



## **Froebel Trust Podcast Transcript : Episode 1 Feb 2023**

00:00:07:05 - 00:00:32:03

Colin

Hello and welcome to the Froebel Trust podcast. Now this podcast is for you if you've ever wondered what a Froebelian approach to early education is all about and want to know what it looks like in action. Well, Froebel was the inventor of kindergarten and a pioneer of early childhood education. The principles of his approach prioritised play and learning in and through nature.

00:00:32:21 - 00:00:55:08

Colin

A Froebel approach values practical hands on learning and the idea of nurturing a child's connection to their community. And these are all things we're going to talk about in the next few episodes of this podcast. It's all about giving you ideas about how to bring a Froebelian approach to your school or early years setting and the difference it can make to young children's education.

00:00:56:03 - 00:01:25:02

Colin

My name's Colin Kelly. I'm a journalist and dad of two young children. And in this first episode, we're going to explore what it takes for an early years setting to undertake a Froebelian approach. What needs to happen to get staff engaged in a positive way? What kinds of training and support are available and what are they like? And in this episode, I'm joined by Dr. Stella Louis, lead tutor for the Froebel Trust Short courses and an independent early years consultant.

00:01:25:17 - 00:01:59:13

Colin

Sally Cave, head teacher at Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre and co-director of the Froebel Partnership. We have Professor Chris Pascal, director of the Centre for Research in Early Childhood. Dr. Lynn McNair, head of Cowgate Under Five Centre in Edinburgh and programme director of Froebelian Futures. And Simon Bateson, co-director of Froebelian Futures and a senior practitioner at Cowgate Under Five Centre.

00:01:59:22 - 00:02:22:08

Colin

Now, one of the key principles of Froebel that I've been learning about is this idea that you start with what the child has already. You meet them where they are right now. And so my

first question to Dr. Chris Pascal was that isn't it the case that many nurseries and early years centres might already be using some of these Froebel principles without realising what they were doing?

00:02:22:19 - 00:02:52:01

Chris

Yeah, I think it probably is fair. Froebelian practices is best practice, good practice in early years and all settings would aspire to that, whether they label themselves as a Froebelian setting or not. And I think we're ambitious to make the Froebelian elements of practice much more visible, first to the practitioners and then within their practice. But there's a lot of pressures in the sector out there that take people often away from those Froebelian principles.

00:02:52:01 - 00:03:30:15

Chris

And I think what we're trying to do is reaffirm the importance and the value of those Froebelian principles as we navigate this uncertain future in the challenges of the 21st century. We as a collective group, I think, believe those principles are strong and very relevant in today's world. But to kind of foreground them and explain them out there in the wider sector, but also to keep them alive and relevant for today's world, too, because those principles have evolved over many years and have had to adapt to different circumstances, to make it relevant.

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Colin

Sally, at your place in Guildford, if you decide right I want my want my nursery school to be it, to take on these Froebelian principles if somebody's listening and they think I want to be like her. How do they go about it, Sally?

00:03:42:17 - 00:04:13:17

Sally

I mean like all things it needs to be led from the senior leaders. They've got to be really committed to that. For us, we bought into the Froebel short courses, which had they're not particularly short. They had six elements of two days each. And we've been doing those as a whole staff team. So nobody's left out at all over the last five years. That coupled with use of in-school setting work as well, has really had the greatest impact, I would say.

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Colin

So when you when you adopt these these principles and you take on the Froebelian approach, I mean, does everybody do all at once? Or is it certain staff or certain groups where it works best?

00:04:24:15 - 00:04:56:19

Sally

We've used inset days for that. So an element a year. We started with the first two in the first year and then after that it's been two inset days. But as a Froebel travelling tutor, I've

been able to support that through staff meetings, weekly newsletters. So it's it is a very slow cook approach. It isn't a one day course, we all go away inspired and then the real world hits and nothing happens. You know, it's engenders a lot of deep thought which really changes hearts and minds and therefore practice.

