



Froebel Trust Podcast Transcript : Episode 8 January 2024

00:00:06:09 - 00:00:31:23

Colin

Hello and welcome to another episode of the Froebel Trust Podcast. My name's Colin Kelly and I'm your host for this episode where we're exploring 'Where are the men in early childhood education?' Recent data from the Department for Education suggests only 2% of the people who work in early years education in England are male, so why does early childhood education continue to have one of the most gender imbalanced workforces?

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Colin

If you're new to Froebel, well, Friedrich Froebel was the German inventor of the kindergarten and a pioneer of early childhood education. He lived and worked back in the 1800s and founded the first training colleges for kindergarten teachers, and at the time advocated for more women to be part of the teaching profession. This is at a time when there were virtually none in teaching roles.

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Colin

Well, now we have the reverse. And perhaps Froebel, if he were alive today, would be talking about the need for balance and ensuring that educators in early years settings and schools reflect, and are part of, the wider community they work in. My guests for this episode are Pete Moorhouse, a Froebel Trust Travelling Tutor and author, and an early years creative consultant who works with schools and educators in early years settings all over the UK.

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Colin

We have Shaddai Tembo, a lecturer in early childhood studies at Bath Spa University. He's an associate lecturer at the Open University and an independent speaker, trainer and consultant through Critical Early Years. We also have Matt Langton educator at Outdoor Owls, an outdoor based early years setting in South London, and Matt was recently named the 2023 Nursery World Practitioner of the Year.

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Colin

And I'm also joined by Louie Werth, researcher at the University of Cambridge, whose current Froebel Trust funded Ph.D. is exploring the role and identity of male primary school teachers. A warm welcome to all my guests and thank you for listening. Louie, I'd like to start with you because I know that as part of your work around your PhD, you've been exploring the way men care or the way men should care.

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Colin

And I guess my first question would be, is it different? And should it be different?

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Louie

Yeah. So I think those two questions, are the 'now' questions. I think the 'past' question is why is teaching even a caring profession? Because we think of teaching as a caring profession. But if you jump back a few hundred years, particularly in Froebel's time, you go back to Germany in the 1800s, and teaching is not a caring profession.

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Louie

It's male dominated. It's male led. And actually, Froebel very carefully sidestepped the controversy at the time, the issue of corporal punishment, and instead just focused on the idea of teaching being about care. But one thing that he did that was crucial that I'm kind of unpicking in my work, is to do that, he also said that teaching was a form of mothering.

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Louie

It was a training school for mothering. So whilst Froebel did a huge amount of great stuff for our profession, he also was one of the leading voices that kind of said teaching is a natural skill for women. So now we're at this place where, you know, less than 2% of teachers worldwide are male. And the typical picture of the schoolteacher is like Miss Honey from Matilda, some kind of like nice, demure, 23 year old female.

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Louie

And as male teachers that raises a lot of practical challenges. And one of them is 'how do I show care? What does it mean for me as a male to be caring? Is it different for a female staff member? And then alongside that, should it be different?' I think to answer your question, the people I've interviewed for my PhD what they've all seemed to say is 'I do care about caring', but they all define care very differently based on what they're comfortable with.

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Louie

So, some will openly use words like love, and will talk about hugs and cuddles. Others will talk about care in terms of things like being able to be spoken to or being an excellent teacher. So, they're redefining care in the ways of whatever they are comfortable to be in.

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Colin

Let me bring in Matthew just to maybe try and get an answer to that question. Matthew, I'm sure you're a wonderful person, but with all due respect, you're not Miss Honey from Matilda. So I'm wondering, I mean, all joking aside, maybe some of us grew up with the idea that that's what an early years practitioner had to be.

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Colin

Was that a challenge for you, and how have you found your way of being caring and showing care along the lines of what Louie was talking about?

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Matthew

I think when I first started, I was quite apprehensive about any like hugging or even just the intimate care aspect of things with nappy changing. So, I was quite apprehensive to be on my own at all in any room with any children, because obviously being a man in early years, certain people may think that you have more sinister reasons for going into the job.

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Matthew

I think as I progressed through, it's become a lot more normal for me to have physical contact with children by picking them up and giving them hugs and like changing them. It's almost second nature now.

