



Froebel Trust Podcast Transcript : Episode 11 May 2024

00:00:06:08 - 00:00:42:10

Colin

You're listening to the Froebel Trust podcast, and this is episode 11. As we continue to explore the pioneering work of Friedrich Froebel, the inventor of the term kindergarten, and how his principles apply to early years education today. My name is Colin Kelly and our focus in this episode is babies and the baby room. Babies are often overlooked in discussions about early childhood education and care. There's about to be a period of rapid expansion of baby room provision in England, with new government funded childcare support being offered from September to working parents with a child from nine months old.

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Colin

So are early years settings ready to welcome more babies? What's it like working in a baby room today? What skills and knowledge do educators caring for babies need? And how might a Froebelian approach support educators in their work with babies? Well, to discuss all this with me, I'm delighted to be joined by my panel of guests. Caroline Guard works part time with babies in an early years setting in Surrey.

00:01:05:19 - 00:01:31:15

Colin

She's also a senior lecturer in early childhood education at Kingston University, London, and has recently published guidance for leaders of early years settings about their provision for and approach to caring for babies. Julia Manning-Morton's an author, trainer and lecturer in early childhood. Her career spans 40 years and diverse roles as a nursery nurse, manager, advisor and lecturer in early childhood studies.

00:01:31:17 - 00:01:59:01

Colin

Julia is now an independent consultant and associate trainer for education and a Froebel Trust traveling tutor and her latest book, 'From Birth to Three: An Early Years Educator's Handbook' has just been published by Routledge. Chloe McLaughlin is a senior early years educator at Poppies Preschool in Laurencekirk in Aberdeenshire in Scotland. She has many years of experience and has developed and embedded a Froebelian approach in the baby room at Poppies.

00:01:59:03 - 00:02:31:04

Colin

Kerri Stephen is a lead early years educator at Poppies Preschool in Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire. She's worked with both the preschool and the setting's youngest children and is embracing working with a Froebelian approach guided by Froebelian principles. Now, Kerri's just been working recently alongside colleagues on an action research project funded by the Froebel Trust called 'A Sense of Belonging'. And if you'd like to find out more about my guests and all their work, please make sure that you read the podcast description, because there's lots more information there.

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Colin

And links to many of the resources and different aspects of their work that they're talking about in this discussion. So let's get started. Chloe McLaughlin from Poppies preschool. I know that Froebel talked about this idea of babies being people, as individuals. So when you look around your baby room, what kind of people are they?

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Chloe

so I think where to start is like, initially when you first, you're not even getting to know the babies to begin with. I'd say it's the parent and the family. When you first are taking a child into the setting, their parents are the ones like, that's their whole world. They've got to let you in to their baby's whole world.

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Chloe

So I think to begin with, before you even get to know the baby, you've got to build that really strong foundation with the parents. And once you've got that and they begin to trust you and to see that that's a safe space, it then becomes the baby that will then be like, okay, my mum really likes you.

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Chloe

So I'm going to really like you. And then that's when you begin to know, like building on what parents have told you, like their favourite songs, their favourite teddies. And they say, oh well, mummy sings that to me and now you're singing it to me. You must really know my mummy. And that's when I think you begin to really know the little individuals.

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Chloe

We always try and just do sort of one baby settling in at a time. So until that child sort of settles into the setting, we won't take on another baby, settling in at that time, because you want to make sure that you spend that quality time with, with one child first before you... So that's something we just try and do at Poppies.

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Colin

I think Kerri wants to come in here on that as well.

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Kerri

Yeah, at Poppies, we've actually, like just reviewed our settlement policy as well. So, like, we obviously do our paperwork for our initial first visit and then on our second visit, when the child would come into the setting on their own, they can have the choice whether the parent can come in with the child. And then we go through their 'all about me.'

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Kerri

Some parents can just be very vague. Whereas, you know, for the littler guys, like they can't tell us what their likes and dislikes are. So we kind of like to have as much information as possible. So we've really been looking at our settling in policy lately and how we can make it work better for the child that can't really speak for themselves right now.

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Chloe

One of the things that I really do love most is because you're not just building that relationship with the child, you're building that relationship with the parent and the family. And when the children get older and they're at the big school, they don't remember seeing you, but you meet parents down the street and they're always like, 'oh, hi, it's nice to see you.'

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Chloe

They still have that relationship because you spent that time at the beginning really invested in wanting to know their children and their most precious baby.

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Colin

Yeah, yeah. And Kerri, just moments ago, when we were just having our introductory chat, you talked about... the phrase you used was the 'wee room'. And you mean the baby room at Poppies in Laurencekirk. Can you just describe that room to me? What is the wee room? And maybe a bit about a good baby room in general.

