



Froebel Trust Podcast Transcript : Episode 3 Feb 2023

00:00:06:09 - 00:00:35:05

Colin

Hello and welcome to the last in this series of Froebel Trust podcasts. I'm Colin Kelly, and in this podcast series I've been finding out more about the Froebel approach to early years education. I'm joined by an excellent panel of guests. Dr. Stella Louis, lead tutor for the Froebel Trust Short Courses and an independent early years consultant. Sally Cave, head teacher at Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre and co-director of the Froebel Partnership.

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Colin

You'll hear from Professor Chris Pascal Director of the Centre for Research in Early Childhood. Dr. Lynn McNair, head of Cowgate Under Five Centre in Edinburgh and Programme Director of Froebelian Futures. And Simon Bateson, co-director of Froebelian Futures and a senior practitioner at Cowgate Under Five Centre. And in our conversations over the last two episodes, we've been looking at what's involved in becoming a Froebelian early years centre.

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Colin

In our second episode we discussed the learning environment, what goes on inside the nursery, and in this episode we'll be exploring how a Froebelian setting interacts with its local community, including parents, families and primary schools, the environment around the setting. I started by asking Lynn about how they go about starting conversations about race and diversity with the young children at their setting. And I asked Lynn if it was helpful and necessary to have these conversations with children at such an early stage in their learning.

00:01:38:04 - 00:02:05:18

Lynn

We did a project because we were kind of concerned about, well, some of the books that were uncovered in our library, and it started off with actually 12 practitioners meeting regularly during COVID time to start talking about race. And we genuinely believe that having these kind of is sometimes difficult, but almost always sensitive conversations with children are really key. So we need to have them, we need to acknowledge them.

00:02:05:22 - 00:02:41:05

Lynn

We don't have all the answers. I think we all know that. But, you know, sometimes through like a book can help us. Like, for example, we had books in the bookcase that looked at children being black and white and being separated in South Africa and our children that are a completely multicultural little group were kind of going, I don't know, what do you mean? I don't understand this. And it's really great to open up that dialogue with our children. And, you know, we talk to our children about death. Our children regularly visit an old cemetery that's nearby us.

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Colin

So the children, initiate that. So the children as your Froebel approach they would initiate a conversation about death.

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Lynn

Yeah well you know we would maybe take them to the graveyard anyway they would maybe because there's one in the local community and it would just stimulate that kind of conversation. And of course, many, many of their grandpas and grandmas die and, you know, or little birds die or, you know, we've had lots of very fascinating discussions with children about that, like if they find a dead bird in the nature kindergarden, they want to bring it back and revive it and we have to have those conversations. But not in a way that is macabre. It's very, very open and it's very, very dialogic.

00:03:28:24 - 00:04:13:09

Lynn

And but I think as practitioners, there's something that sometimes we want to gloss over some of these areas. And I think in a Froebelian world, we do not. In a Froebelian world, we open that up and have those very rich conversations with children but not adult led. I think that's the really key thing. It's, again, this one of Froebel's principles that keeps coming up, but starting where the learner is. And so it's not about assuming that that child is going to be upset regarding the grandmother's death and might never have seen the grandma very much. But, you know, just being totally tuned in sensitively to where that child is and adding to that is really key.

00:04:13:09 - 00:04:28:21

Colin

And Stella, Lynne mentioned South Africa and a very diverse community that she's she's working with and you're obviously visiting lots of lots of nurseries in lots of different communities. Are you seeing that as well? And how do we make them welcoming places for everyone?

00:04:28:21 - 00:05:10:24

Stella

I think that's quite a big question. Children are not colour blind. You know, staff may pretend to be, but children certainly aren't. They they do notice. They they absolutely notice and observe all sorts of things that are happening around them. And I think we need to be in

a position where we respond. To what it is. That they notice. When you think about diversity and equality, you know, really we're thinking about how we don't just celebrate the sameness, but how we also celebrate and respect difference. As practitioners, they need to not shy away from sometimes having conversations. That make them feel uncomfortable.

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Stella

But, you know, I think Froebel talks about children being part of the human race and their individuality and their diversity is hugely important. So we've got. To find ways to to incorporate those things. And talking about difference. Whether you're talking about differences in leaves. Their shapes, their types, their veins. Or differences in hair colour, eye colour and different lengths of hair, skin colour. All of those things are huge teachable moments. And it's knowing your children, knowing your community, and knowing how best to guide.

00:05:50:03 - 00:05:53:07

Colin

I can see Professor Chris Pascale wants to come in here. Go ahead, Chris.