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Colin

Let me bring in Shaddai here. Do you think there really is a problem in society that at the back of some people's heads, they think that a man that wants to be a nursery teacher is there for some kind of nefarious reason?

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Shaddai

Well, yeah, it's a really good question. I think by and large, most parents are really accepting of men working in the early years, and that's really positive. But unfortunately, there are a small minority who aren't. And we often talk about in terms of the 'Three Ps', so men are either seen as perhaps 'poofs, paedophiles or perverts' wanting to work with young children.

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Shaddai

And I know that I experienced all three as a practitioner. You know, for me, it's really difficult working with some parents sometimes when they have a certain perception of what an early practitioner is or should be and how they should look. And when you don't meet that expectation, it can be difficult. Certainly there are a lot of stereotypical views that parents do perpetuate comments such as, 'I don't want that man changing my child's nappy because he's weird' for whatever reason.

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Shaddai

Unfortunately they are commonplace. Certainly conversations I've had with men in the early years revealed that they're more widespread than we think, unfortunately.

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Colin

So with that going on and I'm sure you've all encountered aspects of that Shaddai, what was it then that did attract you to the profession and made you overcome all that? Because it can't have been an easy route for any of you?

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Shaddai

No, it wasn't at all. Like most men in the early years, it wasn't my first choice, unfortunately. I fell into this profession after failing my A-levels. And that's the common move for a lot of men working in the early years. It's not really their first choice. They don't think of doing childcare when they leave college or university. They tend to fall into this career path.

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Shaddai

So I did that. I always wanted to work with people, I just didn't know they would be really young people and young children. So I ended up doing an apprenticeship with children in the early years, and I stayed with it because it was, you know, a self-fulfilling job. It was something that's so rewarding, the creativity that you have on a daily basis, to work with children and learn from them, I think is incredibly nourishing.

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Shaddai

I won't lie and say it's easy There are wider societal conditions around pay and the work force that need to be addressed, but by and large it's an incredibly rewarding position. And personally for me, I was really fortunate to have found a network of other men working in the early years during my time in Bristol, and despite some of the comments that I had faced from parents having that other pool of men who were going through similar issues, having similar experiences for me was really fundamental in staying in the profession.

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Colin

And Pete, your work as a Froebel Traveling Tutor, going around a network of nurseries and early years settings, what sort of reactions do you get when you meet men that are working in the profession? What are they saying to you?

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Pete

Firstly, you know, we got to highlight that's actually a pretty rare occurrence. I mean, when we're looking now at even a decreasing number of men working in early years, which is quite shocking. I mean, it had gone up to about 2%. I think it's now moving back down towards the 1%. So when you actually think about what that actually means in practice, that

means the vast majority of nursery schools across the whole country have no men working in that setting at all, which is quite astonishing.

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Pete

I mean, coming back to what Shaddai was saying that, you know, in terms of parents' perceptions, that minority is actually quite big. There was a survey done with MITEY, I think it was about ten years ago that was saying that 10% of parents had concerns about men working in early childhood, which is quite astonishing really, especially when you think in the culture at the moment where now it's almost seem not to be appropriate if men aren't a little bit more hands on with their children in the house in terms of childcare.

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Pete

But you know, the early years profession I feel, is quite extraordinary in the way of you know, the gender imbalance there. I mean, when you look at other professions which have traditionally had quite a significant female dominance, you take nursing, you know, that's now 16% male. You take something like working in elderly care. Again, that's sort of like 18% male carers.

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Pete

Whereas early childhood education, you know, 1.5%, it's quite astonishing really. You know, the question we really need to be asking is, is this a problem? Do men actually contribute? Is there a benefit for having a greater gender balance within nurseries and kindergarten?

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Colin

And do you think there is? I mean, what's your take on it Pete, first of all, do you think it's a problem?

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Pete

I mean, I think there's a multitude of benefits. You know, I think it's really healthy for children to be nurtured by people from both genders. And I think we should also acknowledge there's often a greater difference between people within one gender than across the genders in terms of the multitude of different skills and different ways that they care.