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Colin

What does it look like? What is it have in it?

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Kerri

Yeah. So our baby room is situated just across from our larger room. And so it's like an open, large free flow room, with little areas within our room. And the room looks out. It's all glass so the children can look out into the older room as well. So then we have quiet, restful areas. We have role play areas.

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Kerri

We have block play areas. We have water sensory areas. You know, our room is very much adapted for the age and stage of the children that's in our room. And so they can explore themselves within the room. You know, we've got a lot of children who like to climb. So we have little toddler boxes that they can climb freely on, you know, and not hurt themselves if they roll off of it because it's not that high.

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Kerri

You know, we have soft furnishings, soft lighting, and it's a calm space where the children can explore and investigate and we can spend lovely interactions with them.

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Colin

And Kerri is it deliberately a Froebelian baby room? Does that make it different? How does Froebel fit into this?

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Kerri

Yeah, it is very for Froebelian. You know, with the lighting, the soft furnishings. There's no bold colours, there's open ended materials. You know, we don't have these noisy toys that the children could sit and press, you know... It's very much they're exploring their environment with open ended materials, you know.

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Colin

Let's bring in Caroline now. You've done a lot of research throughout your career and, have experience of various different settings. Does a good baby room, will it look different in different settings? Or are there certain things that they all ought to have? And are there certain non-negotiables?

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Caroline

I would say that the non-negotiables are the open ended resources. And I think most baby rooms, typically you would see a lot of open ended resources. So when we talk about open ended resources, we're thinking kind of, blocks. We're thinking cotton reels, chiffon scarves, types of things where children can explore and discover on their own, but also have their key person there to support them and to extend what they're doing.

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Caroline

and as Kerri was mentioning, the importance of having a space where the children can move, and movement is hugely important in a baby room to ensure that actually they are able to practice those skills that they need. So climbing, crawling, cruising, rolling if they're much younger. So yeah, I would argue that the non-negotiables are those open ended resources.

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Caroline

And of course, the people in the baby room really, really matter as well.

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Colin

Yes. And of course, when we talk about people, how many people? And Julia, I know that's a real area of interest for you.

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Julia

One of the things that we really need to think about for babies is group size. If someone's setting up a baby room. Research shows that, group sizes of six are optimal for babies, and the larger the group gets that has huge implications not only for the environment that the child has to deal with, but even if there's enough staff according to ratio, there are more children

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Julia

for educators to have to keep in mind the whole time. And that is another thing that can add to stress.

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Colin

So that's six in the whole room. I mean, is that is that viable? Is that feasible?

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Julia

Yes. when I was a young educator, we had six babies. Yes. With two members of staff. When it starts to get to 12, 15, these are, you know, this economy of scale that a lot of settings look to have. I don't believe is, optimum provision that babies have a right to.

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Colin

Caroline if I bring you in here just picking up on what Julia is saying. I'm sure there's a lot of people would agree. It's a 'nice to have', but do you think it's viable?

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Caroline

I think we have to find a way of making it viable. As Julia has alluded to, it's the fact that we've had this astronomical growth in particularly private sector provision for very young children, and that's only going to grow, in England specifically from September this year. I think we have to find a way of, even if we are, registered to receive and take in more babies, that we find a way of ensuring that they are grouped in smaller sizes and ensuring that they have environments that are specifically designed for them in those smaller group sizes. Large rooms which echo don't often, work for babies.

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Caroline

We need to think about space. We need to think about cosy spaces. We need to think about access to gardens. Fundamentally, the bigger the group gets, the bigger the challenge and the bigger the culture of conflict for babies and also educators.

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Colin

And, Julia, I know that a lot of your work is looking at the needs... practice and provision that meets the needs of children from birth to three years old. And I suppose those, you know, one thing I've noticed about my own children is how quickly they develop and how quickly they grow and the needs at six months, are completely different to the needs at nine months and a year.

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Colin

That must be quite a challenge. What would you say the needs are? And could you walk me through what they are at different stages and how they change?

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Julia

Okay, I think there are some baseline needs, and I'd like to think in terms of rights as well as needs. These babies have rights to certain conditions in their everyday experiences. And one of those, as Caroline just said, fundamentally, is the people who are looking after them. And they are the foundation stone of quality in a baby room.

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Julia

Part of the skill of those people is being able to be flexible and adapt to each child's needs as that child grows and changes, and that can be a huge challenge because that child's needs can change daily and hourly, as well as over time. So being able to understand what is happening and why it's happening is crucial. But part of that and part of that being that key person for these children and building that relationship is being able to attune to their needs and to be able to do that, you need to have really good observational skills and I talk a lot about noticing as a foundation for observation, and that noticing isn't just with

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Julia

your eyes, it's with all your senses and with your emotions. And so to be able to really attune to a young child, you need to be able to access and understand what your own emotional responses as well as your thoughts are to it. And that requires a huge skill and maturity and self-knowledge and self-awareness, as well as all your knowledge and understanding of child development and the children as individuals.