00:04:56:20 - 00:05:06:15

Colin

You mentioned the training and you said that you use your inset days. On those days. What are they doing? Are they stand...Are they sitting in looking at powerpoints? Does somebody come in and speak to them or what are they doing?

00:05:07:07 - 00:05:27:03

Sally

The short courses are always delivered by two travelling tutors, so you'll always have qualified tutors, which I think is really important, that it's not just one. And they're very interactive as as you'd expect from Froebelian course, so there's a little bit of information being given, but there's a lot of discussion, some video, some practical stuff.

00:05:27:03 - 00:05:49:04

Sally

So staff actually get involved in working with clay, for instance, or the blocks and the gifts and that and really sort of understanding it for themselves. So you're physically doing things as well as discussing those things. So they are really practical, really accessible and again, they're Froebelian tutors, so they'll take the learners in the group from where they, where they are.

00:05:49:11 - 00:06:11:15

Colin

Well, let's hear from Dr. Stella Louis. I know that you lead a small team of Froebelian travelling tutors. You're in the individual nursery settings promoting, developing and delivering some of those short courses that Sally was talking about. So what's the best way for staff to go through this? Is it something they would all do at once or can they undertake it in small groups?

00:06:12:00 - 00:06:33:11

Stella

I think one of the powerful things about doing it with a whole staff team is that you really do have not just a community of learners, but you have a shared language because staff are all educators are able to use the Froebelian language. Not even the ideas just the language of the principles to articulate their practice.

00:06:33:11 - 00:06:56:01

Stella

And you alluded to the fact that people are probably doing this Froebelian approach anyway and they don't know it. And I think just that one exercise really does allow them or enable them to locate themselves in their practice and and talk about their practice and their children. And I think for all educators, that's so important.

00:06:56:21 - 00:07:12:06

Colin

Lynn, what would you say if there was a member of staff or maybe even a member of management that didn't get it wasn't keen, maybe preferred another system, didn't see the point? How would you get them on board with this?

00:07:12:11 - 00:07:45:06

Lynn

These kind of challenges do emerge. But when we advertise for positions, the questions that we ask potential staff members are Froebelian. So we ask them what their knowledge is of Froebelian principles. Our website is totally Froebelian. You raised an important point there. I've had managers coming to me saying We're really interested in phonics, for example, and I've said, I'm afraid, you know, we wouldn't be looking at that.

00:07:45:06 - 00:08:12:09

Lynn

It gives us an opportunity to stick with our principles, to guide us in our practice. We don't sway from them, but there are definitely some things that we would not embark on because they're not Froebelian. They would take us away from the child. And I think that's the strength of Froebelian principles, I think. And it keeps you from being eclectic in your practice so you can't see or do a little bit of Rayes, you do a little bit of this.

00:08:12:17 - 00:08:36:12

Lynn

You keep really true to what you're doing. You know, a new fad can come along and people all jump on the fad. Now, there are very well-meaning practitioners that do this. They think they've got to do it. But actually when you're guided with Froebel's principles, what is right for children and families is right there. You don't need to be looking for new fads.

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Colin

Stella Is that something that you've experienced as well?

00:08:39:24 - 00:09:46:05

Stella

I have. So quite often I'm, I'm delivering training to staff teams and I'm just remembering a recent encounter where on one hand one of the major Froebelian principles are that children learn through their own effort. It's the activity. It's this whole idea that self activity leads to the sort of understanding reasoning and thinking. And there'll be some educators wanting to just teach children because that's how they have been trained and they will say, oh, you know, this Froebelian approach just letting, you know, self activity. What do you mean? And I think where we've worked with those educators with we've worked with their strengths, so we've almost applied the same principles that we apply to children. To them. We start with what they know, what they can do, and we bring them with us that way. And, you know, somehow along the process, you know, Sally has a really nice example of one of her staff saying, you know, I just didn't get this Froebel stuff.

00:09:46:05 - 00:10:12:06

Stella

I absolutely get it now. So it's giving them the time and space to go with them, because an important thing to understand about the Froebelian approach is it's exactly that. It's an approach, it's a way of being and doing. It's not a particular method. So one size doesn't fit all and I think you've got to just like we would children play to the educator's strengths, whatever they may be.

