



Froebel Trust Podcast Transcript : Episode 6 July 2023

00:00:00:00 - 00:00:26:18

Colin

Hello. My name's Colin Kelly. I'm a journalist and dad of two young children. In this series. I've been learning more about a Froebelian approach to early childhood education, about how young children learn in a holistic way, the importance of play, and why learning should never be compartmentalized. So I'm interested to find out now how this approach fits with modern assessment processes in early years settings and schools.

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Colin

How can a Froebelian educator navigate assessments, inspections and the progress reporting systems they may come across? What does Froebelian assessment look like in practice? And how might observing young children help educators to truly see what young children know, understand and are able to do? I'll be discussing all these issues with my two guest speakers Dr. Stella Louis, lead tutor for the Froebel Trust Short Courses.

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Colin

She's also an author and early use consultant and Gaynor Brimble school improvement partner for the Southeast Wales Education Achievement Service. Well, hello to you both and probably a good place to start. Dr. Stella Louis, how would you define assessment when we're talking about the early years? What exactly is it?

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Stella

Hello, I think I would say there's an old saying - In order to find someone that's lost in the woods, you need to know where it is they could be at. And I think that is exactly what assessment is. It's knowing where to find your children. And I think it's quite widely recognized in early years that children discover, you know, as and when children discover new things, they link that to what they already know.

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Stella

Education should be about helping children to make those important links. And I would go on to say that awareness of children's prior learning is absolutely essential if we want to teach them new things. This is absolutely key. It will help us to use what we know about

individual children and we'll be able to guide them as we teach, making the necessary adjustments along the way.

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Stella

But what's most important, I think in all of what I said, observation is part of this process because they contribute to the way that educators are able to assess where they know where children are in their development and in in their learning. I think educators have a responsibility to gather information about children that informs them. It's not just about observing children, it's about observing children, acting on what we've seen, and responding to them appropriately and and helping them, I think to make those links.

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Colin

And Gaynor, when you were helping the Welsh government shape their policy in this area, what sorts of things were you telling them? That assessment ought to be this early years stage?

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Gaynor

Exactly. What Stella's been describing actually that we need to start with where the child is and not come from that deficit model of what they don't know that, you know, that's not helpful to the child or to the practitioner, actually. So we look very much at starting with where the children are. What does a knowledgeable adult do to support the child moving forward?

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Gaynor

So assessment as well is is not what it used to be, which was tick sheets, one off events accountability measures, you know, proving how well you've done. And it was really about the teacher proving what they had done rather than thinking about what's important for the child. If you start with the child from what they know, then it's easier to lead them forward to new knowing and to link back that to their knowledge, that their understanding is deeper and firmer and then they can build on it for themselves.

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Gaynor

So when we looked at our assessment arrangements, we very so we previously written a curriculum for three and four year olds. We made sure in that curriculum that it was very authentic to three or four year olds what they're going to be interested in. There's another problem sometimes that adults will choose topics and themes that they think the children are going to be interested in, but if they use their observations, they would have noticed that actually this theme is going nowhere.

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Gaynor

They're actually more interested in transporting objects or emptying and filling, and actually they're doing that in lots of places. Or we've noticed that their mathematical development is

coming on in the cooking corner or in the block play. So those sorts of things, we wanted everything to be more authentic to the child and also for the adults, the authenticity for the adults who make an assessment that's going to inform their planning and their provision.

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Gaynor

So we're looking forward to the publication of the assessment and hopefully for the educators out there, particularly those in schools who have been under a very different regime, that they're going to get some professional acknowledgment of what they can do and what they know that it's best for children.

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Colin

This is for both of you, sometimes when politicians or parents talk about assessment, they immediately think of tests. Froebel doesn't talk about tests. Does he?

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Stella

No, I mean, test is very much a deficit model. It's not focusing on what children can do. And I think sometimes children are tested in really superficial situations where the resources aren't meaningful or they don't have the experiences embedded in their life experiences, for them to be able to talk it live, feel it, play it.

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Stella

And, you know, as Gaynor said, the old style of assessment was very much just ticking things off. You can do this, you can do that. Children are quite complex and we go back to knowledgeable adults. Adults need to understand what it is they're seeing. I would love politicians and policymakers to spend a day with a two year old or group of two year olds and they will be able to see just so much working out, thinking, problem solving, finding solutions, trying things out.