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Julia

And what that requires is that educators work within a system that understands that and supports it. So that the educators have adequate support from their management teams, their mentors, whoever it might be. With that, focus on those emotional processes.

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Colin

I mean, it's a big ask. It's a big responsibility, isn't it? And I know that one of the things Froebel was big on was those relationships. And it sounded like from what you were saying there that one of the things that's going to be important is continuity of staff.

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Julia

Absolutely. And continuity of experience throughout everything. And it was lovely to hear Chloe talk straight away about that relationship with parents because, one of the most important tasks that educators do, I hope Kerri and Chloe would agree is about supporting that transition from home into setting. Certainly educators that I've worked with have always identified that as being A) really important and B) very challenging in a lot of instances.

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Julia

but that is how babies adapt to a new community. And Froebel talked a lot about community, and the importance of that. And we have to understand how we're helping these very young children who are very sensorially aware and acute, are adapting to a whole new community and environment.

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Colin

Chloe, just before we started recording, you said, you know this is it, this was your first job. This is the only job that you've had. You've been in Poppies since day one, working with those babies. So that continuity of care you're, you're delivering that. Is that something of a rarity when you look around your setting, and other colleagues and friends in the profession.

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Colin

I mean, it sounds to me like that what you have described might be fairly unusual, that you've stayed in that same place for so long.

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Chloe

I think, definitely in some settings, and especially when I was doing my training, like a lot of the other educators I was doing the training with, they did sort of change jobs. But, I mean, at Poppies, we seemed to be quite lucky for whatever reason. But we do seem to have the same educators all the time. But I do think in a way that is down to the way that I was when I started to the educator I am now is completely different.

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Chloe

And I think to begin with, I would have taken a step back to doing any of the settling in and any of the more challenging side of it, but by watching, so by watching the ones that worked before me do it, you build that confidence, you know, you just sit in with them and you watch and you listen, and then they sort of guide you into it without you really realising.

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Chloe

They'll maybe introduce you to a parent and they'll maybe get you to.... It's the same with the child. Once they've built that nice, strong relationship, it's about then sort of showing the children that actually there's lots of lovely people here that want to be here for you.

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Colin

Kerri, I was reading, I think it's a Froebel document that Dr Sacha Powell and Kathy Goouch contributed to and they talked about some of the sort of negative experiences, not what Chloe's experienced, but very different experiences that some early years or baby room educators have experienced. And they talked about, you know, nobody ever comes in the baby room.

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Colin

We're just left along. It's very demanding being with babies. Can you give me a sense of maybe some of the difficulties, if we weren't in a supportive environment, how demanding a job is it and maybe what are some of the things that maybe could go wrong?

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Kerri

Yeah. The baby room is a demanding room. You know, we have our ratios. But when you think about it, you know, you could have two children crying, and sometimes our ratios are 1 to 3.. So you have two children crying. You're trying your best to kind of juggle them and keep them calm and keep yourself calm as well.

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Kerri

So it doesn't project on to them. So that's something that could be a bit of a challenge. You know, just having the right amount of staff in your room to help you meet the needs of these children. I think the age range as well, one that we've got right now is like eight months, and then we've got like a one and a half year old coming up for two.

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Kerri

You know, the age ranges are different. That two year olds is needing that little bit more. They're needing outside a little bit more and more challenges, you know, and having the right amount of staff. And we're very lucky at Poppies that we do have quite a large staff number. So we are able to adhere to that kind of needs that the children need.

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Colin

And Caroline, obviously Chloe and Kerri are in Scotland. But if we look at some of the changes that are coming in, I think they're due to come in in England, this expansion of childcare places, do you think that those ratios are maybe going to come under pressure? First, maybe remind everybody what the ratios are and is it going to be difficult for the sector to meet that?

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Caroline

So in England our ratios is one adult to three babies. Already that, as Kerri and Chloe have said, already brings challenges to the baby room as it stands, and I think with the confirmed changes that are happening from September this year regarding additional places and funding available for babies, we need to really look at how the provision and the cultures that we are offering for these very young children are being provided in full day nurseries.

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Caroline

So I think one of the key things we need to think about is the education of the educators. I mean, the ratios as they stand are not going to change. We are very fortunate in England, actually that is in favour of, around the babies and the adults. If you look kind of across Europe, the ratios do differ quite considerably.