00:05:53:11 - 00:06:50:13

Chris

Children live in the real world, and real world issues are going on around them and it's how we enable them to live those out in the nursery as well. Those real puzzles and questions or emotions or responses. And during COVID, part of the work we did at some of these nursery in Guilford was how children were dealing with the COVID situation. And we were observing how children were playing, how they play. It was enabling them to make their experiences a reality. And we noticed that the children had created this game and kept playing this game, which they called the death game. And during COVID, this was very real. And the death game was that there was a family at home and then the mother started to cough and then she lay down and she got into bed and the children ministered and brought her drinks. And then eventually the parent died and then the game kind of came to an end.

00:06:50:13 - 00:07:20:10

Chris

But we noticed they kept playing this game, but they didn't want to play when there was an adult around and we had a really good. So it was something that was really important to them because it was happening for some of these children, bereavement and death, they've seen it. And and we had a big conversation as a staff team about why were they not wanting to play the game when there was an educator and an adult around the adults were aware it was being played, but the children didn't. If the adult went in, it closed down and it stopped.

00:07:20:10 - 00:07:41:07

Chris

We felt in the end it was important to enable the children to have the freedom to play that game without us interfering and going in and scaffolding and extending and just enabling them to to play that experience out. That that was okay, but that at least those children felt they could come into nursery and play that game.

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Chris

So sometimes as educators, it's important not to intervene as well as when to. But children bring their real world experiences into the nursery with them. They don't kind of think, Oh, it's the nursery, I've got to leave that at the door, because now we're in this. If the environment is open enough. They have come trailing families and experiences in life and our job, I think as an educator is to give that life, whatever it is, space, an opportunity to be explored. And I just think the death game is, is a nice example of they bring it in and they worked it through. And we as educators have to respect that and respect when they want to do that away from us as well as when they want to do it with us.

00:08:28:09 - 00:08:37:20

Colin

Sally, I'd like to come to you now and ask about the community around your inner city school. Can you tell me a bit about how you interact with and connect with your local primary schools?

00:08:38:19 - 00:09:19:08

Sally

I think for us that we empowering parents so that they know what they want from their primary schools and and quite a lot of now parents will come to us and say, Can you recommend a school which we don't. But you know, because I want that my child to continue spending a lot of time outdoors. I want I can see how much they can do, for instance, in woodwork. I want that to continue. So I think empowering parents, we can't change every school in the country, but we can empower parents to to be more ambitious for their children in many ways, actually, and to want everybody that deals with them to have that respect and trust for their child.

00:09:19:08 - 00:10:07:12

Chris

I just wanted to just add to that, empower that What a really good early childhood setting in particular for everyone is to empower the children so that the children will leave you from the nursery to go into. And I being strong enough and articulate enough and competent and confident enough to name their worlds, to shape their worlds and to ask those hard questions of those teachers. And, you know, I always think even if it's difficult, at least in their early years, they've had these kinds of experiences, which is when those children are being fundamentally formed and you've got to trust the child again, that they will navigate whatever they're faced with, with those solid foundations there in place and find their way through.

00:10:07:12 - 00:10:38:04

Chris

I hope, shifting things a little as they go because children are not powerless in any situation, just like any of us aren't. And reach their maturity knowing and remembering those Froebelianearly years experiences they have because that has shaped and transformed and

indelibly impacted on who they are. So you've got to have confidence that they will take that with them and you're laying down a footprint that is there for life.

00:10:38:10 - 00:11:06:13

Chris

And I always think that whatever comes next they've had that wonderful early start that will be all we can hope to do at this stage. Although we all of us are working like mad to try and get the next stages more congruent with some of the things that we believe. Because I don't think that Froebel, by the way, is just an early years thing. I've already said it works with the adults we're working with as well. And it's it's a kind of way of living your life.

00:11:07:03 - 00:11:30:06

Colin

Yeah, I think that's a really good point. Sally, I just want to come to you. There might be some people listening who, despite all that, maybe feel a bit nervous or reluctant about, you know, even having that conversation with the staff or the management at their nursery, if this is something that they're interested in. How would you suggest maybe they overcome it? Or is there more that nurseries could do to open up that dialogue with the parents?

00:11:31:15 - 00:12:13:17

Sally

I think the important thing is to start with your staff team and actually in a Froebelian setting everybody sees themselves as a learner and so being able to comfortably discuss those things both Lynn and Stella were talking about that are difficult and people are often adults often shy away from them because they don't want to offend or get it wrong. But actually having that safe space where you can talk about it before, you might actually then discuss it with parents or children so that you really and I think that can't be done as a one off. That's a sort of continuous conversation you're having that, you know, this child has said this or a parent said this. I'm not sure how, you know, and you just really constantly learning.

