



Pillarwood Farm Preschool

Why we do what we do.

When Clarissa and I finally decided that we had done enough talking and we actually needed to do our outdoor preschool, we had to work out what route we should take to be the most beneficial to the children in the area.

We wanted to move away from the idea that an outdoor setting means that it is a Forest School setting. We take elements of the Forest School pedagogy, but we wanted to add other ways of learning to enhance our setting.

Now, what follows may seem long winded and possibly over the top, but we feel it is incredibly important for people to know what we teach our team and why.

We want to offer a point of difference to the early years provision in our area. To do this our team, children, parents and of course us, need to know why we do what we do, and how it affects everything that we do.

In the UK we have concrete learning frameworks that we must follow, but the tools we can use beyond that rely heavily on our knowledge of early years pedagogy.

Every situation that we are in and every child we look after is different. The more we know, the more prepared we are to approach different situations and challenges. By learning about a different early years pedagogy and constantly learning doesn't mean we have to adopt it overnight, it just adds new tools to our kit.



What is early years pedagogy?

Most simply, pedagogy is about how we educate children and help their development. It's the techniques and strategies we can use to provide opportunities for development and how our relationships and interactions with children can affect them.

Early years pedagogy can be many things, but it may touch on things like:

- **Development** - Focusing on how and why children change in terms of their learning and development over time.
- **Behaviour** - How a child's experiences shape their behaviour.
- **Relationships** - How children change and learn in relation to those around them.
- **Culture** - How family life and culture impact learning and relationships.
- **Critique** - Inviting you to challenge assumptions and issues around power, equality, and curriculum expectations.

When looking at 'what, how, why' whilst setting up our preschool we looked at our own backgrounds in early years and the provisions we had worked in before. Clarissa and I had both worked in Montessori settings, and I had been busy setting up Forest Schools in local schools. Both these pedagogies have a great number of wonderful things about them. But why not put them together to create another pedagogy. These pedagogies don't necessarily disagree with one another, and one isn't better than the other.



Pillarwood Farm Pedagogy.

At Pillarwood Farm we particularly identify with some of the pedagogies. We have added below. What we have tried to do is to weave them meaningfully in and out of our practice and have found it extremely beneficial. We then in some ways have created our own Pillarwood Farm Pedagogy.

- At the heart of what we believe is creating a safe, ordered and nurturing environment that encourages self-directed, hands-on learning in an outdoor environment
- That each child is individual and deserves to learn and play at their own development. Each child is offered play opportunities that are right for their stage of development. Independence as early as possible in daily tasks.
- Our children participate in cooking and preparing food or tidying away, using tools. This develops life skills and encourages respect for things. Use language to allow all activities to encompass different areas. Children can build their own learning, and require adults to help support it, not instruct.
- The focus on exploratory and child-led play is meant to improve problem-solving skills in particular. All or almost all of our learning takes place outside in a woodland or natural environment.
- Children are trusted to explore and discover, and allowed to engage in risky play.



- Encouraged to choose their own learning and to develop a close, positive relationship with nature.
- We understand that our team need to carefully consider their actions, knowing that their behaviour can and will be copied by children.

1. Froebel

Friedrich Froebel was a German educator who invented the concept of kindergarten. The Froebelian approach promotes the importance of play, because it allows children to understand their world by directly experiencing it.

What are the basic principles?

- Childhood is more than just preparation for adulthood.
- All learning is linked, and so every different area of learning can impact others.
- Child-initiated play is very important as it means that the child is motivated and engaged.
- Always start with what children can do, not what they can't.

How can it affects our provision

- Froebel puts a lot of emphasis on self-discipline. So we consider whether we are providing an environment in which children can concentrate and remain focused on the task at hand.
- How well do our practitioners know their children? A key part of Froebel's early years pedagogy is that each child is offered play



opportunities that are right for their stage of development. This is one of the reasons why we all share keyworker responsibilities. We make sure all of our practitioners know how to simplify certain activities so that every child can confidently and happily play.

- We allow children opportunities to make choices, errors, and decisions. This is how they learn what is right for them as an individual.
- Constructive play forms a large part of the Froebelian approach, as well as plenty of opportunities to talk, listen and communicate with adults and other children. We feel it is important that children have time with our staff. That staff play alongside children and help develop play.

2. Montessori

Maria Montessori was an Italian physician and educator who developed the Montessori method based on thousands of scientific observations. It focuses on each child's individuality, encouraging curiosity through a carefully designed environment.

What are the basic principles?

- Crafting a safe, ordered and nurturing environment that encourages self-directed, hands-on learning.
- Features a range of natural, often open-ended resources that match the five Montessori curriculum areas.
- These five curriculum areas are: practical life, sensorial, mathematics, language, and culture.



- Practitioners play a crucial role in providing the right materials for children to explore at the right point in their development. Every resource has a specific place and a role to play.

