts might be effectively embedded into lessons, with accompanying illustrations (For ex: Figure 1). What were these lauded Gifts, and what was their part in the early pedagogical practice of IPS? The answer begins with Friedrich Froebel:

Friedrich Froebel (Figure 2) was a German pedagogue, born in 1782, renowned for his contribution to early-years education. So influential was

his contribution, that it is to him we owe invention of the 'kindergarten'. Experiential learning was key to his educational theory: he believed that children needed to interact with the world to effectively learn. Thus, for him, play was the salient aspect of children's education.

Indeed, Froebel attributed play with spiritual attributes when he asserted that play...



Figure 2

*'...is the purest and most spiritual product of the child, and at the same time it is a type and copy of human life at all stages and in all relations. So it induces joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer repose, peace with all the world. From it flows all good.'*

Using play - or educational games and activities - was key to forging a healthy and harmonious link between the self and the surrounding world, he claimed. Interpreting and understanding ostensible 'opposites' in the world was readily achieved with play. Froebel saw play as 'the product of the connection of related opposite' which was constituted by 'the free activity of the child and the mobility and consequent responsiveness of the object.'

The role of teachers, argued Froebel, was to facilitate this harmony by encouraging them to engage in structured play: in part, by incorporating the use of 'Froebel Gifts'. These Gifts which were, reportedly, the first educational tools for play, encouraged children both to explore the world and to hone their creative skills. Gifts were to be utilised in education in order to encourage a child to make connections between him/herself and the surrounding world.

These Froebel Gifts included six distinct sets which were distributed by age group. The first two Gifts acquainted children with different shapes, encouraging them to consider the relationship between self and the objects. These included the following:

**Gift 1:** a box of yarn balls which are 1.5 inches in diameter, including red, yellow, blue, orange, green and purple colours. (ages 1-2).

**Gift 2:** a wooden ball (1.5 inches in diameter), with accompanying cylinder, cube, and suspending frame.

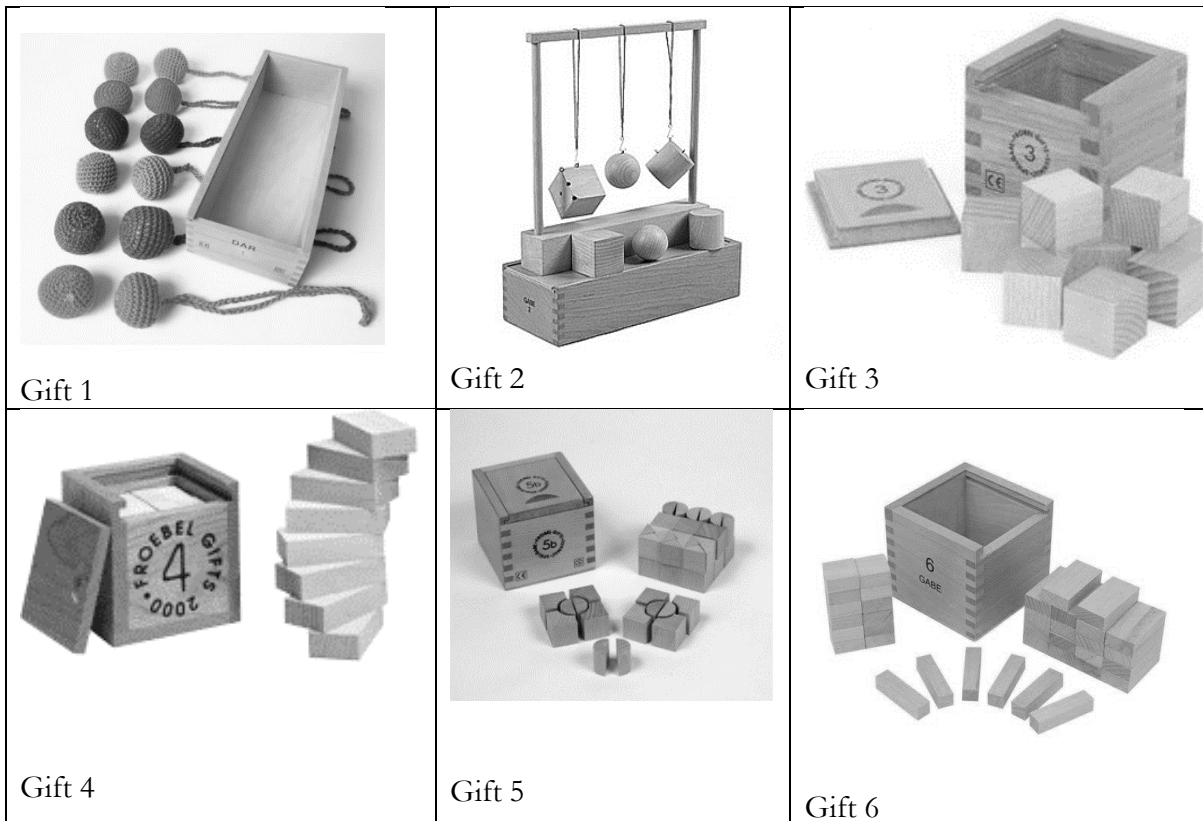
The last four gifts were categorised as ‘Building Gifts’. Composed of various elements, each Gift was received as a whole. Children were, then, encouraged to modify the components whilst drawing upon their creative impulses.

