



Froebel Trust Podcast

Transcript : Episode 21

July 2026

[00:00:08] **Colin Kelly:** Hello, I'm Colin Kelly. we've now published 20 episodes of the Froebel Trust podcast, and we're taking the opportunity to look back at what all our guests throughout the series so far have taught us about the Froebelian approach and what it can offer early childhood educators, parents, and anyone working with young children.

[00:00:34] **Colin Kelly:** We're going to be reflecting on the difference practicing a Froebelian approach [00:00:38] can make to children in the here and now, and how starting where the child is, focusing on their interests, abilities, and needs right now, can best prepare them for the future. Throughout the podcast so far, we've spoken with experts across early years education and covered a lot, so this episode, and others to follow, will be a summary of what insights have been shared about certain topics.

[00:01:03] **Colin Kelly:** They're designed to be an introduction to the topic, and if you want to know more about what a [00:01:08] particular guest says, I'd recommend going back through our catalog of episodes and listening in full. in this episode, we're looking at communication and forming relationships. Froebel recognized that children thrive when they are emotionally secure and in close relationships with others, educators, families, and carers.

[00:01:29] **Colin Kelly:** The Froebelian approach is relational. He viewed children as holistic beings who learn through their connections with people. Now, it's [00:01:38] important to mention that Froebel also spoke about relationships in the sense of children's relationships with nature and the world around them. In this episode, we're going to be focusing on relationships between people, and specifically between children and adults.

[00:01:54] **Colin Kelly:** let's dive right in with those first relationships and find out how early educators can start helping children learn about communication

and relationships. With more under twos now in early years settings, let's [00:02:08] hear from Dr. Julia Manning-Morton, author, trainer, and lecturer in early childhood, and Dr.

[00:02:14] **Colin Kelly:** Caroline Gard, researcher and senior lecturer in early childhood education and author of the Froebel Trust pamphlet, Thinking About Babies, which is free to download. Here are some clips of what they had to say about relationships and communication with babies in episode 11, Time to Focus on Babies in Early Years Settings.

[00:02:36] **Dr Julia Manning-Morton:** When a [00:02:38] child has that one-to-one nurturing time with a caring adult It fills them up with the self-confidence that then enables them to go out into the playroom and be with the other children. And these times are the key times for their learning.

[00:02:59] **Dr Caroline Guard:** I think one of the key things that we go back to what Froebel writes a- about children and their first relationship with their family, he [00:03:08] talks very much about the parents being the sun that draws the baby out into the social world.

[00:03:13] **Dr Caroline Guard:** In my writing, I've talked about the fact that as educators, we have a responsibility to be that sun, to bring the child out into the climate of the nursery, however that climate may be. and it's very important, as Julie has highlighted, to have the time through caregiving routines, to establish that connection with children, the relationships which are so fundamental.

[00:03:34] **Dr Caroline Guard:** the research that I've done highlighted very much that [00:03:38] very often it's the, nappy changing time is that one-on-one, and perhaps the only one-on-one time that the baby might get and receive across the day. Interestingly, at no point during my six months in each of the settings I was working in did any of the babies cry during a nappy change, and I think that says an awful lot about h- their voice and how they find those times, that they are positive experiences for those children.

[00:04:02] **Dr Caroline Guard:** They are times where they feel connected, and they are forming and establishing a history, a [00:04:08] relationship with the educators who are caring for them, which is the roots and the grounding for them to then form relationships with the other people, the other babies in the room that they s- socialize with.

[00:04:19] **Colin Kelly:** So let's build on that notion of educator's responsibility to be that sun, how it helps children, and how realistic it is in early years

settings today. Here's what Dr. Peter Elfer, Honorary Research Fellow and author of Talking with Feeling in the Early Years, shared in [00:04:38] episode seven of the podcast on nurturing relationships and the key person role.

[00:04:43] **Colin Kelly:** He explains how, in a Froebelian approach, a child who feels known, understood, and responded to develops the self-confidence required to explore new environments, and the key person role is central to this.

[00:04:57] **Dr Peter Elfer:** I think it's more vital than ever. We absolutely must afford it, and yet there are huge obstacles.

[00:05:06] **Dr Peter Elfer:** And one of the things that was so [00:05:08] brilliant about Froebel was that he, he really understood this. We're going back, 150 years. he's a historical figure, but his foresight, his understanding was incredible, and he understood in a really deep-down way that for every child, every human being, what really matters is to feel known by somebody, understood, and responded to.

[00:05:35] **Dr Peter Elfer:** And if you don't have that, and we all [00:05:38] need it, you don't have anything. It's almost as important for life as food and water to feel attended to. Froebel had a tragic childhood. His mother died, so I wrote out a quote from him. But he said, "Soon after my birth, my mother's health began to fail, and after nursing me nine months, she died.

[00:06:00] **Dr Peter Elfer:** This loss, a hard blow to me, influenced the whole environment and development of my being. I consider that my mother's death [00:06:08] decided more or less the external circumstances of my whole life." Now, that's an incredible experience for him to write about in his autobiography as an adult, and it's clear that relationship with his mother was really fundamental to his whole life.