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Stella

You know, they will see learning taking place. But you have to understand what you're seeing in the first place. And if we're starting with where people are at, I think for educators that has to be our first port of call. And Gaynor is right when she says that the educators do know their children. They just don't know how to articulate it, always.

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Colin

Gaynor, I thought it was very interesting what you were saying about the value of observing and assessing. It's not about checking on the child. It's really it's about helping the educator maybe change the environment or plan what you're going to do next.

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Gaynor

Absolutely. So in our curriculum, we have three enablers, one of them being the enabling adult, the other being effective environments and engaging experience. It's that knowledgeable, observant adult that makes the changes for those engaging experiences. And again, if we think about Stella has just described two and three year olds, they are probably at their greatest, I feel, in education systems, at their greatest period of autonomy.

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Gaynor

And as they get older they get less and less opportunities or fewer and fewer opportunities to be autonomous. So the more that we can provide environments and experiences that allow them to show us what they can do by themselves, what they're puzzling over, they will ask us for help. Sometimes it might not be verbal, it might be an eye indication.

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Gaynor

But the more that we can do around observing what they're doing and how they're doing it and how we might support and then nudge them forward, I think it is about gentle nudging rather than a direct instruction that I've seen a gap. You don't know what your four shapes. I'm going to teach you triangle this week. That kind of thing is not helpful to the learning process of that child.

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Colin

So let's say that you observe a four year old or a three year to four year old and they're regularly playing, and every time they do it, they take the toy cars and the line them up like bumper to bumper, in a huge, big long line of cars. What sorts of observations or reflections might you make on a child that's doing that?

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Gaynor

I mean, the number one that is one observation of one activity, but I appreciate you saying they're coming back to it all the time. So we talk and Stella has been fabulous in terms of training myself and educators in Wales on schemas. So children have biological drives to do such things as positioning. But underneath that positioning schema, there are mathematical concepts the child is driven to do.

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Gaynor

So they'll be learning about 1 to 1 correspondence. So they might be counting in their head, they might be seen how long they can go. Is this, am I doing this longer this time than yesterday? But also you'd want to see whether they do the same kind of thing in other areas of provision. And if they are, then how are you supporting them to really feed that schema?

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Gaynor

Stella, would you want to add anything to that? Because you are much more knowledgeable on that!

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Stella

Oh no. I think you're very knowledgeable yourself too. Okay. Now I think I would add to what you're saying is I would want to observe them in other areas because I think you know the story behind that. Froebel talks quite a lot about the inner life of the child and whilst as an adult, it's really easy to assume all a child just lining up cars bumper to bumper, they're just doing, you know, they're lining and maybe it's a schema, but actually it could be a scenario of a traffic jam or a road trip they went on or something.

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Stella

They have experience from their own experience and that will be represented in lots of different ways. So I would want to be looking out for those different representations. But I think it's about adults ultimately understanding what they see. I, I often say everything children do, they do for a reason. Our role, whether we're parents or whether we are observers and educators, our role is to work out whatever.

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Stella

The question is, children are trying to find the answer to. And I think Froebel had the foresight to see that. He really encourages us as adults to look for children's good intentions. And quite often we don't look for their good intentions. We see what they've done and all we see is the behaviour. We have no idea about the processes or the thought processes that are going on behind their actions.

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Stella

Observations provide us with a path to begin to get to know children better. In fact, it provides us with a path that we can get to know children really really well. That influences the way we teach and that influences, I think, our relationship with children. I think observations give us insight into children's interests, their abilities, their strength, their knowledge and all that they can do.

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Stella

And as Gaynor said, it's only when children have opportunities where they can make decisions, where they can make choices, where they feel in control, they can repeat, they can practice newly acquired skills, they can select, stimulating and engaging activities. It's only when they're in that kind of environment is it possible to truly assess where children are at.

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Colin

We know that the observations and the assessments they need to be recorded. So that scenario that I gave you and I know that there would be much more work rather than just one situation, but something like that. How might you go about recording that and then what sorts of things would you be saying to a parent?