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Caroline

So it's about education. It's about having time and space for those educators to reflect on those challenges that they do come up against, with babies. Balancing and juggling the three babies that might be crying all at the same time. There's very often a typical kind of image that you might see in a baby room is an educator settled with one baby, reading a book and snuggled up somewhere really cosy, and the other babies will find a way of coming over to you and will clamber on

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Caroline

you and want some of that attention, want some of that connection. So it's about creating a team in that where you see your team members struggling or overstretched that you think about how can I support them? And if they are settled with a child snuggled up reading a book or sort of carrying out an activity, can I support them?

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Caroline

Do I need to call them over at that moment to come and help with something? Or can I allow them that time to really validate that connection and extend that connection with the child?

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Colin

And Kerri, just back to you for a second, one of the things that came up in... I think it was the inspection report that Poppies had, was that the some of the older children were involved a little bit in the baby room, and they actually said that they quite liked the responsibility of being involved in quiet time and things like that.

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Colin

So can you tell me a little bit about how that works?

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Kerri

Yeah, absolutely. I mean they're little but they're so able to help with busy jobs. You know, today for instance, one of our educators was just hanging up the washing, and they were sitting at her feet passing her the pegs and passing the clothes. You know, if they could have got to the washing line, they would have hung up clothes as well, they would have tried.

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Kerri

So it gave us food for thought. You know, maybe we have a little washing line for them because they're able, you know. And like after lunch, they help to put the things on the trolley, they help set the tables, you know, they're so able. At such a young age you think, oh, God, you know, they would never be able to do that.

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Kerri

Their parents don't believe they can do things like that, but it's really lovely. Like today, a little girl tried to take her little basin that we put the dirty cutlery into. But she ended up like walking away with it. But she spilt all the water all over the floor. But you know, it wasn't, it wasn't a big deal.

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Kerri

We mopped it all up, you know, we got a towel. She helped and it was just lovely. Like, you know, some people might say, oh no, there's water all the floor. But it wasn't about the water on the floor. It was a process. She was actually just trying to help, you know. And that's fine. You know, they're doing a busy job.

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Kerri

You know, some children like to be very helpful. And we put some of our, little ones go to sleep after lunch and some of our older ones run their backs and help them get to sleep. So it's really lovely. It's a lovely experience for them.

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Colin

Julia, it sounds from what Kerri's saying, that there are moments of real spontaneity and moments of joy in a baby room, but I guess there are also moments where, you know, you might have two babies crying at once. There's nappies needing changed, there's time where they need to go to sleep. How do you balance all these needs? And maybe that need for, I guess, maybe some sort of routine with all the things Froebel talked about, which is about freedom and this idea of freedom with guidance?

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Julia

In terms of the overall routine of the day, there needs to be predictability for young children if what happens every day has a predictability to it, and I mean predictability, not rigidity. If it has a predictability to it, then even very young babies can start to predict what happens next. And this is a really important part of their cognitive development.

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Julia

And as they can predict and they can start, so the cause and effect of their actions on what happens is really important also. So this is the early nurturing of their autonomy and competency. And it was just really nice to hear Kerri talking about those competencies of the young children, our youngest children. And I think we have moved away to a degree from a deficit model and perspective of babies and very, very young children.

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Julia

But it is still there.

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Colin

What do you mean by a deficit? What's a deficit model?

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Julia

So always focusing on what they can't yet do and always comparing them unfavourably with older children and toddlers and two year olds are particularly victims of this view, I have to say. But babies also, I mean, people often say, well, they don't do anything, do they? And things like that. So adjusting our thinking to an abundance model or a competency model is really important.

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Julia

Focusing on what children can do, what they're interested in, what their attributes are as people. It's really, really important. But we're not talking about being rigid because the routine also needs, and the educators also need to be able to respond to individual children's needs as they arise. Unfortunately, a lot of people do find that hard to balance, but for me, this is why these so called routine times of day, which I call care events, should take primary focus in a baby room.

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Julia

They are the focus of the curriculum.

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Colin

So what do you think other early years settings might be putting ahead of those care events?

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Julia

I think sometimes people try to run the baby room as if it's a room for older children. So yes, the play provision is hugely important. I'm not going to deny that for a second, but the balance of time is different in a baby room or I believe it should be different. Because when a child has that 1 to 1 nurturing time with a caring adult, it kind of fills them up with the self confidence that then enables them to go out into the play room and be with the other children.

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Julia

And these times are the key times for their learning.

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Colin

Is that something the rest of you agree with?

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Caroline

Yeah, I do, sorry just to come in here. I think one of the key things that we go back to, what Froebel writes about children and their first relationship with their family, he talks very much about the parents being the sun that draws the baby out into the social world. In my writing, I've talked about the fact that as educators, we have a responsibility to be that sun, to bring the child out into the climate of the nursery, however that climate may be.