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Pete

You know, sometimes I think this polarized argument across the genders is very misguided. You know, I know so many men, you know, who are incredibly gentle and sensitive, and there's a massive spectrum out there. There's clear benefits for children, for having both genders within a setting. They then don't perceive that this is a job for women. And, you know, just that perception that, okay, childcare is a woman dominated profession.

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Pete

You know, it's only women who care. And I think, you know, it's important to have positive role models. I mean, a lot of children won't have any men in their lives. I mean, I've had quite a lot of parents who've come to me in the past and said they really like it, that there's men working within this setting because they have very little experience to having positive relationships with men in their children's lives.

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Colin

Let's bring in Matthew then. When you look at the work that you do at Outdoor Owls and what you do in a typical day and the other members of staff around you. I'm not asking you to justify your position here, but do you think there is anything, I suppose, that is, I guess, uniquely male that you bring to the job that they wouldn't have if they didn't have you?

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Matthew

We've had a big shift towards emotional competency in language and self-regulation, and I feel from personal experience growing up, not having emotionally available men in my life has contributed to me not expressing myself quite as freely as I would. I think it's important that there are men in the setting that are emotionally available. So specifically, little boys know that it's okay to feel and to express themselves and to have negative emotions and show that sadness and cry, without it being like, man up or get on with it, that sort of thing.

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Matthew

Men play in a different way to women as well. It's a lot more rough and tumble. It's a lot more physical. Rough and tumble play with young boys is a good way for them to learn empathy for their actions. Having that space with me and the other men I work with, to be able to engage in that without quite as much hesitation around the rough and tumble play I think is really important as well. If you look at male suicide rates in not just this country but across the world

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Matthew

a lot of it is because they're not talking about things in their most formative years. It's really important to set that standard for them where it is acceptable for you to feel bad and it's acceptable for you to express what you're feeling as well, not hold it in and it come out in terms of like, as you say, aggression or something like that.

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Matthew

I think it is quite a big reflection on my experiences that I want to give the children in my care as much of what I felt like I should have had when growing up. So that then when they are older, they're not going to be hiding things and not talking about things and being ill, essentially.

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Colin

Well, Matt, there's a phrase that you used a couple of times there. You talked about being emotionally available. What exactly did you mean by that?

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Matthew

In my head, it's just knowing that you can feel an interaction between a child and an adult, but a child can feel whatever they want and it's fine. And you should never be told that your feelings aren't valid and that you shouldn't be feeling this way in a situation. And just being able to have those open and honest discussions about why you feel a certain way about things, why you're experiencing these big emotions at that point and having a conversation and not at a teacher student type of interaction where it's just, you're a person, I'm a person and we're going to talk through this with each other and showing your

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Matthew

your emotions around children and your own children so that they know that 'okay I feel that as well. And mum and dad feel that as well. Or my teacher feels that and they're showing it, so it must be fine to feel that.' Shaddai,

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Colin

We heard from Pete and he was suggesting that actually the issue seems to be getting worse, that the numbers are declining. Now, I know from, I guess anything around inclusion and diversity, people need to see it, don't they? If they see it, then they can be it. They can achieve it. If men can't see other men doing it, they're hardly going to take that step themselves, are they?

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Colin

So it sounds a bit like we're stuck in a vicious circle.

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Shaddai

Yeah. Yeah, I would completely agree with you. There's been lots of research about whether or not we need a critical mass, so to speak, get 10 to 15% of men working in the workforce, and that might sustain and lead to even more, more equity in future. I think it's really important that we don't lose sight of the fact that lots of settings run very well without any men at all within the setting.

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Shaddai

And it's really important that we acknowledge the strengths that men bring without situating women's role as deficits or saying that doing badly. Equally, many boys are raised perfectly fine without any men at all in their lives. And I think we need to acknowledge both sides of that. Certainly more recently, the argument I've been pushing for is, is more men of all kinds, and that for me is a really good way of thinking about the different kinds of men that we need to see within

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Shaddai

our early years settings. Men who are caring, men who engage in rough and tumble play, men who are queer, men who are black, men who are disabled, men of all different kinds of representations to really enable the child to reflect on their own identities and challenge and push back against those perhaps more crude stereotypes about what a man should be that I've seen within the media.