00:10:12:06 - 00:10:44:01

Chris

I don't think we train anybody in anything. Training is not what we do. Training is what you do with dogs. We're educating people and the principles that we would see that would allow young children to be educated and to flourish and to fly and to be fulfilled. These are all Froebelian words. We would use the same concepts with adult we mirror when we're developing work with staff to when we're working or educators of when when those educators we're hoping they're working with the children.

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Chris

And the first thing is, is starting within that community of practice a really reflective and self evaluative dialogue, which is where you're reading the evaluation, the research comes within it because you're evaluating your practising giving the framework this again of freedom, but with guidance so that the tutors guide that dialogue and feed that dialogue. They don't dominate it or train them to operate in a certain way.

00:11:13:08 - 00:11:26:01

Chris

What you want is to give those educators that capacity to learn with their own agency through their own self reflection and rigorous, but is absolutely right, underpinned by those core principles.

00:11:26:08 - 00:11:51:16

Colin

Well, let's just bring in Simon Bateson, who's co-director at Froebelian Futures, and Simon gets involved in training and research to try and develop and deepen the Froebelian approach and leadership in Scotland and beyond. Simon We've heard a bit of discussion already about the Froebelian community and the network. I'm just wondering how big is that network? I mean, is there is there like a Froebelian centre in in every major city or is it not as common as that?

00:11:52:21 - 00:12:22:20

Simon

That's a great question. I mean, it's growing is is the key thing to say these trainings are rippling out certainly through England, through the Travelling Tutors programme and here in Scotland, through the University of Edinburgh's training, where we're training thousands of of early childhood practitioners as well as policy makers and leaders in primary schools

and even secondary to get this understanding of Froebelian principles. We've just started a programme in Froebelian leadership, which has been mentioned here as being absolutely critical.

00:12:22:20 - 00:12:53:13

Simon

So it's there's real momentum here. What's really exciting in Scotland is that national talking about leadership are national guidelines now for early childhood practice, which are called 'Realising the Ambition', have Froebel really at the heart of how they view the child so that leadership from the top of saying, look, children are competent, capable, creative, to be trusted, they come alive in relationship, they need time and space to come into themselves.

00:12:53:13 - 00:13:21:24

Simon

These things are being set from the top and most of us are called to this work with young children because we've got a passion for seeing children come alive in their skills and capacities. And Froebel would be delighted with a lot of practice, but he'd also have, I think, some real concerns about practice in many communities where that top down message is that children need to be, as you were rightly critiquing there Chris, children need to be trained.

00:13:22:06 - 00:13:58:17

Simon

They need to be brought up to a uniform standard of human being and citizenship and knowledge as opposed to children are creating knowledge. Children are teaching us in children's play, which is what Froebel was so inspiring on. Children are creating the world anew each and every day, and it's our job to create the space and the time for that and how we break out of some of the constraints that are imposed on our settings in terms of curriculum constraints, the routines, some of the risk aversion still dominates around children's play.

00:13:58:21 - 00:14:09:08

Colin

I can see Sally nodding away there. Sally, you're the head teacher at Guildford Nursery School and Family Centre, navigating a way through these constraints, I guess, is something that you do every day.

00:14:09:21 - 00:14:54:23

Sally

We Yes, we do, actually. The Froebel approach can help for some educators and we've got many in England in reception classes, for instance, under huge constraints to deliver phonics in a very prescriptive way. And so but actually the Froebelian approach of looking at the whole to parts and starting with the learner is really, really helps through the family songs, starting there and playing with language to make sense of the phonics approach, if you like, And it just helps them to see that whole because they are under huge pressure and I don't think we can deny them that pressure they're under and we can help them to navigate it, to make it make sense.

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Sally

Because currently I would suggest the practice in the phonics approach in many reception classes doesn't make sense to either the staff or the children. And I think Froebel's thing of wanting to educate people to think for themselves again is a really empowering statement for for teachers.