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Gaynor

So I think that's a really good question, Colin, and I think there's not one answer to it. So in terms of recording, you might mentally record it and have a conversation with a colleague about have you seen similar behaviours and what did you think about that? You might record it on a Post-it because it might not be significant.

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Gaynor

I think we have to also in terms of recording sometimes we record for recordings sake. And when we look at it afterwards, we go, So what did that tell me? Absolutely nothing. So we've got to be really careful about how we record. We might choose to do a long observation where we describe that scenario, but also in the describing, we also try to interpret because you can never know what their intention was with that scenario.

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Gaynor

You can record, video record, on an iPad or a phone. I always caution against too much recording that way. I feel like it's an inhibitor to building up relationships and also you might stop the play. Or alternatively, children then perform for the camera or they don't feel validated if they haven't had a photograph or a video taken of them.

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Gaynor

So I think there's a real strong significant balance that we have to come to there about, you know, the use of our recording implements, the video ones in particular. So in answer to your question, I couldn't give you one answer and people will find that really frustrating because sometimes they want one answer. When you're talking about children and the progress they're making, the most important thing for that parent to know is that, you know, that that child really well and actually you like them and you can pick out significant characteristics of the child that says that you know them really well as well, but also that you know how you're going to take

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Gaynor

them forward with with their learning. And and we have tried really hard to talk about having narratives, whether written or conversational, rather than boxing things into - now I'm talking to you about their wellbeing now I'm talking to you about their communication skills because that doesn't help in terms of that holistic picture of the child and where you think they are currently and where they might go next and it is a where they might go next.

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Colin

And Dr. Stella Louis, there's a wonderful quote in one of the papers that you produced, 'nothing gets under the parents' skin more quickly and more permanently than the illumination of his or her own child's behaviour.' I think that's that's so true, isn't it?

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Stella

It's not my quote. It might be from one of my books, but that's from Chris Athey. Again, I'm going to add to what Gaynor has just said. Parents want to know that, you know their child. They don't just want a generic overview of child development. They want to know that their child, the child they know at home is the same child.

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Stella

They can identify what you're talking about. But in relation to the question that you asked initially, I would want to know how this child is exploring this schema at home. Did the parents know anything about what it might connect to? You know, are they traveling in the car a lot? What you What does he talk about in his drawings?

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Stella

What the books. I would want to link it to more than just one thing. You know, what sorts of places are they going to? So there isn't one answer. And I think for us to think there's one answer, that's our biggest mistake. And that's what's amazing about children's experiences, their experiences are similar, but they're different. And because they're different, that's the detail we have to tune in to that.

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Stella

That's significant learning. I once wrote an article about observations. I was quite clear that I felt that practitioners didn't need to do more than six observations a year and they would need to do six really detailed observations that really captured significant learning. Not that little Johnny can stand up, turn around and touch the ground, but like, you know, little Johnny, when he's exploring, mixing water and soil and all that's happening and him trying to capture... anything that's significant, I will have lots of observations of Little Johnny over a period which would give me significant information to structure my learning environment to support Johnny, but also allow him to practice all his newly acquired skills because

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Stella

only once he's done that really got them out of his system in loads of different ways. Is he kind of ready to move on to the next thing.

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Colin

I just want to pick up - Gaynor mentioned how the observations are recorded and you mentioned the technology and it's probably interesting just to explore that a little bit

because I guess that's the last 15, 20 years that's come into all our lives. Yeah, and there is a convenience aspect. I heard what you said, Gaynor, about don't overdo it because people start performing for the camera... overall, is it a force for good or bad?

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Colin

Are there some centres that try and avoid it?

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Gaynor

I would say it's like anything that you use, isn't it? It's how you use it to its best effect. So where I see video recordings in particular being used well is where the camera's set up unobtrusively and they're capturing children's play. That then is taken into a staff meeting later on in the day where the adults can unpick the learning and everybody will see different things in that video, which is powerful.

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Gaynor

So that then becomes staff training really. And also, you know, if we're talking about children's progress, then really we've got to be on the same page about what we're seeing. So what I might decide is progress. You might not. So we can have a conversation around why I do and you don't. So I think, yes, embrace that.