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Caroline

and it's very, very important as Julia's highlighted to have the time through caregiving routines, to establish that connection with children, the relationships which are so fundamental. The research that I've done highlighted very much, that very often it's the nappy changing time is that one on one and perhaps the only one on one time that the baby might receive across the day.

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Caroline

Interestingly, at no point during my six months in each of the settings I was working in did any of the babies cry during a nappy change. And I think that says an awful lot about their voice and how they find those times that they are positive experiences for those children.

They are times where they feel connected and they are forming and establishing a history, a relationship with the educators who are caring for them, which is the roots and the grounding for them to then form relationships with the other people,

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Caroline

the other babies in the room that they sort of socialise with.

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Colin

Chloe, one of the difficulties that I was reading about in some early years settings for some members of staff was this feeling that the baby room was constantly getting interrupted. They felt they had a low status. They felt that it was always the least experienced members of staff that were assigned to the baby room. When you look around the profession, is that something that you identify with in some places?

00:28:03:06 - 00:28:37:13

Chloe

I definitely think it's something that I've heard of. I would say, I think like especially when educators come, when they're brand new, like I was when I first started and I was a bit like, oh, I've never spent any time with babies. What do I do with a baby? You can get yourself sort of wrapped up in the jobs, you know, like, oh, maybe I'll just go and make the bottle, or maybe I'll just go and tidy up here because I'm actually a little bit nervous on what to do with a baby.

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Chloe

And I think it's about the other educators that you work with and about yourself having that sort of conversation when you're speaking to your, like, senior leads to say that actually, I'm not very sure. And I'm a wee bit unsure of what to actually do. And when you just watch people and say, okay, if just sit down here and sing a song and then the the babies will be like, oh, wait a minute, she's sitting down.

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Chloe

She's not running around trying to do a job. Then they sort of come to you, and then that's when you can start building those relationships and having time that's uninterrupted with them. And I think there'll always be interruptions because there's always maybe another baby that that needs you. I don't think you can go through a day where you can be totally uninterrupted, but as long as you're having like the moments with the nappy change. I mean, I still love doing nappies because it is that one time that you've got sole... and we really try and focus not to hurry them, you know, not to think, right, 10:00 we need to get the

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Chloe

nappies done and we've got so many to do and being very respectful, you know. If we say to a child, 'would you like to come and get your nappy changed now?' And they say, 'no', you

know, we try to just respect that and say, 'well, that's absolutely fine. We'll wait for a moment'. Maybe when they're not doing anything else.

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Colin

I might as well Chloe just before I move on. Do you think that working in the baby room is something that, with training and support, could anyone do it? Or do you think that there is a type of educator or a breed, if you like, that's best suited to it?

00:30:15:16 - 00:30:37:15

Chloe

I think it's difficult because obviously, like thinking about the educators that I work with and the ones that have gone from the baby room to the big room and back and forth. When I first moved through, I just clicked and thought, you know, this is where I want to be. I need to be at the start with these really tiny little people.

00:30:37:19 - 00:30:54:10

Chloe

I think that is a challenge as well. You know, when you're working with the older ones and they can tell you so much, babies can't tell you in the way a 3 to 5 year old can tell you. So you have to find out way to tune in and observe and pick out.

00:30:54:12 - 00:31:09:03

Colin

Caroline, you've gone back and when you spoke at the beginning, I could see the kind of glow in you when you said, 'I'm back working with babies a couple of days a week'. So there's obviously something that you're getting from that, that you, that you didn't want to lose.

00:31:09:06 - 00:31:28:00

Caroline

Yeah, absolutely. I just feel, going back now as a mother, I've got two children of my own, that I can offer something more. And I think conducting the research that I've done and a lot of the writing and, and deep level of reflection that I've done around what very young children need and what they should be receiving in formal daycare environments.

00:31:28:02 - 00:31:58:06

Caroline

It's key that that we can offer something, whether it's just that presence, that, Kerri is talking about around sort of being with them, sitting, singing and being responsive, to those children. But yeah, I find it absolutely thrilling. And I think spending time with the very youngest children is an absolute gift, isn't it? I think we're being gifted their time, and we're able to give them our time to get to know them, to contribute to their holistic development in the many ways that educators do.

00:31:58:08 - 00:32:10:01

Caroline

I just it's such an exciting room, which is so undervalued very often in policy and, and sort of in all the writing, it's important that we really elevate the fact that that is the most important room where everything starts.

00:32:10:03 - 00:32:31:18

Colin

All right. Well, listen, how about we try a quick fire round? So I'm just going to ask each of you quite straightforward, simple direct questions. And I'm interested just in your gut reaction, your gut response to some of these. so, Kerri, if I could start with you, if that's okay, just for this first one, how would you sum up the skills that someone needs to work in a baby room?