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Shaddai

When we talk about more, more men in the early years, typically and in some sectors, we are still talking about more men in the early years to go and work outside in the garden with the boys to support rough and tumble play. But we also want men who can come in and challenge those perceptions of what a man is.

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Shaddai

And offer new conceptions and ideas of what a man can be. And for me, that's really important for the children to be able to see that different kinds of diversity in their early years settings.

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Colin

Yeah, thanks, Shaddai. Pete. I can see you want to come in here.

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Pete

I think by having more male staff within a setting, it actually encourages more fathers to become actively involved within that, within the setting. And we've really noticed that that more dads would sort of like volunteer to come in at different times or would come to, to parents meetings and just show more genuine interest in their child's education.

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Pete

So I think, again, it can be really important in making stronger links between fathers and the school.

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Colin

And Shaddai, I can see you nodding.

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Shaddai

Yeah, I would certainly agree with that. Certainly just reflecting on my experience as an early years practitioner. Many more fathers got involved on the basis of me being there and I think back to my 'stay and play' group that was not 50/50 in terms of fathers and mothers joining, but there was certainly a much greater number of fathers wanting to come along and bring their children, engage within the play environment because of my presence alone.

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Shaddai

I think that was really important and something I'll never lose sight of when I argue for more men in the early years.

Matthew

I've had dads talk to me about how to be more emotionally available to their children and talk about their past experiences, where I don't think they probably would have done that. They may have, but I don't think they may have been quite so open and frank with a female member of staff. We have seven men that work in our setting.

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Matthew

So we're quite unique in that sense, hopefully because they see that. Like, with the children, they can be emotionally available and everything like that. Hopefully then they reflect a bit and then know that they have a support network for them through us as well, where they're not having to work things out or read a book

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Matthew

They can actually go and have a conversation with someone and be quite vulnerable as well. I felt really privileged to have the conversations I've had, which start with some of the dads go to my setting.

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Colin

And Louie, how do you think we get it then? Whose responsibility is it? Is this the government or local authorities? Is this recruitment? Is this other people already in the sector spreading the word a bit more and reaching out to men?

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Louie

I think it's a couple of things. I think everyone's points around different kinds of men. One of the challenges is that one of the things we found out with the interviewees is that they might be one type of person, but when they get into the school, the head teachers have a very particular view of who they want that man to be.

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Louie

So they want that man to be the shouty, angry, scary teacher that scares the Year 6 boys, if he's in a primary school or if they're in reception, they want them to be the surrogate dad for the children who don't have fathers, because I think one of the challenges that my PhD participants found is that they were already being told what type of men they wanted them to be, and that meant they left or they moved to different settings, or I assume people will then leave.

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Louie

So I think it's having a broader expectation that when a man walks in the door, they're not trying to turn him into anything. I do think there a couple of major changes.... we need to shift what the value of working in this sector is like. I didn't go into teaching because I was super caring. I went into teaching because I found children very funny.

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Louie

I found it very funny to be with children. They made me laugh and I made them laugh. And actually one of the main focuses of my PhD is how men use humour as a way of showing care. Essentially without touching them. Of course, many women are also very funny. My wife's a female teacher and she's hilarious too. We need to help people understand the wider gamut of what it's like to be in a nursery, or an early years setting.

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Louie

I think to be really blunt, this is not just for men. This is universal. Money. Money is a massive issue. We're living in a cost of living crisis. Most families now have two income households, and I think issues around pay are a massive barrier and if they're not a barrier for entry, they're a barrier for staying.

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Colin

Pete - I'm quite interested in the pay and conditions part of the story, I guess the social justice part of the story as well. Do you think it is the case that maybe we can't solve one issue without solving the other? If the lot of the nursery professional improved, you would get more men?

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Pete

It's a complicated picture about how to move forward. I mean, I guess for me, the first thing is are we happy with the status quo? And I think unless we actually see this as a problem and actually really want to have a greater diversity within the profession, nothing's going to change. I think the Department for Education primarily has key responsibility that they need to have a strategy.