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Gaynor

Embrace it. But what I would say is that it shouldn't be a barrier. And we've written this into our assessment document. It shouldn't be a barrier to interactions. So you can make it an observational assessment just when you're interacting because we're adults and we can multitask. So when we're engaging with children in a play situation and we might be talking with them, there might be some serve and return going on, but we're making moment by moment decisions about what to say, how to say it, when to say it.

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Gaynor

So I know I've gone off a little bit in terms of the digital aspect. I think that there is power in it, but we must use it carefully. And if we do notice some of those things happening, I think again, I would come back if I was in a setting, I would come in and talk about is this influencing the play in the way in which we want it to?

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Colin

So again, Gaynor you mentioned this idea of maybe three or four educators observing the same experience and them then discussing it. Is that important to try and make sure that I'm not bringing my own prejudices or maybe even judging the play, and what I'm seeing in front of me... is that what this is all about?

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Gaynor

It's partly about that, but it's also about, you know, it depends on the educators level of experience, how confident they are. So some of that is purely about we're calling it professional dialogue. So it's learning together. And in those situations they've got to be very trusted relationships, respectful relationships. We are not pointing fingers at each other.

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Gaynor

So that's not right.

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Gaynor

No one is judging or being judged. I've been fortunate to be on the Froebel Trust training this year, and that whole notion of bringing a group of educators together to expose ourselves to what unconscious biases we may have, but also to expose ourselves to things that we don't know and we're afraid to say we don't know. So it comes back to trusting relationships, relationships matters, and that whole aspect of let's all be together, learning together.

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Gaynor

So when we then plan or whatever we're going to do in the environment tomorrow, or the experiences that we're going to plan, we all know why we've done it. Because sometimes what might happen in some settings is some people might get different jobs to do, so they know why it's there, but the other the other people in the room might not, you know?

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Gaynor

So we're working as a collective.

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Colin

Gaynor, you're in Wales? I'm in Scotland, Stella's in England. How are the nations different in terms of observation and assessment?

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Stella

I can't speak for England in any great shape or form, but in terms of Wales, we have a new curriculum coming in - Curriculum For Wales, there's much more of an emphasis on children's progress over time, 3 to 16 continuum. I wouldn't say we're there everywhere in terms of observational assessments, it is a new thing. So where we are now in Wales and and I feel like we're more aligned to what's happening in Scotland is that particularly in the early years, we are looking at a child centred pedagogy with adults who are observing and noticing and changing their pedagogies to suit the children rather than trying to fit the children into topics and themes and

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Gaynor

projects that the adults have chosen and, you know, the assessments that they think are important. So, you know, this morning we've had a conversation about why is it so important to you that you would write it down, that children at three know the four shapes, they know the seven colors, they can name them. And, you know, children were being withdrawn to find out that sort of information.

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Gaynor

So you're dragging them away from their play, their exploration, where they're really into deep level learning to say, you know, do you know what this color is? What color is this or what shape is this? They're going to know those things later on. Why have we put you know, why have we put importance on those items of knowledge at three when we know they're going to get it, that they might have at two, or four or five or six, it's not going to make a big difference to their learning.

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Gaynor

The relationships and the experiences that on offer will make a difference to how they learn, particularly in their disposition for learning.

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Colin

So you were very diplomatic when you said, I can't speak, I can't speak for England. Well, I've certainly heard the Scottish Government have said things that I've had about England. Stella, has England got it wrong?

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Stella

I think the honest answer to that is yes, England has got it wrong. I think play has taken a back seat. We all know that children learn through play and I think the focus is too much on outcome. There were a group of early years providers and educators that were so upset with the last revision of the Early Years Foundation stage that this whole coalition came together to form what is now known as Birth To Five Matters, and that is curriculum guidance that we felt reflected all our beliefs and our values.

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Stella

And I have never in all of my life felt I needed to stand up for something as much as I felt I needed to stand up for the Early Years Foundation stage. I would say having worked in Scotland, Wales and in England, I think Scotland has a wonderful, The Curriculum for Excellence is a wonderful document because it values practitioner training, it values research and it values knowledge.