**Gift 3:** a 2 inch cube which was divided into eight smaller 1-inch cubes (ages 2-3).

**Gift 4:** a 2-inch cube which was divided into eight oblongs (ages 2-3).

**Gift 5:** a 3 inch cube formed of 27 smaller cubes (ages 3-4).

**Gift 6:** a 3-inch cube divided into 27 oblongs (ages 4-5).



Accompanying the ‘building gifts’ were a set of rules which Froebel generated for their use. Crucially, these rules encouraged the development of language skills, cultivating independent thought and respect, and team-work.

1. Use all the materials in order to keep the idea of the relation of parts to a whole.
2. Give names to each object constructed, bringing it into relation with the child's experience.
3. The younger the child, the more you should talk about the thing that you will construct.
4. When the play is designed to be individually oriented, do not allow the child to rely on the materials of his playmates in his building project.
5. Intentional group work or "united building" should be frequently introduced during these exercises.

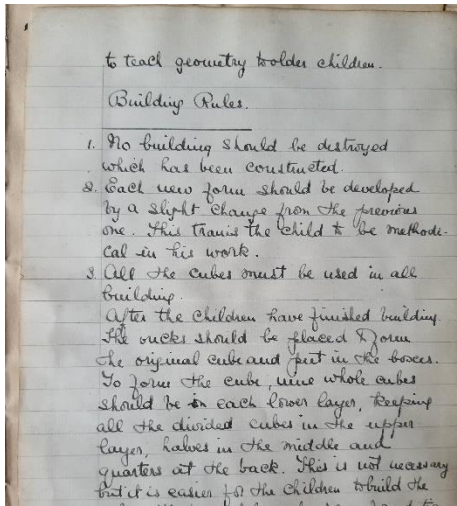


Figure 3

Ms McCracken, evidently, also saw the need to incorporate some additional rules for the 'Building Gifts' which she listed in her teacher notes for the Demonstration School (Figure 3), with emphasis on orderliness and method:

1. No building should be destroyed which has been constructed.
2. Each new form should be developed by a slight change from the previous one. This trains the child to be methodical in his work.
3. All the cubes must be used in all buildings.
4. After the children have finished building the blocks should be placed in the original cube and put in the boxes.

These gifts were utilised by Froebelian educators to facilitate structured play, with which children learned to imagine the environment and create it in multifarious ways. As the opening narrative suggests, these tools were utilised at the School from the early 1900s and associated pedagogical advice for teachers was plentiful. Their continued use throughout the School curriculum is evident until the middle of the twentieth century (Figure 4).



Figure 3

## **Bibliography:**

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