



Froebel Trust Podcast Transcript : Episode 14 September 2024

00:00:07:00 - 00:00:31:24

Colin

Welcome to episode 14 of the Froebel Trust podcast. I'm Colin Kelly, and in this episode we're focusing on the experiences of young children with additional needs in early years settings. Froebel, inventor of kindergarten, believed that all children are unique and develop at their own pace. At a time of year when many young children are joining settings and schools for the first time

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Colin

this podcast explores how educators can support and welcome every child. How can educators today ensure that they are offering a truly inclusive environment, which allows *all* children to play and learn? I'm joined by a panel of guests. Dr Agnes Agyepong is a mother of three and the founder and CEO of the Global Black Maternal Health Institute, which produced the Black Child SEND Report earlier this year.

00:00:59:24 - 00:01:27:01

Colin

This research report looked at the experiences of Black and mixed Black heritage primary school aged children's access to SEND support in South London. I'm pleased to welcome back Janice Marriott. Janice is Head of Tuffkid Nursery, a Jewish nursery school for mainstream children and those with disabilities, and special educational needs. Janice leads the nursery with an integrated approach to learning through play.

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Colin

I'm also joined by Eve Mawby Whistler. Eve is currently a nursery teacher in a primary school in Cambridgeshire. She gained her M.A. in Early Childhood Studies at the University of Roehampton, and it was there that she became inspired by a Froebelian approach to early education. She's now a Froebel Trust Travelling Tutor, sharing her Froebelian knowledge and supporting educators in schools and settings across the UK.

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Colin

Eve has co-authored a new Froebel Trust pamphlet published this month, all about supporting young children with additional needs. Eve, if I could ask you first - We hear a lot about different terminology. When I was at school, people talked about special needs. I hear from you the introductions that use of additional needs. What are the phrases that we should use when we're discussing this topic?

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Eve

Yeah, well, that's quite a big topic and quite a big question in the pamphlet, the pamphlet on supporting children with additional needs. We use the term 'additional needs' mainly because it is a widely used term, and widely understood across the UK. But we are aware that across the UK and globally, different terms such as 'special needs', as you've mentioned, and 'additional learning needs' are used.

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Eve

And I think the term has been useful as a shared term and helping us to describe children that learn differently or need specific adaptations or support to access learning. However, as Froebelian educators, we do wish to avoid labelling or categorising children. So we do acknowledge the limitations of the term 'additional needs'. The most important thing is that each child is viewed holistically as a whole child, within the broader picture of their family, their culture, and their profile of strengths, interests, likes and dislikes.

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Eve

So there is kind of a growing discontent with the term 'additional needs'. And, many educators and researchers do view it as quite outdated. So I think it's definitely something for us to be reflecting on and thinking about more.

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Colin

And when you talk about 'additional needs', what does that encompass? Would that encompass a child with a disability or would that be a separate terminology for that.

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Eve

So in the pamphlet we used 'additional needs' as a very broad term to describe children with a range of different support needs. So that would include children with disabilities, with mobility needs. It could be visual or hearing impairment and also children with neurodiversity as well.

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Colin

Janice, if we think about your nursery at TuffKid, I suppose the ideal of course, when you're talking about children is that you're just using their name because you've got to know them. And we all have needs and challenges and, you know, situations that we're dealing with. But there might be times when you when you're having to talk about some of these topics.

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Colin

And it seems to me that the language is maybe sometimes a barrier.

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Janice

Yes, I think so. I think that we always talk about looking at the child and where the child is at versus looking at the label. The label sometimes can be very limiting. And if we can see where a child is actually at, we had a child who came in who was, two and a half years old, however, was developmentally at a nine month old.

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Janice

So if we knew that, then we knew that she would benefit from a treasure basket and we could celebrate that with her and the parents versus us saying, well, this is her label. And therefore, you know, we've got the resources which are out for the child of that age. So I think it's really important to look at each child as an individual and what stage they're at.

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Janice

And to celebrate that stage and to let them develop in that stage.