00:32:31:20 - 00:32:47:19

Kerri

I think you need to be patient. You know, you have to be relatable to them. You know, sit with them, spend time with them, not rushing around doing things you know, just a very patient, calming nature to yourself.

00:32:47:21 - 00:32:56:22

Colin

Okay. And Caroline, one for you. What kind of training and support do educators working with babies need, and where can they find that training?

00:32:56:24 - 00:33:23:07

Caroline

Okay, educators need a lot of training in regards to children's development, so theories around how children play, how babies play, specifically. We want to think about early relationships and the importance of that on brain development. In terms of other support that they need once they are in practice, they need to ensure that they have access to supportive management teams and supervisors, mentors.

00:33:23:09 - 00:33:44:04

Caroline

They need a cohesive team where they can share and reflect with one another about the positives and the challenges that are associated with working closely with young babies. In terms of training, there are a number of different training routes open for people who want to work with very young children. That can take form in local colleges, local training providers, universities.

00:33:44:04 - 00:33:55:07

Caroline

Obviously, we're all for pushing to ensure that educators are full graduates working with very young children. And of course, the Froebel Trust offer a range of different courses available for educators as well.

00:33:55:11 - 00:34:09:14

Colin

Okay. And one for Chloe. I know, Chloe, the length of time that you must have been in baby rooms, you must have had lots of experience of children growing up and leaving. How do you manage those transitions?

00:34:09:16 - 00:34:46:17

Chloe

You need to think of transitions, as they're happening all day. So you've got to support all the transitions, not just the main big transition from the move from the room to the twos... but actually just the transition from coming to nursery in the morning to then maybe we then go outside, to then we come in for lunch, I think support them through all those little transitions and being there too, when they are having those tough transitions, that somebody is there to know that they can just pull back and they can have their person.

00:34:46:19 - 00:34:59:16

Chloe

And I think that starts right from the start of the initial settling in and building those relationships at the start. If you get that right, then you can manage the rest of the little transitions.

00:34:59:18 - 00:35:30:13

Colin

And Kerri, one of the things we know from research, I think this was from the Early Education and Childcare Coalition, they found that parents were really concerned about staff leaving the profession, and then the impact that has on their child, who is forming emotional attachments to people that then leave. How important is that consistency when you know you're recruiting more staff and people are leaving and the numbers are fluctuating for the management of a setting had to have consistency with the staff in the baby room.

00:35:30:15 - 00:35:51:00

Kerri

It's so important. Like you say, the children need to know who they're coming into in the morning and that familiar face where they feel safe and secure. You know, it's vital to have a strong team. You know, we don't want to have a lot of like a big turnover of staff. You know, you want to have that continuity of staff coming in every day.

00:35:51:01 - 00:35:59:01

Kerri

You know, it's very important for a small room, as well as a bigger room. You know, seeing that familiar face every day.

00:35:59:01 - 00:36:28:13

Colin

Chloe, I've got two children myself. And then one of them is just about to start secondary school. But I remember I mean, some of the baby years are just a blur, to be honest with you. But I remember some of it, and one of the things I remember was it's physically

exhausting some of the time. And I'm wondering when you're in a room... are there times when you, you just need a break? And does your employer support that, and how do you manage that?

00:36:28:15 - 00:36:49:06

Chloe

So yeah, so there's definitely times where you do need a break. The further you go with your learning, you do realise when you know if you're dealing with a child that's maybe struggling to settle in and it can be really challenging because you've got to, you know, you're there for them. You're trying your best to support them as much as you can.

00:36:49:08 - 00:37:07:19

Chloe

And it's about finding that time when you do maybe just need to go away, you know, once they've gone home, not when they are there, you know, try and be there as much as you can for them. But then once they've gone to go and take a minute to yourself or to say, you know, 'Kerri, I actually found out really difficult today, maybe tomorrow can you come

00:37:07:19 - 00:37:28:02

Chloe

and if I give you a wave, can you come forward and sit next to me just to share the load?' Because yeah, there has, there has been times where it does get a lot and just at the end of the day, offloading that to someone, you know, when we're getting ready at the end of the day just to be like, 'you know, this was a really hard day.

00:37:28:02 - 00:37:31:10

Chloe

How can we support him better tomorrow?'

00:37:31:16 - 00:37:35:17

Colin

What does make the day hard? What is it that makes it hard?

00:37:35:19 - 00:38:00:10

Chloe

Just I think if you've got a young child that you're. I think that's the main thing. Settling in a new child. They've never been anywhere else. They've only been with their parent. And they don't understand why they're here with a stranger, you know? So you need to just support them as best as you can, but also find that time to say 'that was hard

00:38:00:12 - 00:38:05:00

Chloe

And how can we make it make it easier for everyone?'