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Stella

And I think the Froebelian threads are filtered through that document. And again, I'm going to say exactly the same for the Welsh document. I think practitioners, I urge them in England to go with what they know about children. Don't just look at children through this, this very narrow lens that devalues play. But what it also does is it devalues practitioner knowledge.

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Stella

And there's a point I want to make. Quite recently I was doing some training on observation, observing children's learning, and I shared with a practitioner an example of an observation where this practitioner Roz had done six observations of this little lad over a period of a year after she had done these observations, and she's got some analysis about what she knows.

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Stella

And this educator said to me, Where does she get this from? And I was just stunned - she got that analysis from her relationship, her interaction, her learning environment and her knowledge of the child. And I think some times the consequence of when curriculums are played with and when we're focused so much on outcomes, not only do we make things difficult for children, but we devalue our educators to the point that they don't know what they do know and what is part of their everyday bread and butter and that's sad.

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Colin

So there'll be people listening to this who are Froebelian educators in England and have to comply with Ofsted inspections. How do they do what they have to do while staying true to their Froebelian principles?

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Stella

I think it's possible to use the Froebelian principles to help you articulate your practice. And that's how many Froebelians have navigated their way through Ofsted inspections. Because, you know, when you look at the Froebelian principles and you look at the principles that underpin Curriculum For Excellence, the the Welsh curriculum and the English curriculum, these principles they kind of interweave.

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Stella

And because the Froebelian approach is based on those same principles, it's difficult to argue if you're able to articulate why you've done something, what you're anticipating to come from it. And I think it's when practitioners can't say why they've done what they've done, that's when they get into difficulty. The minute you are able to say, I'm doing this because of, you know, this child has an interest in gravity, then it's less difficult.

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Colin

Gaynor, we've spoken about that, this importance of observation, I which I'm guessing is a skill that has to be practiced. Maybe there needs to be training. What is what what is good observation look like What what's the educator doing?

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Gaynor

Mostly thinking. Again, Stella's got a quote. It's not her quote. Externally passive and internally active so that, you know, you might walk into the room and it might look like the educator is sitting there and not doing very much. She might actually be engaging with the child. But actually, as I said earlier on, there's a lot of thought going into what am I seeing?

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Gaynor

Is it significant? Have I seen it before? Is there a way I can support that learning or extend it somehow, some way? So an observation is something that might not look like very much at all. For someone who doesn't know how important observations are.

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Stella

I think observations for me involve three things. I think the first thing is having a well-organized room both inside and outside that supports children's development and learning. I think the second thing that children are offered meaningful experiences that are socially and culturally appropriate and stimulating and engaging. And I think the third thing links to, Gaynor's point that the adults working with them need to be able to pay quite close attention to what they're doing in order to gain understanding about their developing capabilities and become attuned with them.

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Stella

I think that's what observation is about. It's not just about watching, it's about being externally, externally passive, internally active, thinking about what you're seeing, asking yourself about the links. What is it the child is doing? What is it they're trying to find the answers to? How can you or the environment support that child? So, yes, on one hand you're watching, but actually there's a whole heap of stuff going on in your head.

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Colin

How can practitioners get better at observation or if there's an early years setting that wants to maybe change the way that they assess, what should they do? What would be a good next step for them?

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Stella

I think I would say rather than sort of, you know, you'll get people that will kind of observe particular and specific areas of learning. And as you said some time ago, learning isn't compartmentalized. You know, everything absolutely links. And children will learn about

language and science and numeracy in the water tray or in the home corner, depending on what resources they have available and how much guidance they get from their knowledgeable educator.

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Stella

But I think we need to make sure that if we're going to observe children, we observe all sorts of things about them. So we get this whole picture, so we observe what materials they play with, what they do with the materials. If they encounter problems, how do they deal with them, how do they solve the problems? We need to observe what they're interested in.

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Stella

We need to have knowledge of what they like, what their choices are, you know, whether they want to play on their own or whether they want to play with others, what they choose, the kind of questions that they ask, whether they use their body language or actual language to describe events and tell you stories, whether you know, whether they share experiences with you and how they symbolically represent their experiences - a song, a dance, a model, block play, you know, So you can already see I haven't just said one thing.