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Colin

And, Agnes, I know that you were leading a project looking at the experiences of young Black children with additional needs and their families in South London. There's some fascinating insight, because you were speaking directly to these children and their families. What did your research find? What is the experience of young Black children with additional needs as opposed to the general population?

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Colin

Is there much of a difference?

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Agnes

Well, I'd say first of all, the SEND system in general is broken at the moment, and I believe all children up and down the United Kingdom are not potentially getting the support that they need. I think that the SEND system needs to be overhauled in general. Our work was not really about looking at this versus that in that kind of way.

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Agnes

It was really about understanding the cultural, lens that Black children, or Black and mixed heritage children, experience SEND. So, for example, we found so many different, themes that came up in our report looking at silos, looking at the kind of cultural nuances that are kind of interlinked when a family is trying to really understand the SEND system.

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Agnes

I always like to give this example, you know, my heritage is Ghanaian and my children are half Ghanaian and half Tanzanian and in those languages there is not actually any word for mental health. There's not any word for SEND. So oftentimes educators might be trying to explain to family that actually we think that your child have, some sort of behavioural challenge or whatever it is, but they don't realise that when that family, if translating that in their head and in their language, what you are basically saying is 'we think your child is mad', and then that parent starts getting very defensive because obviously they want to defend their

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Agnes

child and that becomes a breakdown in communication for that child. So our report is really about support getting to grips to understand what these nuances are. And that's because at the moment in the UK, Black three and four year olds are 3 to 4 times more likely to be excluded from nursery.

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Colin

You just mentioned there a breakdown in communication and I just wanted to come back to this issue of the terminology we use and perhaps sometimes the lack of a shared language.

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Agnes

Yeah, I agree that with that, there needs to be a shared language, but I think it is that kind of cross sector training because actually what we found was that when the system was working well or when parents said, actually, I had a really good experience, it was because of individual educators or individual professionals, should I say, that were from all different backgrounds.

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Agnes

You didn't have to be a Black professional that was supporting a Black family, and then it was good, it was from all different backgrounds. But that one professional that came in and made that family feel seen and listened to and actually said, 'I don't understand, could you explain?' when they didn't understand something, they didn't come in with any kind of preconceived ideas.

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Agnes

That was when parents identified that they had a good experience, even if their child didn't get the outcome that they specifically wanted. So I do think language is really, really important. I also think when you don't know or you're not sure about, something it's okay to say that or to say, you know what, actually, I'm going to go away and maybe speak to one of my colleagues and come back.

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Agnes

It is language, but it's a lot bigger than that. I personally think.

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Colin

You mentioned there the professional that gets it right, that contributes to a positive experience. I wonder if I could start with Eve and then I'll go to Janice. What can we do to make sure that every child has that good experience? Maybe right from the beginning. And I'm conscious that there might be children right now having their first experience of some sort of education setting.

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Colin

So what do we do to make sure that it's welcoming and positive for everyone?

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Eve

I think it's really important that we build up a relationship that is characterised by trust and respect with the parent or carer or family right from the beginning, even before the child starts the setting. It's really vital that the parents and the carers feel that the setting is an inclusive community and that their child is really welcomed into that community and I think there's many ways that we can support parents and families to feel really included and welcomed.

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Eve

And I think that first point of contact is really crucial. So it could be the home visit when the educator first visits the child at home and visits the parent and carer. Or it could be the child's first visit to the setting or the parent or carer's first visit to the setting. It's really important that we start building the relationship from that point.

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Eve

This is where having a Key Person really comes in. It's having that one person that the family feels connected to and can trust and can build that relationship with. And so it's important to consider, as a team, who the appropriate Key Person is for that family. There might be a particular educator that is a good fit for that family.

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Eve

Perhaps they share some characteristics or experiences with that family. The family feels more comfortable with them, so it's important to reflect on that as a team. It's also really important that when we start having those discussions with parents and carers about their children, that the parent and carer feels that they can lead that conversation and that we start with open ended questions about the child's interests, the things they like and the things they dislike, about how they communicate their feelings, how they communicate their needs so that we can get that holistic picture of the child.