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Pete

They need to set targets of what they want to happen and then make sure that they're implemented. The coalition government actually did set targets back in 2010, and failed utterly. So that's something that clearly needs to happen. I mean, they're just about to have a massive recruitment campaign because of the expansion of nursery places in the sector. There's no way the nursery sector is going to be able to meet these.

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Pete

It's an ideal opportunity for them to actually try and reach out to male practitioners in this sort of context. Another aspect we need to think about is that male retention within the sector is really, really low. You know, senior leadership teams perhaps need to look at how they can best support men. Shaddai and I were both part of the Men in the Years network in Bristol, which was really valuable to actually talk about some of these issues and share experiences.

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Pete

You know, it can be slightly isolating for some men to be one guy working within quite a large female staff team. So to have that forum I think can be quite beneficial.

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Colin

And Matt, you'll see this because you're working with children every day. What kind of impact does this poor retention have on the children?

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Matthew

I do think it is quite detrimental to children to have constantly shifting staff numbers, different people in every day, and if they build up that really good relationship with a person and then they leave, it can be quite sad for that child as well. They need so much security in what they do, so then they can.... sort of all of the background noise is dampened because they know that they have their safe space and their safe person

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Matthew

so then they can engage in really, really in-depth play or different types of thinking and things like that.

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Colin

Yeah, and I can see Shaddai wants to come in here as well. Shaddai, please go ahead.

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Shaddai

I just want to go back to the comment earlier about what the children want, because I think that's a really important question. I think they want to play for longer, and I think that's really important. And they probably want less assessment and less tests. I think they probably want their practitioners to be happy and all of those things related to the sector in the workforce and the nature of pay and conditions.

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Shaddai

So I think if you ask them, they want the same things for us for a better childhood and a better experience, for all of us.

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Colin

Shaddai if we could stay with you just for a second and think a bit about recruitment. And is there something we could do in job ads to make it clear to men that this is a fulfilling job, that we'd like them to apply? I suppose maybe to some extent normalize it, but at the same time not normalizing it too much because, well, it isn't that normal, is it?

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Colin

So how do we get that balance right?

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Shaddai

Yeah, well, this is the kind of paradox of inclusion. We need to talk about it more to make it matter less. And unfortunately, we're not at a stage where we can normalize it at the moment. So we do need to be having these conversations because we do need to be challenging that gender imbalance within the early years profession. So, you know, I always talk to practitioners and setting leads and say to have on your website

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Shaddai

'We actively encourage applications from men in the early years because we recognize their value and what they can bring to early years settings'. I think you need to be bold and brave and say that, and that's really important. And then when it comes to a parent having a show around in the setting, you can say 'we employ a variety of staff in the setting, including men in the early years.'

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Shaddai

And at that point, it's a really good opportunity to have that conversation with the parents and mitigate against any issues that might arise further down the line with the parents saying 'Great, but as long as I'm not changing my child's nappy,' that sort of thing. If you're proactive with these sorts of issues, if you name that, you are for gender equality because that's what this is effectively, for me, that that's a really good strategy towards mitigating any issues further down the line.

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Colin

I think as well, Shaddai yourself and Pete, you mentioned the network that you are in. I guess that's important as well because if I was running an early years setting and I was recruiting, even if I didn't have a man already working with me, if there was a network, I could go and speak to some men who are in the profession.

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Colin

I might be able to say to them, Look, here's my job ad, would this have appealed to you, or what could I say here that would reach you or somebody like you and building that resource that people can tap into is really beneficial.

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Shaddai

Yeah, absolutely. I think Pete mentioned earlier that about 65-70% of settings have no men at all within their settings and therefore networks that are available in the local community are really important for those settings to reach out and get in touch with other men working in the early years. There's a vacancy going. Perhaps that can be a good opportunity.

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Shaddai

I would just flag the MITEY campaign, the Men In The Early Years campaign that's going on across the UK. We do have a website, MITEYUK.org, that's a national campaign that's been going on for the past few years now. There are some brilliant resources on that for the settings who are looking to engage more men in the early years, who are looking for that language,

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Shaddai

looking for answers to questions that parents might have around these sorts of issues that they can turn to.

