

Do ✓

Slow pedagogy

As early education becomes ever more pressurised, slow pedagogy aims to take an unhurried, mindful approach to learning.

# Taking Things SLOWLY

**I**t's not uncommon for childcare practitioners to feel rushed. With daily schedules to be adhered to and learning outcomes

to be reached, it can sometimes feel like a challenge fitting everything in. At worst, childcare settings can become just as busy and pressurised as the rest of our fast-paced existence.

That's the thinking behind "slow pedagogy": an educational approach supported by the Froebel Trust, which positions itself as a corrective to a busy culture. While the term itself may seem self-explanatory – it implies taking an unhurried approach to

learning – its implications are profound.

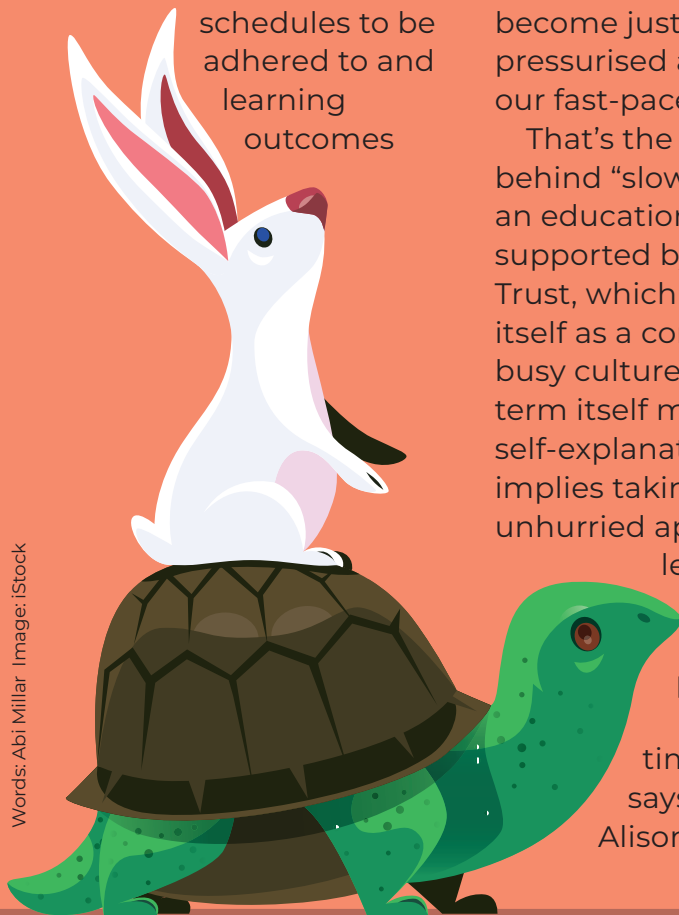
"I think it is time for a reset," says Dr Alison Clark,

Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of South-Eastern Norway. "During the pandemic some settings were able to experience a different pace and way of working but the challenges post-Covid have continued with

even greater pressures. We need a reset for the sake of practitioners and children."

Dr Alison Clark is the author of the 2023 book *Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child* and one of the leading researchers in this field. Her Froebel Trust-funded research explores a range of 'slow' practices, in which children and practitioners are given space to slow down. These might include extended

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DO ✓

## DOS and DON'TS

**DO** Trust the process.

## DON'T

**Be too hard on yourself.** “Slowing down is a move towards prioritising wellbeing, which means your own wellbeing too,” says Alison Hanson.

**DO** Lean on your professional network and seek out like-minded practitioners for support.

## DON'T

**Try to adopt slow pedagogy without discussing it with colleagues first.**

“Participants in my research talked about the importance of feeling they had permission to ‘be with’ children more – so it was seen as being valued by the team and wasn’t about being lazy,” says Dr Alison Clark.

**DO** Enjoy it! “Because without joy, what have we got?” says Alison Hanson.



mealtimes or unhurried outdoor exploring.

“In a slow pedagogy, time for play is central, [as is] looking for ways in which young children can experience periods of uninterrupted or ‘stretched time’ where their ideas can develop,” says Alison Clark. “This puts greater emphasis on practitioners allowing themselves to tune in to children and to know when to step in or step back. Froebel talked about this as ‘freedom with guidance’.”

### Tortoise beats hare

A strong advantage of slow pedagogy is that it

allows children to learn at their own pace. This isn’t necessarily slow – it may involve some phases of rapid development – but it does remove any pressure around time frames. It focuses on the individual child, as opposed to the benchmarks that have been set.

“We live in a society that shouts, ‘more is better’ and ‘faster is better’, even with regards to child development,” says Alison Hanson, a childminder and PACEY member. “For me, slow pedagogy really pushes back against this consumerist rhetoric. It’s about trusting children as the pilots of their own

**“WHEN WE ARE MINDFULLY PRESENT, WE CAN BECOME MORE HIGHLY ATTUNED TO THE CHILDREN”**

learning journey. In the Froebelian spirit, we value the child for what they are right now, nurturing and revelling in each stage of the learning journey rather than simply ‘ticking it off the list’.

As Alison Hanson sees it, the benefits are extensive. Slow pedagogy places children’s wellbeing at the foundation of learning, meaning children are more likely to develop secure attachments and a sense of self-efficacy. And when a child is dysregulated, the caregiver has more scope to model self-regulatory behaviours and emotional understanding.

“When we slow down and allow ourselves to be mindfully present, we can become more highly attuned to the children we care for,” she adds. “We can be truly playful and child led, which leads to deeper and more

## PRACTICAL STEPS TO SLOWING DOWN

What does slow pedagogy look like in practice? Dr Alison Clark points out that it’s important the imperative to be slow doesn’t become yet another pressure. Rather, practitioners could look for where they can integrate slow moments throughout the day, perhaps extending the time they spend outside and seeing the effects on the children.

- “Start with thinking about where in the day feels most rushed and use that as a starting point for reflecting together on how this could be different for children and adults,” Dr Alison Clark says. “This might be mealtime or nappy changing, for example.”
- As childminder Alison Hanson remarks, slow pedagogy doesn’t mean your day becomes a free-for-all or that you lack routines. It is simply that your routines aren’t rushed through. Meal preparation, tending the allotment and even toileting routines can all become learning opportunities in their own right.
- “On a practical level, I love getting outdoors,” says Alison Hanson. “I have had the deepest, most valuable learning experiences with children using nothing more than stones collected on a hillside walk, or logs gathered in the woodland. I avoid outings to places such as soft plays that I know can be dysregulating.”

meaningful moments of learning.”

### Taking stock

Alison Hanson notes that while slowing down may sound simple, making more of doing less isn’t easy. Rather than implementing any specific techniques, it requires a willingness to unpick current practice and exercise a high level of self-reflection (turn to page 46 for more about this).

“In a modern world where we can give children so much, it’s so important to continuously reflect upon: what really makes the difference? What really matters?” she says.

“Seeking change is not a weakness or a sign that your practice is not good enough. It is your strength in understanding that we all need to grow and adapt to suit our ever-changing contexts.” 