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Eve

And I think at that point, the parent can communicate if they have any concerns about the child's development or if they have had any contact with other agencies or professionals, and in a way that they feel comfortable and in a way that they're in control of.

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Colin

Yeah. And Janice at TuffKid, how would these initial conversations take place in terms of, you finding out about the child, finding out about the situation and any additional needs that we might have to discuss. How's that introduced?

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Janice

So we do a home visit as well. And what we would do at the home visit, again, is gather as much information as we can. One of the key things we also do at the home visit is we really focus in also with the parent on what songs they sing with their child as well. And we're doing that so that when the child comes in, those are... Froebel talks about Mother Songs, which was about how the mother had that attachment to the baby as well, you know, singing the baby would coo and she would sing back.

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Janice

We find that often our parents have got these songs which they sing, and those are today's Mother Songs. So when our children come into the nursery and they're settling in, we can sing those songs when the parent leaves, because often, you know, the parent will go for about ten minutes and we've got those songs that that child, we see them visibly relax that we know, and we've got what supports them.

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Janice

We also have a meeting. So often our children would have, Local Authority involved. So we would do a big meeting. We have professionals in the nursery. So in our nursery, we have a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, a dance movement therapist, and a speech and language therapist. And we would do a team around the child meeting to make sure that we've all got, as much information as we can.

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Janice

Bearing in mind, though, that often children are very different from how they present at home. So we know when they come into the nursery, they might be doing a lot more at home, or they're doing things differently in the nursery from how home is. And it's very important for us to, help the parents to relax about that.

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Janice

It's a different environment. It's an education environment that's very busy. There's lots more children, and we also want to try and make sure when we can is if a child needs to have objects of reference to help support them, that's an object rather than something visual, because some children aren't using visuals yet. So we want to try and make sure that, we've got as many things in place, including Makaton, which is signing for all the children, but that we do with absolutely everybody, which really supports our mainstream children in also communicating with our children with additional needs as well.

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Janice

you know, we say to parents they can stay as long as they want.

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Janice

We've had parents who stayed with us six weeks. We've had parents who have only stayed with us five minutes. But it's about helping support them. If their child is ready. So I happen to have this year just started now, a parent who came in, she said 'last time I started with my other child I was with you for six weeks.'

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Janice

This time she's managed two days and she's left. But that's what the child needed. And we are saying to the parent, look, we will help you, support you, whatever you need and the child needs. So it's about building that trust which is going to carry them through life. So we need the parent to trust us and the child to trust us as well.

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Colin

I'm just picking up on one thing Agnes said. She spoke about the system being broken and broken for pretty much everyone. And there are comments from the Secretary of State for Education in England, Bridget Phillipson, who wrote to educators and leaders and said, what probably many of you have felt for a while that because of 'severe financial constraints and growing problems with the right support, the persistence of these problems leads to an erosion of hope.'

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Colin

So, Agnes, is it broken just because of of funding and budgets, or is there more going on, and how do you think we can start fixing it?

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Agnes

I think it's a mixture of everything you just said there, funding, teachers need to be adequately paid. You know, I think educators are the most important people. And I say this as a mother of three and somebody who I would say survived Covid, having three children at home and when they could go back to school and nursery, I literally wanted to hug my teachers.

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Agnes

Obviously we couldn't because of social distancing, but it really puts into perspective, the role of educators and how valuable you all are. So I think number one, you know, our teachers need to be fairly compensated for the work that they do. I think number two, leading on from that point is that, SEND or SENCO or additional needs that should not just necessarily be a department, that needs to be something that is interweaved throughout the whole educational system.

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Agnes

You know, every single teacher, should be and I say this in inverted commas, "a SEND teacher", right? They should have an understanding. One of my children in their school, I went there the other day and I noticed that instead of having two TAs (teaching assistants) they now only have one, and that one goes in between two of the classrooms. And you know, as I said I'm a mum of three and, you know, at home, you know, I'd find that a lot.