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Colin

Hopefully this podcast can help as well. Matthew, this podcast is listened to all over the UK, really all over the world, and there will be men maybe listening to this who feel like they're the only one and you've got the opportunity now to speak directly to them. So if there's someone maybe feeling like you were a while ago where you're maybe a bit uncertain, a bit new to it, feeling that you need that support, what would you advise them to do?

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Matthew

When I first started, I wasn't aware of all the networking that I could do to talk to other men in the early years. So I think using things like the MITEY, and things like that would be really useful just so that you can share certain experiences or questions or certain ways you feel about situations that you've been involved in at work just so that you have another voice as well.

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Matthew

Because I relied a lot on talking to my managers. They were both female so they may not have had the same perspective on the situation that had occurred. If you want to do it and you're passionate enough, all the things that go along with being a man in early years sort of melt away, when you're seeing the benefit you're giving each child that you interact with, it becomes less of an issue because you push past it to know that you are doing something very, very good for the world as well in terms of teaching children and giving them amazing experiences at such an early age.

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Matthew

But you have to let it roll off your back a little bit. Okay, I understand this. I know this is a certain situation of moment or this is the situation in society at the moment, but it's so valuable and so fulfilling to do this job. You've just got to be a bit strong about it and be like, okay, cool it's fine.

00:27:10:06 - 00:27:29:10

Matthew

I can do this. I didn't actively look to go into early years. I worked in an after school club for a bit and thought, 'Oh, this is quite fun'. I then worked in a nursery for a bit and I was uuming and aahing for a long time. Then when I properly got into like, okay, I, I found the way I want to practice and the way I want to teach children.

00:27:29:12 - 00:27:33:13

Matthew

I was like, This is the job for me. I couldn't think of doing anything else in the world.

00:27:33:15 - 00:27:56:03

Colin

Thanks for sharing that Matt, that's so encouraging to hear. Pete I guess maybe speaking a bit more generally, if there's somebody listening to this, if they are a man and they're interested in getting into early years education, beyond just waiting for a job ad to come up, is there something they could do now to find out more or maybe to boost their chances a bit?

00:27:56:05 - 00:28:22:09

Pete

Well, I mean, there's a lot of different organizations which are great. First, I mean, the Froebel Trust is a wonderful insight, I mean, they've got a whole selection of different varied information on the Trust website, different pamphlets about different areas of child development and also lots of webinars, but also, to hook up with your local nursery, go and have conversations with the head teacher.

00:28:22:14 - 00:28:43:00

Pete

You know, ask about ways into this career. Have a tour around the setting, and hopefully you'll see a senior leadership team which is quite enthusiastic about that because I think generally a lot of people are within the profession. They would like it to be different. It's just difficult to, you know, to make these changes happen.

00:28:43:05 - 00:29:17:02

Pete

And I think especially for some of the young guys still at school now, consider this, it is an incredibly rewarding profession, sadly, at the moment vastly underpaid. But the joy and the satisfaction as Matthew knows from being day to day hands on with children, sometimes it can be a struggle, it can be difficult, but it's also elevates the soul, those wonderful interactions that you have and the joy that - you can't emphasize what what a delight it is to work with young children.

00:29:17:02 - 00:29:25:03

Pete

It's an incredibly special thing. And it's almost a privilege, really, on many levels to work within early childhood education.

00:29:25:05 - 00:29:50:14

Colin

Well, if I could just stay with you for a moment. You know, looking back, one theme I suppose that comes up throughout the series of podcasts is that so many of the issues we're dealing with today, Froebel had something to say about them, albeit at a completely different time and maybe a different context. Is there anything in his work that might help us with this issue of how do we get more men coming into the profession?

00:29:50:16 - 00:30:12:15

Pete

Yeah, it is interesting because clearly Froebel was a visionary pioneer. I mean, I think his ideas, are even more relevant today than they were back in the mid 1800s. When you think about it, he was passionate advocate of play, experiential hands on learning, but also in having that deep connection with nature.

00:30:12:17 - 00:30:35:18

Pete

But we've also got to acknowledge that he existed in a particular time in history prior to that. So as Louie was mentioning, that actually education had been more of a male preserve right around the world. It would have been the monks in monasteries in Japan. It was through the church that mainly was the educator. So it was a male dominated sort of profession.