00:12:13:17 - 00:12:25:14

Sally

And we learn from each other. We learn from the children, we learn from our own experiences. But just being very open. And that mistakes are opportunities to learn as well. So that's how I would start.

00:12:25:23 - 00:12:41:10

Colin

And then Simon, I guess another thing we're really trying to get across in these podcasts, it's that there's a huge amount of support available for nurseries and staff that want to know more about the Froebel approach. There's lots of training and lots of resources as well.

00:12:41:10 - 00:13:10:09

Simon

Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, as we've said, starting with the Froebel Trust's website, looking for the University of Edinburgh's Froebel website or the Guildford Partnership, there's there's a

wealth of resources of stories and most importantly of people out there who you can connect with visit other nurseries. If you know a Froebelian practitioner or setting, arrange to go and visit and watch the films that have been produced on the University of Edinburgh website and get yourself inspired and and connected.

00:13:11:04 - 00:13:57:01

Simon

Just briefly on families, I just wanted to say every year as a practitioner, and I'm sure this is true for others here, we received the most beautiful letters from parents who started off with in a Froebelian setting full of anxiety about how much freedom their child was going to have going outside in all weathers, having a choice over what they might wear on a rainy day in the garden. Because we're not imposing these things. We're talking them through with children. And it's been a real relation building process and it's taken time and building trust. And at the end of these children's time with us so often and invariably parents write these beautiful letters to say, you know, I cannot believe the transformation and what you've what you've given to, you know, our son or daughter.

00:13:57:10 - 00:14:09:14

Simon

And that for me is what we hope, as has been said, goes on with them as a family throughout that child's life. And it's certainly what stays with us as practitioners.

00:14:09:14 - 00:14:32:01

Colin

Thanks, Simon Well, you know, these conversations are really starting to change the way I think about children. I think maybe in the past I hadn't always seen them as complete beings. I felt my kids really needed me to steer them. And I'm getting the sense from speaking with you all that I've been underestimating children and actually we're equal and there's a lot I can learn from them.

00:14:32:03 - 00:14:34:00

Colin

Chris, do you want to come in on this?

00:14:34:20 - 00:15:01:02

Chris

The two things children have that we've lost. Well, three things maybe. One is that they are innately and unendingly curious about the world. And we sometimes, as we grow up, lose that curiosity that these young children have in bucketloads, that deep exploratory questioning drive. Secondly, that they are full of connections. More brain connections than we've got, we've pruned them all back.

00:15:01:12 - 00:15:31:08

Chris

So the possibilities to them are endless. And so so that's something to celebrate. So they're curious, they've got, they've got unpruned connections and they don't live their world in little boxes. They are whole. We've, we've put those boxes, Oh it's school, oh it's home, oh

it's this. It's their life. That's why they're just so wonderful to work with because they've got a looser that they're not so structured and so compartmentalised.

00:15:31:08 - 00:16:29:18

Chris

And I think if we trust that and we trust their questions and I've been in wonderful nurseries where the educators don't have to impose projects or questions on children, they kind of celebrate the children are full of their own. Their world is full of projects and connections and questions. So if we tune into what their projects and connections are, they will fly. We can fly with them to scaffold. And so we have a key role in scaffolding in supporting and enabling. But it's our work with children is very much as a co-learner and a co-partner in in building the track and scaffolding. It's sometimes called in the jargon, but building the framework, providing a frame for the child to climb up themselves, but trusting the children and letting them bring their own real world projects and real world questions and helping them find explore those.

00:16:29:19 - 00:16:47:17

Colin

Yeah, Chris, thank you so much. That's really interesting and I think that's a good note to close this third and final episode of this series of the Froebel Trust podcast. I hope it's given you a flavour of all that the Froebel approach to early years education can offer and what it can do for the children and community around you.

00:16:48:04 - 00:17:07:14

Colin

If you'd like to find out more, remember you can visit the Froebel trust website that's www.froebel.co.uk that's www.froebel.co.uk. And you can access all the training and resources available there and also contact the team that's www.froebel.co.uk

00:17:07:14 - 00:17:46:23

Colin

Well I hope you've enjoyed this podcast. Huge thanks to all my guests. You can find out more about them and their ongoing work in the podcast description. If you have enjoyed this podcast, please do subscribe because that way you'll be kept up to date with any new episodes and we are planning a second series sometime later this year. So I hope you'll join me then.

(ENDS)