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Agnes

And I'm thinking, hold on a minute. You know, you've now got, you know, 60 children in a room, one TA (teaching assistant) that's going back and forth. And this is my son of five. When you think about then, the strain of of a teacher trying to do the best that they can do, but also support other children in their class who have got other additional needs, you can understand where those challenges are coming from.

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Agnes

So teachers need to be fairly compensated. But we also need to make sure that we have enough staff inside our classrooms to be able to give that quality care. Otherwise, you're going to have all these wonderful speeches and reports coming out saying, we need to do x and we need to do y and we need to do z, but there's no capacity for schools and teachers to be able to actually deliver on what the government is saying.

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Colin

Well, let's just bring Janice in now, because, Janice, you're in there every day, do you feel that you have the support you need?

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Janice

So we have our Key Worker who is going to be that initial attachment for the child, which is, you know, part of attachment theory. And then what happens very quickly, all the other all the other educators will start working with that child as well, so that everybody knows how to work with every child in the nursery.

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Janice

And it means that if a teacher isn't there one day, that it doesn't make a difference to that child's package of care. They can still come in, they're still going to get everything they need and be able to access everything versus in other places, which again, when you only have one person who is working with one child, if that person isn't there, that educator isn't there, then it's going to be difficult for that child.

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Janice

The parents have to fight very, very hard. These parents already have so much that they have to deal with on a daily basis with their children, and in order to access any sort of funding, the fight is to another level. It's so difficult for them. And I always have to say to them, it's not about your child

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Janice

Even half the time. It's just the system. This is the system.

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Colin

Agnes...

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Agnes

One of the biggest challenges is actually, Black children. And we can say Black boys but Black children in general, they are over identified as actually having SEND but they're under supported and it kind of touches on the points that Janice was saying is it's just the fight, there's a huge fight to be able to get this, support, and if you then add race and economics into it, who are some of the families that can fight, and who are some of the families that may be disproportionately disempowered to be

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Agnes

able to fight this, system? And even, I've spoken to educators with PhDs and so forth, and they are struggling to go through the system for their children.

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Agnes

So it's important. There is an over identification but it's that under support and we believe it's because of the different systemic challenges to fight, that all families are experiencing, but then as, you know how equity works, those who are usually worse off then find it even harder to fight with different systems.

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Colin

Well, one of the other things we're hearing, Janice and I think Agnes picked up on it in her report, is different professionals not always speaking to each other, even sometimes when they're in the same building. And I wonder, is that a frustration that you've encountered as well?

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Janice

So, yes. We definitely have found that. There is a split between Education and Health. And because we've got this split between them, Health will say, we're not providing the chair for that particular child. It's Education. That child needs a special chair in the nursery or they can't eat. Otherwise they're going to aspirate.

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Janice

So we have to have a chair to feed them. But Education says that's not us, that's Health. So that's occupational therapy. Who comes under Health. So they sort of bat it back at each other. Unless we put our foot down and say that child can't come in and that's terrible for the parent that we would have to say something like that.

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Janice

So we need them to take responsibility. We try and get all this in place before the children come into the nursery, but it's not working.

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Colin

And of course, there's so much emotion involved in all of this, isn't there for parents and carers and their own mental health is important. Their own wellbeing is important as well. Eve, I know that you've recently co-authored this new Froebel Trust pamphlet and it's all about supporting young children with additional needs. What's in there that might help educators who are dealing with the topics we're discussing today?

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Eve

The pamphlet is aimed educators, but it's also a useful resource for parents, carers, anybody working with children or interested in working with children. And the pamphlet details how to support children with additional needs. It covers key features of Froebelian practice, such as the importance of play and having long, uninterrupted stretches of play, and ensuring that all children have this.