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Stella

If I'm looking at the maths, I'm quite narrow. That's all I'm looking at. If I'm looking at how they're doing, what they do and what their interests are, I'm going to I'm going to kind of get much more information that will tell me about what they're wanting to express externally.

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Gaynor

Today, I've been asked that question outside of this podcast, and what I actually said to the educators was for next week, don't have any planning. Just observe, make notes for yourself, mental or or written or the recording. Stella's just described what happens in a really good early years setting. So you need to look at what's happening in your setting.

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Gaynor

What are the children doing? And if they are flitting from one place to another and it seems aimless, then there is probably something wrong with the experiences on offer or of the way in which your room is set out. There's loads of things you can find out from observing your environment and how the children interact with it.

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Gaynor

That will give you the first step to get better.

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Colin

One thing I was going to maybe just go a little bit deeper on was the the feeding back to parents and how often that might be done. So when I think of my kids, when they were that age, I had my two boys and you get the kind of daily catch up, that kind of handover, you know, this is what they did today to kind of informal chat, but it was always well done.

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Colin

And then I think like maybe once or twice a year, maybe at Christmas and then again at the summer, we would get like a memory stick and it would have tons of photos on it and video clips and then like notes that had been taken sort of summarising where they were at. I found it quite a lot to digest all at once.

00:32:26:09 - 00:32:50:13

Gaynor

As you were talking, I was thinking, Oh wow, you'd be flicking through those quite quickly. When you do because there's no context for you. And I think so. So again, I can talk about the, the context in Wales and our assessments arrangements that we're suggesting that settings use coming forward is that we have a period of six weeks when the children first start education.

00:32:50:15 - 00:33:11:20

Gaynor

So that's a period for them to settle in. And then after that, those first six weeks, we would expect then to have a conversation with their parents. It can be written down, it should be written down actually in a summary form. And today we've been looking at the best way to present that to parents. And lots of settings now are setting them out as letters.

00:33:11:22 - 00:33:39:06

Speaker 3

So it's a letter either to the child or to the parent. So it might say, Dear Shiobhan, you know, it's lovely to see how you settled into nursery and you've made friends with so and so. And I know that you like to play over in the block, play with Tom and Harry and whatever it is. So you, you build a picture of those six weeks and then you might say and, and at the end, because there's always going to be kind of a I don't like say, next steps, you know, where are we going to go next?

00:33:39:08 - 00:33:57:19

Gaynor

So there's a little section then that we'll say. And next we're going to be working on this. And we've tried really hard to not say to the parents, 'and you need to do' at home because actually what we want them to do at home is love their children and play with their children and enjoy them and not put pressure on them, particularly in the early stages.

00:33:57:21 - 00:34:18:13

Gaynor

And then they can, if they want to do another progress update in the spring term. But certainly on transition when they're leaving their early years provider or the nursery class moving into reception, you would want to tell parents about that whole journey. But again, I wouldn't be giving you a thousand photographs. It's like a pen portraits of your child.

00:34:18:19 - 00:34:41:05

Gaynor

You want to be able to see your child and know that those adults really know the crux, the little bits that you know about your boy that you want them to know as well and to appreciate as well. So that's kind of what we're hoping will happen. I have to say at the minute, there is still quite a bit of going for finite bits of information that really you probably wouldn't want to know whether they could use their scissors properly in September and now they can in August.

00:34:45:00 - 00:34:51:19

Colin

It's yeah, you mentioned the letter, which is interesting because it's very it's very personal and I suppose.

00:34:52:13 - 00:34:56:05

Speaker 1

That's something Froebel talked about is that it's that relationship.

00:34:56:07 - 00:35:25:06

Gaynor

Yeah. Yeah. I think that the settings that have taken on that's that style of reporting to the parents have had fabulous feedback from the parents. Some tearful you can imagine, for joy, not through sorrow, but yeah, just because you've encapsulated their precious child in such a way that they know that their child has been in good hands, they've been cared for and nurtured.

00:35:25:08 - 00:35:46:22

Colin

I know that there's many people listening in settings where there are sometimes quite a few children with additional support needs. And I'm just wondering, does that have any impact on how observation and assessment is carried out? Does it need to change when you're looking after these children or does the same approach work for everybody?