00:15:13:04 - 00:15:28:23

Colin

Let's go back to Lynn McNair then at the Cowgate Under Five Centre in Edinburgh and you're also the co-lead of the University of Edinburgh Froebel course. I'm interested, Lynne, in the change in staff when they undertake this training and what does it do for them? What do you notice?

00:15:29:05 - 00:15:52:04

Lynn

Well, we've as we've been carrying out some research on that and I think the one thing is it makes them much more eloquent. Our way of being and working with them gives them a chance to stand back, to look at something. So, say they have a block corner that's existed for a very long time, and it's designed in a particular way.

00:15:52:05 - 00:16:18:02

Lynn

When they do our kind, of course, they step back and think, actually I'm now starting to understand what I need to do and why I need to do it. And that's been great. You know, the early years practitioners, they work tirelessly hard, and I think Froebel just speaks to them. I think that at the end they always say, now I understand what I was doing and why I was doing it.

00:16:18:17 - 00:16:47:10

Lynn

I mean, we have so many local authorities in Scotland up-taking Froebel and the wonderful thing that we're seeing is the transformational practice. In Falkirk, for example, they did this project on Marvellous Mealtimes, which really turned kind of institutional meals into a very home-like way of delivering food with children or mealtimes with children, in a very warm and welcoming way.

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Lynn

I know that in Orkney, Anne Clark's working with people in Orkney on slow pedagogy. I mean it's right the way through to the Highlands and Islands, right the way to our borders really. We're starting to see a really big uptake in lots of different pockets in Scotland now, there are little networks. So there's a network in Falkirk, there's a network in Edinburgh, there's a network in the West, you know, there's, there's several little networks and that's exactly what Froebel wanted, you know, like he wanted us all to network and connect and it's extremely successful here.

00:17:27:18 - 00:17:32:13

Colin

Chris I can see you've put your hand up and then we'll come to Sally and then Stella. But Chris, if you go first.

00:17:32:24 - 00:18:36:00

Chris

I wanted to just make a quick but important distinction between the courses and also ongoing and continuous professional development that goes alongside that. And I think one of the ambitions we have is to help a community of educators network or within a setting to become part of a reflective community. One of Froebel's principles was that reflective practitioner, knowledgeable and reflective practitioner, which is helped by attending a course and going on the course, which is an important provocation, but trying to create regular opportunities for staff teams to come and engage together in a reflective dialogue together, a critical, reflective dialogue about their practice and the practice issues that they're facing. That ongoing professional development which is as important as the the courses that you attend, but you've got to have leaders in those organisations facilitating those times for practitioner dialogue.

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Colin

Yeah, really good point. Sally.

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Sally

I would say the the courses and the continuous professional development that Lynne and Chris were talking about actually improves staff wellbeing, which as leaders, is something we are constantly aware of. I can't make my staff happy because I don't have any control over their, that, what's happening to them in their lived experiences. But my role I see it is ensuring jobs, high jobs, satisfaction and having a shared language, having some autonomy, a lot of autonomy in their roles, which is all part of that Froebelian approach gives them actually really helps have a very high level of staff wellbeing.

00:19:17:22 - 00:19:56:20

Sally

Member of my staff told some people on a tour last week and you know, unprompted she just said, I love working here and that's what I want and that's what we all want, isn't it? And especially at a time of real difficulties with recruitment and retention. I think as well the research work we're doing with with Chris's team, that opportunity to reflect gives job satisfaction again. And I can't stress enough, I think the freedom with guidance that all the staff have within a Froebelian setting. And so, you know, and being very ambitious for our children and our staff, but always starting where the child is or where the adult is.

00:19:57:03 - 00:19:58:02

Colin

Dr. Stella Louis.



00:19:58:15 - 00:20:24:06

Stella

Yeah. I also just to add to what you've both said, I think it's also that throughout whatever element it is that you do, there's a real focus on, on child development and really encouraging practitioners to, you know, just take on board this Froebelian approach to observing children, which is externally you're quite passive, but internally you're reflecting in your your thinking about what you're seeing.