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Eve

There can be a tendency for children with additional needs to have their play interrupted by interventions, and for them to have a timetable that's quite filled up in comparison to typically developing children. So this pamphlet is really about how we can ensure that we can support children using the Froebelian principles and adapt our practice and environment to ensure that we're meeting the needs of all children. Coming from a Froebelian perspective, we have a respect for the child's developmental stage and where they're at.

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Eve

And one of the key Froebelian principles is starting where the learner is at, letting the child be the stage they are at and not focusing constantly on pushing them to reach the next stage. It's also about respecting that children have lots of different ways of communicating, and also we avoid taking a deficit approach, which is focusing on delays and deficits, or having an assumption that all children should play a certain way or should communicate a certain way.

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Eve

A Froebelian approach is all about respecting diversity, respecting that all children are different. All children communicate in different ways.

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Colin

Absolutely Eve, I'm just keen to get Janice's perspective on that as well.

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Janice

I think that's really important that, children with additional needs are allowed to take risks, like mainstream children are allowed to take risks as well, obviously risks at their level. So when we're doing cooking with support they can peel use the potato peelers as well or, you know, use the hammers and the saws for the woodwork.

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Janice

And I think we shouldn't be limiting them. And I think that's really important.

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Eve

Yeah, I absolutely agree with Janice. I think taking risks is absolutely integral, to a Froebelian approach and to our development. And, I think there's often an anxiety around, physical risk, for example, using tools, like Janice was saying, hammers and saws and things like that. And this can be, kind of increased when working with children with additional needs.

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Eve

Occasionally you can come across children who don't have much risk awareness or awareness of danger, who do need a little bit more support. But this shouldn't, like Janice is saying, this shouldn't mean that we prevent them from taking risks and we sort of exclude them from any of the Froebelian Occupations, such as woodwork or cooking.

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Eve

I think, again, it depends on the child, but we do mention in the pamphlet some sort of strategies that you can use to support children with additional needs to take risks. And some of the things that we've suggested are thinking about having that 1-to-1 support, making sure that the adult is thinking about again how they balance the freedom with guidance.

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Eve

Maybe they need to give a little more guidance. It's also about thinking about the ratios, maybe thinking about how many children take part in the cooking if you're using a knife or something like that, or thinking about how many children there are at the woodwork bench, making that ratio higher if needed. But yeah, it's really, really important that we support children to explore risk safely in a way that is appropriate for them.

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Colin

Thinking about the support and guidance individual children may need. What about this question of labelling children and understanding children's behaviour - Eve?

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Eve

In my experience, when we're dealing with what we might perceive as challenging behaviour, in very young children, the first thing that we should do is have a look at our routines, have a look at our expectations. And it tends to be that when we're meeting children's needs, when what we're offering is appropriate to the child's level of development, that we can solve a lot of those behavioural issues that we might struggle with.

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Eve

So are we expecting children to sit for too long on the carpet? Do children have enough time to play? Are there enough opportunities for physical play, are children moving enough? You know, children are not designed to sit on the carpet for long stretches of time. Children need to be challenged physically. They need to be challenged mentally.

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Eve

And I've seen the really powerful impact that the Froebelian Occupations like woodwork and cooking have on children who have been perceived as having challenging behaviour. So being given responsibility, being trusted with kind of dangerous tools, children that educators might think can't listen to instructions, will certainly be listening to the instructions and following it because they have that intrinsic motivation to do so.

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Colin

Agnes, can I bring you in here?

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Agnes

I would say is that we need to really be checking our own selves and our own biases, and we all have them.

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Agnes

You know, I have biases, you have biases, my grandma has biases, everybody has biases. But, when we're kind of assessing children's behaviour, really, really, really checking ourselves to ensure that is it actually, a behavioural challenge problem in the way that we've perceived it to be or, is there a little bit more investigation that we need to do. I would really implore every educator, irrespective of your background to, to really do so because those stats need to come down.

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Agnes

You know, we're in 2024, and we can't have it that our most vulnerable children, you know, age 3 to 4, to me are very vulnerable. Are more likely to be, excluded for nothing, nothing but their race.

