



Chapter brief

Slow pedagogies and slow knowledge

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Chapter summary

Introduction

The concept of ‘slow pedagogy of place’ has emerged from environment/outdoor education in an attempt to counter what Payne and Wattchow (2009) describe as ‘take-away pedagogies.’ Take-away pedagogies are fast, virtual, globalised, downloadable pedagogies that are easily accessible but offer little long-term nourishment. For example, downloadable worksheets be quicker and easier for educators, do they provide opportunities for deep learning? (pp. 37–38).

A slow pedagogy enables us to engage in a place for more than a fleeting moment and encourages us to attach and receive meaning from that place. The focus is on repeated immersion in the place, providing first-hand, in depth, embodied learning which engages all the senses (p. 38).

Context

The study draws from research interviews and a focus group conducted with twenty early childhood and primary school researchers, educators and advisors across England, Scotland, Wales, Norway, Japan, Denmark, Portugal, Israel, USA, Canada and Australia. Three interconnected themes emerged from the research: ‘Being with’ relates to giving attention to the rhythm and pace of children and the key concepts of listening and lingering. ‘Going off track’ is about valuing the unexpected and unknown. ‘Diving deep’ is about creating the time to explore in depth together.

‘Being with’

‘Being with’ is seen as the essence of slow pedagogy. It is about more than time; it includes capturing the rhythm of the children and the adults in the space as well as the materials and environment. It involves being with others, and with ideas, rather than standing back. It connects

with the ideas of experiential and relational pedagogy with an emphasis on engagement between the teacher, children and environment (p. 39).

Rather than a transmissive pedagogy, 'being with' is a pedagogy of co-learning where teachers and children cultivate a space together. This includes working together, helping each other to notice, borrowing each other's ideas, and not seeing ideas as belonging to any one person but to everybody so they can be shared to cultivate a culture of thinking together (p. 39). When educators slow down, they are more likely to pay attention to things in a way that enables them to be and to listen rather than in a way enables them to do.

'Being with' involves 'learning to linger'; being comfortable with pauses and not needing to always move on to the next thing (p. 41). There are also close links between 'being with' and the 'pedagogy of listening', as expressed in the early childhood programme, Reggio Emilia (p. 41). '[T]here is time to "be with" children's ideas ... time to listen to the unexpected and the urgent concerns (p. 42).

When we linger and listen, pedagogy becomes something that we do *with* children, rather than *to* children. The time and opportunities for wonder and uncertainty changes the adults' role to one of presenting possibilities for inquiry and tools. A role of supporting the children's ideas rather than having a goal in mind and a focus on progressing children (p.42).

Going 'off track'

Slow pedagogies allow for and value the unpredicted or unexpected: 'going off track'. Rather than being guided by an end goal they have an openness to exploring what is not known and value surprise. They are not constrained by the need to get somewhere at a certain time but instead value time for reflection, dialogue and discussion. Educators and children follow the unexpected and have time to think about and investigate things (pp. 42-43).

In line with the 'off track' metaphor', a distinction can be made between the 'navigator' and the 'wayfarer'. The navigator works point to point, planning and calculating before the journey begins. For the wayfarer, every destination along the way is important, not just the final one. Slow pedagogy provides opportunities for children to be wayfarers. They may have a destination but take many different paths, or they may have no destination but they're moving and learning as they go along. The concept of the wayfarer acknowledges and accepts difference rather than conformity. A key advantage of this is that it allows children to take different roads on their developmental journey and follow their own timetable (p. 44).

Slow pedagogies are all about being present in the moment with the children constructing the next steps together. Often this means the educators must leave their expectations and pre-understandings behind in order to really listen and catch the moment. Pedagogical improvisation, where the professional seeks the child's perspective, is part of this process. This includes conversations and/or questions which give the children the stage and allow them to take the conversation in their own direction rather than having a predefined purpose (p. 45).

'Diving deep'

Diving deep allows the possibility of children and adults exploring in depth together (p. 46). Slow pedagogy is not just about time but also includes pedagogical relationships that create opportunities for deep inquiry. There is a less focus on the length of the interaction and more on the depth; this connects with the idea of play pedagogies and the need for deep meaningful engagement in play scenarios (pp. 46-47).

Diving deep has connections with the concept of a spiral curriculum (Bruner 1960); revisiting ideas at different levels to gain different perspectives and a deeper understanding. Providing multimodal learning opportunities acknowledges that children need time to be recognised and supported in their learning (p. 47). Diving deep moves away from the fragmented timetable with its focus on 'getting through the curriculum' and 'finishing tasks'. Instead, there is an emphasis on deep engagement with firsthand and embodied experiences (p. 47).

Diving deep can also influence pedagogical documentation. We often refer to documentation to 'make learning visible', however in slow pedagogy there is also a focus on 'making learning visible in order to deepen learning'. We can create lots of documentation that makes learning visible, but when we understand whose learning we want to deepen or support, it provides us with a focus and a purpose for documentation (p. 48).

'Deep diving' requires the educators to learn from the children; they need to tune into the children's rhythm and slow speed. Children will usually take the time they need if they are not rushed into moving along. Slowing down is having a genuine interest in what one can sense in the moment (p. 48).

Slow knowledge

Slow pedagogies are linked to 'slow knowledge'. Slow knowledge challenges the view of knowledge as concerned with facts, universal, easily packaged, delivered and measured, providing an alternative view that values the complexity and interconnectedness of knowledge.

Slow knowledge encourages us to move away from superficial, surface level knowledge and instead build knowledge over time (p. 49). Context is important and therefore local and indigenous knowledges are valued, along with the views of the children, peers, siblings, families and the wider community. Slow knowledge provides time to recognise patterns and connections between ideas, conversations and events over days, weeks or years (p. 50).

Slow knowledge is not linear and can be difficult to measure or duplicate, however it is resilient and durable and may draw on 'old' knowledge, accepting that there is not always a need for 'new knowledge'. This acceptance provides space for traditions and allows children and adults to express their lived experiences in multiple ways. Slow pedagogy is unafraid of complexity and challenges what is taken for granted or remains hidden (p. 50).

Key take-aways for practice

- 'Being with' relates to giving attention to the rhythm and pace of young children and the key concepts of lingering and listening.
- 'Going off track' points to valuing the unexpected and children as 'wayfarers'.
- 'Diving deep' or 'digging deep' refers to children and adults exploring in depth together.

Further reading

Gallacher, L. (2017). From milestones to wayfaring: Geographic metaphors and iconography of embodied growth and change in infancy and early childhood. *GeoHumanities*.

Kind, S., Shayan, T., & Cameron, C. (2018). Lingering in artistic spaces: Becoming attuned to children's processes and perspectives through the early childhood studio. In *Pedagogies for children's perspectives* (pp. 67-80). Routledge.

Olsson, L. M. (2009). *Movement and experimentation in young children's learning: Deleuze and Guattari in early childhood education*. Routledge.

This article brief was compiled by Jodie Stribling and Anne Morrison