00:35:46:24 - 00:36:22:03

Gaynor

I would say the same approach should work for everybody. And particularly if we start from the point of where meeting children, where they're at, obviously, it depends on the the complexity of the needs. But then I would expect the educators to know very clearly what they're observing and how best to support them. But I do know that I've been into one or two special needs schools and and I have talked to them about the fact that actually these children need the same as all children, that's first hand authentic experiences.

00:36:22:05 - 00:36:32:01

Gaynor

So let's get them outside more often, that kind of thing, you know. So they're really they're learning that they're having it is as authentic as their capacities enable them to.

00:36:32:05 - 00:36:58:17

Stella

I think what I really like about the Froebel approach, Froebel thinks about individual children, whether they have additional learning needs or whether they don't. And what he really encourages us to be aware of the importance of the different developmental stages that, you know, each child will go through. And he's clear that each stage needs to be lived fully and thoroughly without being rushed.

00:36:53:01 - 00:37:26:14

Stella

And for some children with special needs that they want in that kind of sensory integration where they're just gathering and, you know, they're just gathering that sensory information, they're interpreting and they're re-interpreted. But again, it's that knowledge of your children. But regardless of what stage it is your children are, all educators need to be that stage and draw from their firsthand experiences as the biggest source from which we teach and obviously observe.

00:37:26:16 - 00:37:50:02

Colin

Final question from me. You know, the more I listen to you both and the more I read about this, the more that the word professional comes up quite a lot. And it kind of leaves me thinking that these educators that you and Froebel are talking about, they are professionals. Do you think the local authorities and management always regard them as professionals?

00:37:50:02 - 00:37:57:20

Colin

And do they indeed regard themselves as professionals, or do you think that there's some that maybe don't see it that way?

00:37:57:22 - 00:38:35:24

Gaynor

So I think that's a really difficult question. Colin, thank you for that. And I think what again, I can only talk and this is not for Wales, this is for the consortia that I work in, and we work with professionals, educators who are working in non-maintained settings. We've done a real a big job of demonstrating to them their professionalism and and what they know and how important they are to children's lifelong experiences and where they can go and they're definitely not remunerated appropriately for the job they do.

00:38:36:01 - 00:38:55:11

Gaynor

You know, I've just talked about..you're handing your child over to educators. They could get just as much money working in a shop. What they do is fantastic. I would say where where I work. And we do appreciate them and we show we appreciate them. I can't say there it is everywhere. I would hope it is.

00:38:55:13 - 00:39:14:00

Colin

Because I mean, Stella, I would I would say that Froebel and the Froebel Trust, you have professionalized early years education to a world that doesn't value it that way, doesn't, doesn't, doesn't regard it as a profession, certainly doesn't pay them that way.

00:39:14:02 - 00:39:55:00

Stella

I think I think when we go, listen, I started off my life as an NDP nursery nurse. I had two jobs, I remember and I had two jobs because that was the only way I could kind of make ends meet. I think I'm really proud to be part of an organization that values play and values knowledgeable practitioners. I think the practitioners do feel professional when they are respected as autonomous learners, when they are given training that they really need the links to the work that they're doing rather than training that just ticks the box to say that we've done that.

00:39:55:01 - 00:40:20:03

Stella

It doesn't matter how it's implemented or how it has or has not an impact on our practice. I think there are lots of things at play trying to de-professionalize educators by telling them what to think, telling them what to observe, telling them what to look for. And actually that's not how children learn. They learn in a holistic way and play co-ordinates all learning.

00:40:20:07 - 00:40:39:22

Stella

And any curriculum that doesn't put play at the heart, centre, middle, top doesn't understand children and has no right to assess children because it's not assessing children based on how we know they learn.

00:40:39:24 - 00:41:07:06

Colin

Well, thank you very much to my guests, Dr. Stella Louis and Gaynor Brimble. You can find out more about them and their work in the podcast description. This is the last episode in the current series of the Froebel Trust podcast. Remember you can visit the Froebel dot org dot UK website to download free resources for educators and for more information about training and courses available for early years settings and please make sure to subscribe to the podcast.

00:41:07:08 - 00:41:12:23

Colin

You'll be the first to know when new episodes are released later this year. Thank you very much for listening.

(ENDS)