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Agnes

You may have heard of Oasis and they have a farm in Waterloo, and that farm is often used by schools, particularly schools who have children who are perceived to have challenging behaviour. And it's very interesting when they go to the farm their whole behaviour changes and they're regulated and they're listening to instructions. And these are children who are near exclusion. These are children who are being perceived as very unruly. You know, they're not listening in lessons and, and so forth. So again, it does show that when children are in different environments, how they can thrive.

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Janice

Yeah. Can I just also bring in about, you know, we found children with emotional behavioural issues and they have thrived with looking after. We have a hamster, as well as being outside and watering the plants and picking the tomatoes, once a week, we have a therapy dog that comes in that is a trained therapy dog, which again, helps support those children with their behaviour.

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Janice

And it's phenomenal how, living beings, living things and if you can show a child something living that they can take care of, they will start taking care of themselves and others eventually. But to start off with something, living like an animal and a plant is hugely valuable for them.

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Colin

Eve, I've been reading a lot about transitions and interruptions sometimes across the day. And I remember a child who was taken out of a class or out of a setting in order to go for speech therapy, for example. Is it better these days, if as much time as possible, everybody's spent together in the in the main room?

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Colin

Or is it unavoidable that sometimes to get that specialist support, people will have to leave the main room for a period?

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Eve

I think one of the key things about the Froebelian approach is that importance of long stretches of uninterrupted play for all children, and I think avoiding interruptions is very, very important. I think, as I mentioned, that there can be a tendency to split the session up for children with additional needs, and often when you are getting advice from multi-agency outside professionals such as speech and language therapists or educational psychologists, they may suggest interventions that don't fit with a Froebelian approach.

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Eve

So I do think the content of the intervention is obviously very key, and there are some interventions that, for example, a child with autism to mimic sort of neurotypical skills, which just encourages them to mask their ways of communicating and probably wouldn't fit with the Froebelian approach. So as much as possible, I think it is important to avoid interruptions and to design the session or organise the session in a way that if there are times when a child has to leave the main provision, and there might be times when that's appropriate, such as if the child's becoming kind of overstimulated in the main environment.

00:29:32:17 - 00:29:49:07

Eve

I know there are Froebelian settings where they do have separate spaces, where children with additional needs can go if they've become overwhelmed or they need a quieter space. So obviously it depends like as, with everything, with a Froebelian approach, it depends on the individual child. But I would say as a general rule, avoiding interruptions is important.

00:29:49:07 - 00:30:04:08

Eve

And if there are times when interventions, if they are appropriate, need to happen, it's probably important to timetable them at the beginning or end of the session. So that time for play can be really maximised because that is a priority in the Froebelian approach.

00:30:04:10 - 00:30:05:15

Colin

And Janice, I know you want to come in on that as well.

00:30:05:15 - 00:30:29:04

Janice

I just want to add to that. Another Froebelian approach is 'freedom with guidance'. And that is where you've got adults who have knowledge on how to help support a child and scaffold their learning and, and really help them to develop it. And the way the therapists work in our nursery is that they don't do any pullout.

00:30:29:06 - 00:30:55:11

Janice

They work in the main room, they work outside. We have, free flow so the children can be outside whenever they want. So the physiotherapists might be outside in the garden, so might be the occupational therapist. Even the speech and language therapist who also might be in the home corner or might be at snack table using the environment and to not have to take the child and interrupt their play, but to support the child in their play.

00:30:55:13 - 00:31:20:17

Colin

I wanted to ask as well, Janice, my instinct sometimes is to avoid talking about the differences that we might have. So, for example, someone from a different race or a different background, someone in a chair. Is it okay to mention those things? Do the educators talk about them? Does that sort of normalise it, or is it better not to point these things out?

00:31:20:19 - 00:31:44:20

Janice

So we celebrate and we celebrate everybody's differences. We've got children who wear glasses. We've got children who have hearing aids. We have children who have very, very special chairs. And what we find is that our mainstream children actually will be the ones to go and run to get that particular chair for that child, because they know that's the best way to support that child.