00:38:05:02 - 00:38:38:12

Colin

Caroline the last thing I would want to do in this podcast is criticise parents, because I'm sure they'd be quick enough to complain, but I can share a little bit of my own experiences

and some of the things, I did reflecting and thinking, oh, maybe that wasn't very helpful. But one thing that I was aware of was when I was dropping off my sons when they were babies or picking them up, I was often in a rush and it was kind of drop and go, you know, get out the car park, get to work and pick them up and get them wherever they need to go next.

00:38:38:12 - 00:39:10:03

Colin

And I'm reflecting and I'm hearing what Chloe and Kerri and Julia, what you've all been saying. And I'm thinking that's maybe from the job I had to do there, maybe I wasn't doing it right, and maybe I needed to slow down and I could have made life easier on the staff like Kerri and Chloe and yourself, maybe by just taking a moment to understand that change and that environment and I guess doing a bit more myself, do you think, is that is that something that parents could perhaps do better?

00:39:10:05 - 00:39:34:12

Caroline

I think it's very important to go back to Elinor Goldschmied here, and think about the writing that she did around babies. And, and she commented, and Chloe's just mentioned something very similar in that babies are the only one that don't know or don't understand why they are in the nursery. So they've moved from the safety of the cocoon of family life, which for most babies is hopefully positive and a really happy and responsive environment.

00:39:34:14 - 00:40:06:01

Caroline

And then all of a sudden they're placed in a a very different environment. Despite many nurseries and formal daycare settings selling themselves as a home from home environment, not very many homes look like a nursery environment. So I think what we need to recognise and share with parents is that it's a new experience for the baby. And as much as we are offering childcare or early education for these babies, we need to work at perhaps a slower rate and pace to ensure that we establish a familiarity for those babies from the outset.

00:40:06:05 - 00:40:25:06

Caroline

And if that means that settling in processes take longer, then that's what it needs to be. Because for some babies, it takes weeks and weeks for them to settle, particularly if they have an infrequent attendance pattern. So maybe 1 or 2 days a week, because it's a long time between Monday and then the following Monday, if they're only in one day a week.

00:40:25:08 - 00:40:46:11

Caroline

So it's very important to share the communication with parents to also to position the facts that we need to look at the baby as the person with rights, and if they're telling us they are unhappy, then we need to work closely with parents to form a better connection with that child. To learn more about them. How do they respond at home when they're in a noisy environment?

00:40:46:16 - 00:41:05:20

Caroline

How do they respond when grandparents come over? What do they do when you go to the local library, for example? It makes me think of a case study of, a baby, that was involved in my research. And he would be very often the one at snack time who would be standing up or pushing his chair around the room.

00:41:06:00 - 00:41:21:16

Caroline

And the staff very often would find that a challenge, and they would be kind of encouraging him to sit back down and to eat his snack. It turns out, however, having spoken to the parents, that at home he doesn't sit down for a snack, he actually is allowed to walk around because he struggled with sitting in a highchair.

00:41:21:18 - 00:41:38:08

Caroline

But that wasn't a piece of information the parents thought would be useful for nursery to know, just because it was different. It's day to day practice at home and it was something they hadn't really thought about. So it's those very small moments that can occur for a baby, which are really important to share as part of the settling in process.

00:41:38:10 - 00:42:16:01

Caroline

And I agree with you. It's the process of the baby losing you as a parent as you disappear out that door at 8:30 or sort of 9:00 in the morning, that's a process of grief. All of a sudden you've disappeared. So it's so important that we take time to familiarise the child with the environment. But also, as was mentioned earlier in the podcast to develop that trust and to show that you are trusting those educators with your child, to share those special songs, those special sort of situations and moments that you have together at home because it makes a relationship connection for the educators a little bit easier.

00:42:16:06 - 00:42:23:12

Caroline

But also, primarily, it's important for the baby to feel safe and secure with the educators who are caring for them.

00:42:23:14 - 00:42:43:17

Colin

That's great. Thanks very much for that Caroline. Now, at the start of Caroline's answer there, she did refer to the work of Elinor Goldschmied. There's a collection of information and extra podcast audio about Elinor Goldschmied on the Froebel Trust website. If you'd like to know more about her pioneering work with babies just visit froebel.org.uk.

00:42:43:17 - 00:43:04:03

Colin

If you navigate to the Training and Resources section and look for 'Elinor Goldschmied and Treasure Baskets', you can find out more. We'll also include a link in the podcast description.

Now Caroline, you worked in the baby room earlier in your career then had some time away and then went back. I'm interested in whether you feel it's changed at all.