00:20:24:14 - 00:21:02:21

Stella

And one of the things that staff feedback is that they're much more aware of the importance of the different stages that children are at, because once they start to respect the stages that children are, they are not pushing children into the next stage. They're not focussed on some sort of outcome, the process of learning becomes more important and they understand that process. So not only are they focussed on the stages, they're wary that each stage of development is dependent on what's gone before and how important it is that they are giving children opportunities and experiences that are meaningful.

00:21:03:03 - 00:21:19:22

Colin

So one of the questions, or maybe the most frequently asked question that the Froebel Trust encounters is we want to be of Froebelian nursery. How do we start? Maybe a couple of you want to have a go at answering this. Simon. Do you want to maybe go first? How how do they start? What's that first step?

00:21:20:10 - 00:21:45:12

Simon

I think the first step has to be engaging with Froebel's original principles. And, you know, many people have made those accessible in contemporary language, the work of Tina Bruce, for example, in doing that. So getting familiar with what Froebel actually said, which is really inspiring and engaging and radical still today, those words that were written in the 1830s.

00:21:45:12 - 00:22:23:03

Simon

We have a really strong focus in Cowgate Nursery on what we call our living questions and our lived stories. Emulating Froebel in how he slowed right down to observe children, to really see what was happening, really understand it, and really let the questions breathe and come to the surface and live them and not be rushing children or ourselves into into any fixed learning programme or answers. Because as it was already been said, each of us is unique and we're part of a unique community of practice and families and children.

00:22:23:03 - 00:22:29:19

Colin

Let me just hear from Sally. So Sally, same question. We want to be a rebellion nursery. How do we start?

00:22:29:19 - 00:22:50:19

Sally

My starting point would be to go to the Froebel Trust website and I would look at download the pamphlet board 'Principles and Practice Today'. I think it is written by Helen Tovey and it just does what Simon says. It makes the Froebel principles really, really accessible. So I'd look and see right, does this resonate with me? And then take it from there.

00:22:51:00 - 00:23:05:06

Colin

Great. And final word on this then from Chris Pascal. If you can do this in 15 seconds, I'd be very grateful. Here's your chance to sell it then to another nursery or early learning years centre. Why should they set off on this journey?

00:23:05:16 - 00:23:37:22

Chris

What motivates them is their vocational belief in transforming children's lives, enabling children to be fulfilled. And we know that children will only be fulfilled in their capabilities with highly skilled, engaged, inspired and excited educators. And so the first step for me would be to get excited yourselves, get the leadership excited, and then pass on that passion and that focus with the children, because you have the magic dust in your hand to transform those lives.

00:23:37:22 - 00:24:04:11

Chris

But you have to be prepared to sprinkle and be hopeful and excited about that yourselves. So you have to channel it yourself and then then share it around and join together in dialogue with others. Find some like minded friends that can get excited with you and then you'll get the children excited and the magic dust could start to transform your lives and the lives of those that you care about.

00:24:04:11 - 00:24:25:23

Colin

Well, Chris Pascal's Magic Dust is probably a good place to leave it for Episode one of this Froebel Trust podcast. Huge thanks to my panel. You can find out more about all the participants in this podcast just by looking through the podcast description. You'll also find on there a link to the Froebel Trust website where you'll be able to access the training and resources that the panel were talking about.

00:24:25:24 - 00:24:50:03

Colin

So if you'd like to do that you can visit [www.froebel.org.uk](http://www.froebel.org.uk) That's [www.froebel.org.uk](http://www.froebel.org.uk). And I'll be back soon with episode two where we'll be exploring the Froebel environment and asking what resources do you need if you want to bring a Froebel approach to your setting and if you're one, how do you know?

00:24:50:13 - 00:25:10:23

Colin

So thank you very much for listening. I hope you'll join me again and do remember the website: [www.froebel.org.uk](http://www.froebel.org.uk)

(ENDS)