00:31:44:22 - 00:31:58:18

Janice

And it's because we've celebrated it. It's okay to have these differences. We are all different. And I think that if we can use that and celebrate it, it's going to make all our children into much more sensitive people.

00:31:58:24 - 00:32:24:01

Eve

I was just going to add that, another benefit of having all of the children together in the provision and not constantly taking out children with additional needs for interventions and removing them from the setting, is ensuring that it supports all of the children to understand, like Janice was saying, that we all have differences and respecting those differences, and also understanding that other people might need different things, to us.

00:32:24:05 - 00:32:50:08

Eve

So, for example, when I worked in the maintained nursery, when we had, lunch times and snack times together, there were children that needed adaptations. They might have needed a different food, a different seat. They might have needed to go into the lunchroom earlier than the other children. There were educators that were anxious. And there can be sometimes people can be anxious that if you're not giving, every child needs the exact same thing, that the other children will feel it's unfair.

00:32:50:10 - 00:33:09:13

Eve

And actually what I experienced was the total opposite was that when you talk to children openly about this and they understand that this child needs a different food because he has difficulty swallowing, they can be so understanding and completely accepting of their friend or their peer might need something different to them, and that they won't see it as unfair.

00:33:09:15 - 00:33:18:22

Colin

It's amazing if we just sit back and take the lead from children. They show us, don't they, Agnes.. go ahead.

00:33:18:24 - 00:33:40:17

Agnes

Yeah, I just want to echo, what Janice and Eve have said. I personally find it, quite awkward or offensive when people say 'I don't see race.' Well, I can see my race. And so, of course you can see me, and I can see you've got blond hair, and I can see you've got brown hair. The issue isn't the seeing of the race, it's the fact of am I being celebrated, or am I not?

00:33:40:19 - 00:33:57:00

Agnes

And I think that's the same if a child's got an additional need. Or they've got a different face. You know, the issue isn't about pinpointing, I don't think anybody would pinpoint if a child comes up and says, oh, you've got blond hair or oh my goodness, you've got brown skin.

00:33:57:02 - 00:34:23:14

Agnes

I can see that I have that. And most people will say, yes, you know, we can recognise that. The problem is the labelling. Is that labelling done in a way that can be detrimental to that child or to that family, or is it done in a way that can empower the family? Because now you've got, you know, this information. You know, Janice has spoken a lot about her nursery and the Judaism faith there.

00:34:23:16 - 00:34:39:09

Agnes

So I would want to know that so I'm making sure I'm respecting the Sabbath and I'm respecting how I'm communicating with her. And if I don't have that information and I'm like, well, I can't see that, then how can I make sure that I'm being respectful to Janice in the way that she would need me to be respectful?

00:34:39:11 - 00:35:00:09

Agnes

So I think we need to echo that point about you can highlight people's differences. I think that's really, really important because we're not made to all be the same. What a boring world that would be if we were all the same. And I think, you know, from a very young age, being able to celebrate children's differences, all we're doing is creating a world where everybody has respect for one another.

00:35:00:20 - 00:35:17:23

Colin

And what would your advice be Janice, to educators and early years leaders if they're listening to this and they think, well, I think we could do better? We've talked about celebrating every individual child. We could do better to be that welcoming environment and celebrating them. What do you think they should do next?

00:35:17:00 - 00:35:51:07

Janice

Definitely get in contact with the Froebel Trust. We started the process seven years ago, and, we were already working in a Froebelian way without realising it. And I think most educators will, they'll embrace this. They they'll go, oh, yes, that's how we were working. But what it's giving you is it's actually giving you the permissions to spend time observing the children, to give the children the time to really, without interrupting them, to play, to have freedom with guidance.

00:35:51:11 - 00:36:00:12

Janice

The children thrive. And as educators, we spend so much time knowing that we had to do so much paperwork. This gives you the permission to say, step back.