00:43:04:06 - 00:43:26:16

Caroline

I think it's different in terms of the pace and the expectation around educators to be moving and to be organising, and to keep things ticking over. Very often you go into baby rooms and they are seen no different as preschoolers so I think it's really important to acknowledge the fact that the provision that we are offering to babies needs to be slower paced.

00:43:26:18 - 00:43:51:05

Caroline

And I think certainly thinking back to my early career, it was much slower pace, there was less pressure on educators and less pressure on the babies themselves to be moved from one thing to another. So we do need to take a step back, take a breath and think what is right for babies? I also think one of the key things that potentially may have been lost in some settings is talking about how we see babies.

00:43:51:05 - 00:44:07:12

Caroline

Who are they? How do we conceptualise them? Do we see them as a person with rights? So actually, if we are asking them, do they want the nappy change? And they say, no, are we still going to pick them up and do it, or are we going to acknowledge that they've said no and revisit that in a few moments or a few minutes later?

00:44:07:14 - 00:44:26:05

Caroline

so I think the biggest thing for me is the pressure on educators. And I talk a lot in my writing about a culture of conflict that I feel has emerged, maybe not just in baby rooms, but across nurseries where educators are feeling they have to fulfil so many professional responsibilities, whether that's paperwork or filling out an iPad.

00:44:26:07 - 00:44:52:22

Caroline

reporting back to parents doing a show around for new parents or fulfilling management expectations as well as the care needs, the connection, the singing for those babies. I think we need to challenge it as a sector. I think we need to make small change, as Poppies are doing, and have educators who are absolute advocates for babies and advocates for making time to be with the babies

00:44:52:24 - 00:45:07:06

Caroline

in those harmonious moments of singing, of reading stories, of activities that the babies themselves are finding and instigating, and we are there just to extend and expand their learning and thinking in that moment.

00:45:07:08 - 00:45:29:18

Caroline

I'd like to bring in Julia here. We've been talking about the pressure on educators, pressure on parents, pressure on babies themselves. All these transitions, the grief of the separation from the parent or the guardian, how can the Froebelian principles help with all of that? Do you think the Froebelian approach can make things better for everyone?

00:45:29:20 - 00:46:04:04

Julia

Well, I think if we go back to Froebel's emphasis on community, then we start to break down the barriers between practitioner, educator, parent, child. And again, Elinor talked about building a triangle of trust in which all three people were engaged. And within that triangle there could be both very positive, supportive feelings. And there could also be rivalry, jealousy, a little bit of difficult feelings and, and everybody's emotional

00:46:04:04 - 00:46:40:19

Julia

part of that has to be recognised. And the parent who rushes off is often under a lot of pressure. Myself, as a working parent, I also used to rush off sometimes. It's difficult. But sometimes the rushing off is about the parent's own difficult emotions about leaving their child. So for everybody to understand you know, well, you know, what a whirlpool of issues and emotions is going on in this process is really important.

00:46:40:21 - 00:47:12:13

Julia

But I do think we do live in a lot of pressure in society at the moment, and that seems to have changed a bit since I was a young practitioner. And I think that pressure comes on parents and educators from all directions. You know, we're under pressure to be doing things so many things with young children, which often, in my view, are completely inappropriate and unnecessary.

00:47:12:15 - 00:47:38:05

Julia

So this kind of push to get to make children develop quicker and faster and do everything earlier is unnecessary. And we really need to wind back, slow down, allow ourselves to slow down with our children, allow our children to slow down and allow practitioners to slow down.

00:47:38:07 - 00:48:00:08

Colin

Well, there's Julia Manning Morton, Froebel traveling tutor with a call to slow down, which is probably a good opportunity for us to draw this episode of the Froebel Trust podcast to close. Julia's latest book, *From Birth to 3, An Early Years Educators Handbook*, is available now, and we did hear several calls to slow down and reference to the slow pedagogy throughout our discussion.

00:48:00:10 - 00:48:18:08

Colin

If you're interested in finding out more about what that is, check the Froebel Trust website, where you can watch a short film introducing the idea of a slower approach to working with young children in early years settings. Well, thanks very much for listening to this episode on babies and the baby room. And of course, to all my guests.

00:48:18:08 - 00:48:47:08

Colin

Julia Manning Morton, Caroline Guard, senior lecturer in early childhood education at Kingston University, London. And Chloe McLaughlin and Kerri Stephen from Poppies Preschool in Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire. You can find out more about my guests in the podcast description, and you can listen to all our previous episodes and access a range of resources by visiting the Froebel Trust website. You'll find that at www.froebel.org.uk, and if you've enjoyed this discussion, remember to subscribe to the podcast.

00:48:47:13 - 00:48:55:00

Colin

You'll find it on all the major podcast apps and directories. Thank you again for listening. Look out for our next episode coming soon.

ENDS