00:30:35:23 - 00:30:58:24

Pete

And, Froebel had this vision seeing actually that things could be different. I mean, he was brilliant in that sense of challenging the status quo, seeing that the female workforce, would make a wonderful contribution to early childhood education. And I think now if Froebel was around today, he would be thinking exactly the same that we, again, that

00:30:59:01 - 00:31:20:08

Pete

now is the time for having a greater gender balance. I mean, clearly, Froebel himself was a very sensitive, gentle man in the way that he interacted with children. He was a great observer of children. His take, if he was around today, clearly would have been different than the mid 1800s. Times change. We've got to remember that.

00:31:20:09 - 00:31:31:21

Colin

Shaddai, when you look to the future, do you have a vision or a hope for maybe like the next 5 to 10 years as to how this could improve?

00:31:31:23 - 00:31:54:05

Shaddai

Yeah, that's a really good question. I mean, personally for me, I think we need a real radical shift in the way early years education is run within the UK. Every week we seem to be having a new report about childcare crises for parents or practitioners, funding, the sector does really feel like it's on its knees at the moment, within which men in the early years is just one issue.

00:31:54:07 - 00:32:14:07

Shaddai

Certainly for me I would like to see a real radical change in the way in which early childhood education is understood within the British context and policy. You know, we look at the wages and conditions of people working in the early years and it is still largely minimum wage for a lot of people working in private nursery settings. Compare that to teachers and lecturers.

00:32:14:08 - 00:32:33:24

Shaddai

I think when we know how important the early years are, we should flip that model around completely. For me, they should be paid much more money than anyone else in society because they are the most important stages of our lives. So for me, a real radical shift is needed. And if there's one thing that anyone can do, it's kind of wake up and realize that we're facing a lot of day to day small issues.

00:32:33:24 - 00:32:59:02

Shaddai

But the bigger picture is that a real shift in how we understand early years education, how it functions for parents, for practitioners, how it's funded is also, for me, very important. I'd like to see this as a number one government priority come the next election. Maybe we will, maybe we won't. I certainly think it'll be an issue in terms of childcare costs for parents, whether that's in terms of the sector and conditions for staff is another issue.

00:32:59:04 - 00:33:23:08

Colin

Pete, it sounds like the government think they're doing everybody a favour by expanding early years, but I guess with that comes a huge responsibility and it would be dreadful, wouldn't it, if they expand that provision and children form attachments and then that gets fractured and disrupted because they're not properly supporting this profession.

00:33:23:10 - 00:33:48:18

Pete

You know, if we really believe in giving children equal opportunities, you know, it's all about challenging stereotypes. And we do that on a day to day basis within our settings. But our work force is this giant stereotype, we've got a lot of work to do to challenge that. And the Department for Education have a responsibility to really, address this as a major concern.

00:33:48:24 - 00:34:15:11

Pete

But I couldn't agree with Shaddai more in terms of the fact that we really need to rethink early childhood education. You know, this is the foundation for life. Froebel realized, just how fundamentally important it was and it could look very, very different. You know, there's no reason, we could invest a lot more, it actually pays for itself if you invest in the long term.

00:34:15:11 - 00:34:23:01

Pete

It's a very short sighted strategy of successive governments really to to under invest in early childhood.

00:34:23:03 - 00:34:47:10

Colin

Well that's Froebel Trust Travelling Tutor Pete Moorhouse bringing things to a close for another episode of the Froebel Trust podcast. Special thanks to all my guests. You can find out about them and stay up to date with their work by visiting the links in the podcast description. You can also find out more about the Froebel Trust itself and access some of the support and resources that were referred to in the podcast by visiting their website.

00:34:47:10 - 00:35:05:13

Colin

That's at Froebel.org.uk. And if you've enjoyed this episode or you've got any opinions of feedback, it goes without saying, we'd love to hear from you. Thank you very much for listening. We'll be back again soon with another episode. If you follow or subscribe to this podcast, then you'll receive it as soon as it's published.

(ENDS)