How can it affects our provision

- We perhaps do not incorporate Montessori specific resources, but we provide more open-ended resources that allow children to direct their own play and make choices for themselves.
- A calm, focused environment is a core feature of a Montessori education. We believe our unique outdoor space provides a calm , focused environment.
- Montessori emphasises opportunities for independence as early as possible in daily tasks. Our children participate in cooking and preparing food or tidying away, using tools . This develops life skills and encourages respect for things.

3. Steiner/Waldorf

Rudolf Steiner was an Austrian educationalist, who set up his first school for the workers of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart. Steiner believed in an environment that is calm, peaceful, familiar, predictable and unhurried.

What are the basic principles?

- Learning should be experienced through the course of regular daily tasks and activities.



- The environment is central and shouldn't overstimulate children. It should be familiar to them.
- Natural, open-ended resources feature heavily, leaving room for the child's imagination.
- A homely environment is preferred in order to make children feel welcome, and each child should have a place where their things belong.

How can it affects our provision

- To Steiner, 'doing' is learning. We try and give children as many physical activities as possible and opportunities to learn from the real world in order to 'grasp' the world around them.
- Use language to allow all activities to encompass different areas. Mathematics can be learnt while children prepare food for snack for instance, as you give them the language of adding, subtracting, weighing and measuring.

4. Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia approach was developed by Loris Malaguzzi alongside parents after World War II. It is a heavily child-centric approach, with a focus on the many ways children can express themselves. The practitioner is an observer and promoter of the child's interests.

What are the basic principles?

- Every child should be seen as strong, capable and resilient, and ready to explore.



- Children are natural communicators, and it's important that we understand the '100 languages of children' - the many different ways children express themselves.
- Children can build their own learning, and require adults to help support it, not instruct.
- The focus on exploratory and child-led play is meant to improve problem-solving skills in particular.

How can it affect our provision

- We hope children feel like their conversations with adults are an opportunity to learn and search together. It's a process. For that reason, our team need to have the time and patience to really engage with children and pay attention to what they're saying.
- Our team engage with the children by undertaking peer observations. Ensure that they're acting as a guide and not interrupting or quashing children's interests.
- We emphasise a hands-on approach to learning, as this is what best allows children to communicate using their hundred languages. This includes drawing, dancing, painting and pretend play, music, sculpting. Giving children opportunities to express themselves is key.

5. Forest schools

The forest school pedagogy focuses on giving children the opportunity to learn through hands-on experiences in a woodland environment. Originating in



Denmark in the 1950s, the forest school ethos is now seen throughout the world, including at the UK's preschool of the year 2017.

What are the basic principles?

- All or almost all learning takes places outside in a woodland or natural environment.
- Children are trusted to explore and discover, and allowed to engage in risky play.
- Encouraged to choose their own learning and to develop a close, positive relationship with nature.

How can it affects our provision

- We believe that physical exercise is a huge benefit of forest schooling. We believe everything that the children do have a physical edge.
- Risky play is a huge part of forest schooling. It's easy to be overprotective of the little ones, but we teach them to engage with risk and understand their limits is important too.

6. Bandura

Albert Bandura's work is mainly focused on something called Social Learning Theory, which is all about behaviour. In particular, his experiments have shown the importance of adults as models, whose behaviour children observe, consider, and then later often copy.



What are the basic principles?

- Children were shown by Bandura to copy aggressive actions made by those they trust unless those actions were criticised. This led to the theory of adults as models for behaviour.
- The Bandura approach includes modelling calm, respectful behaviour, as well as the way we interact with one another.
- Bandura also emphasises the importance of displaying thinking out loud to show thought process, and for adults to have problem-solving discussions between themselves to demonstrate co-operation.

How can it affects our provision

- We understand that our team need to carefully consider their actions, knowing that their behaviour can and will be copied by children. For example, the team eating with and displaying good eating habits around the children.
- Don't be afraid to have discussions together to solve problems in front of children. You are modelling good co-operative behaviour.

7. Athey and Schemas

Chris Athey built on the early work of Piaget to popularise the idea of schemas - the fascinations that children obsess over during different stages in their development. Understanding and encouraging children to develop within these schemas is key to this early years pedagogy.



What are the basic principles?

- The main thread of Athey's thinking was about identifying and encouraging these patterns of repeated behaviour that we call schemas.
- Athey's schemas are dynamic vertical, dynamic back and forth, dynamic circular, going over and under, going round a boundary, going through a boundary, containing and enveloping space.
- The adult has an incredibly important role to play in the schema framework. They must observe, understand and then provide opportunities for the child to explore their schema further.

How can it affect my provision

- Education of all of our practitioners is key. Like all observations, the skill comes from being able to recognise different schemas at work, so that we can both assess a child's development and provide more opportunities for them to learn in a way that engages them.
- Schemas can be very helpful in understanding what might look like 'bad behaviour'. Is the child throwing objects around, or are they experimenting with trajectories? Are they obsessed with ruining your carefully curated play space, or are they fascinated by transporting? Understanding schemas can help clarify these questions.