00:36:00:14 - 00:36:08:19

Colin

Eve - the Froebel Trust pamphlet that you've co-authored that we've referred to throughout this podcast. What are you hoping that achieves?

00:36:08:21 - 00:36:36:12

Eve

I think we're hoping that, more educators, not just in the early years, but in primary years and beyond, will become interested in how we can use a Froebelian approach to support children with additional needs and I hope that it will contribute to challenging the deficit narrative around children with additional needs. Within a Froebelian approach we talk a lot, and I know Janice has mentioned it many times about 'freedom with guidance'.

00:36:36:14 - 00:37:04:23

Eve

So a Froebelian approach is not just about giving children complete freedom. It's not about a laissez-faire approach to education and just leaving children to it. Froebel understood that children are biologically predisposed to learn and develop, and that there is a natural course of development that children follow biologically, but also that they need the appropriate environment and the appropriate support from the adults around them in order to meet their potential.

00:37:04:00 - 00:37:26:06

Eve

But what that potential is, will look different for every child. So providing freedom with guidance is all about balancing giving children autonomy, and freedom with providing the appropriate guidance and support. But the ultimate goal is for children to reach their potential. And to become autonomous, independent learners.

00:37:26:08 - 00:37:45:18

Colin

So just to draw this discussion to a close, those comments from the Secretary of State for Education, and she mentioned the 'erosion of hope'. Are we able to end this podcast on a hopeful note? You know, even in these challenging times, Janice, is there hope?

00:37:45:20 - 00:38:07:19

Janice

Yes. I definitely think there is hope. I think that, you know, if we are using the Froebelian approach and we are allowing children to take risks and to explore with their senses, and that we really look at each child for who they are and they can be at the stage that they are at. And we celebrate that.

00:38:07:21 - 00:38:08:02

Colin

Agnes do you agree?

00:38:08:04 - 00:38:25:12

Agnes

Yeah, I do think there is hope. I think the fact that we're all identifying and being able to name the problem and that is that the system, you know, is broken, full stop. That's a starting point. It means that we can build back. And I suppose on my side, I want to make sure that we're building back better.

00:38:25:14 - 00:38:49:01

Agnes

You know, we're building a system that looks different, that is relevant for today and tomorrow's children. Even just being on this podcast now, look at how passionate we all are. And I've spoken to so many different educators and people that are working with children. And it's the same, you know, on the ground, you know, educators and professionals want to do good.

00:38:49:03 - 00:39:15:13

Agnes

If that's just at the moment where so many of us are in silos and we're not able to have that kind of joined up approach. And I think now that we're all being able to name the problem and we've got consensus, not just, from the client facing view of, you know, the educators that are dealing with children. But actually, from the government perspective, it means that now our conversations are not just focused on naming the problem and saying, this is all bad and this is all bad.

00:39:15:15 - 00:39:27:17

Agnes

It's now focused on okay, we understand these are the challenges, but how can we work together? And I think it's a really exciting time that we can now start looking forward about how we can build back better.

00:39:27:15 - 00:39:44:17

Colin

Well that note of optimism from Agnes Agyepong brings us to the end of this episode of the Froebel Trust Podcast. You can find out more about how a Froebelian approach to early years education can help all children, by accessing the resources we've linked to in the podcast description.

00:39:44:15 - 00:40:05:17

Colin

You can also find out more about all the guests you've heard from in this episode. Dr Agnes Agyepong, Founder and CEO of the Global Black Maternal Health Institute. Eve Mawby Whistler, a nursery teacher in Cambridgeshire and Froebel Trust Travelling Tutor. And Janice Marriott - Head of TuffKid Nursery in London. Special thanks again to all my guests.

00:40:05:15 - 00:40:30:17

Colin

Remember there's a full transcript for this episode, as well as all the previous episodes of the Froebel Trust podcast, as well as details of training and additional resources. It's all on the Froebel Trust website, at froebel.org.uk Thank you very much for listening - subscribe or follow this podcast and you'll receive all our episodes as soon as they're published.

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