[00:06:26] **Dr Peter Elfer:** Now, I'm not saying when children go to nursery that because they're leaving their family, their family is somehow dying. But for a baby or a very young child, it can feel like that, [00:06:38] and then to have the attention of a key person is really enormously important. So to answer your question, can we still afford it, we've got to afford it.

[00:06:47] **Dr Peter Elfer:** We've got to find a way of affording it. It's fundamentally Froebelian. It's absolutely core.

[00:06:53] **Colin Kelly:** And what about how educators feel? Does this make a difference to their relationships with children and what it teaches those children

about communication? Can they sense if an educator doesn't feel connected to them?

[00:07:07] **Colin Kelly:** in this episode, [00:07:08] we also heard from Dr. Robyn Dolby, a psychologist and researcher based in Australia. Robyn has been working in the field of infant mental health and supporting educators in early years settings for over 40 years.

[00:07:21] **Dr Robyn Dolby:** Children can feel how you're feeling, and one of the things that we're so interested in is in building connections with children, I think educators think that They think about the connections that they can [00:07:38] build in peaceful moments, like when the children are settled and ready for play.

[00:07:43] **Dr Robyn Dolby:** But the whole basis of our work is about how to stay close and build connections around painful feelings. because if you're too frightened as an adult to connect with a child around a painful feeling, then the child can't connect with you because they can't feel, enough of you, and they can't [00:08:08] feel understood by you.

[00:08:09] **Dr Robyn Dolby:** So I would see that as, critical work. And also, it's often an area where if you work on it together, we like to work with everyone in a service, you build strength in each other. And, a doubt that you might have that maybe I'm not as good as Mary is in comforting a child doesn't matter anymore because you're all looking and working on this together.

[00:08:37] **Dr Robyn Dolby:** So we [00:08:38] find that, working together, building this secure base culture around the idea of making connections around painful moments, the ones that we focus on are at the start of the day when the children are saying goodbye to their mom and dad. And then when the parents leave, the young children still have to work out how they get into peer play, and that's also a stressful time.

[00:09:04] **Dr Robyn Dolby:** So we look at that focus, and we often [00:09:08] find if we really are with the educators in that part of the day- then the rest of the day goes well. And the children start to use the educators in the way that attachment theory would talk about as a secure base so that they know that they can come back to you if something goes wrong.

[00:09:27] **Colin Kelly:** And Holli Williams, who was also a guest presenter on episode seven alongside Peter and Robin, also spoke about this in relation to supporting them for the future. Holli is a Froebel [00:09:38] Trust traveling

tutor and head of schools at Linden Tree Nursery Schools, a group of Fröbelian nursery schools in South London.

[00:09:46] **Holli Williams:** I really hope that the, there's more of an emphasis on the relationships with young children because that's what quells young children's an- anxiety. That's what supports them to go on to school and the rest of their lives. it's not just about school readiness. We're supporting these children for the rest of their lives, giving them the tools to be able to, deal with conflict, to make positive relationships.[00:10:08]

[00:10:08] **Colin Kelly:** In episode 19, Dr. Karen Vincent expands on the importance of relationships for supporting children having big emotions as they grow older. She explains how when children feel emotionally held by an educator, they are in the right frame of mind to learn and can better navigate the social whirlpool of a busy classroom.

[00:10:29] **Colin Kelly:** Through positive relationships with adults, children learn how to navigate conflict and form their own positive connections with peers. [00:10:38] Feeling cared for and considered helps keep a child in a safe place emotionally, which is the right frame of mind for learning and building resilience. Karen Vincent spoke about this in episode 19.

[00:10:50] **Colin Kelly:** When I look at coverage in the media about education, and, I hope it's not too much of an issue in the early years, but it might be, and it's certainly an issue in primary and secondary

[00:11:00] **Colin Kelly:** schools, is educators saying that they are facing violence. Can the Fröbelian approach help with that, [00:11:08] Karen? Or is that asking too much of it?

[00:11:09] **Colin Kelly:** I

[00:11:10] **Karen Vincent:** think it's very socially and emotionally based. It's very much about that young child's wellbeing And I think, if you can enable that child to feel safe, cared for, thought about, considered, I think, that, that will go so far to enabling them to be in the right frame of mind to be learning.

[00:11:35] **Dr Karen Vincent:** Yes, there, there can be [00:11:38] violence, verbal violence, physical violence. Children come from so many backgrounds, We have lots of children who have experienced violence in their own domestic situations or in their countries, different countries if they've come to live here with their families.

[00:11:54] **Dr Karen Vincent:** But I think Froebel offers a way of giving them, space to develop at their own pace. It's not about adults deciding what that child needs, it's about the child [00:12:08] communicating that through their behavior, and through their actions. and Froebelian educators are very adept at interpretation.

[00:12:18] **Dr Karen Vincent:** They're full of respect, I think, for the child, which enables that child to develop in whichever way they need. So I do... Yes, I do think, to some extent, it can help to address some of those concerns because it keeps the child in a safe place

[00:12:36] **Colin Kelly:** And what about [00:12:38] relationships and role models for young children?

[00:12:40] **Colin Kelly:** In episode eight, Pete Moorhouse, a Froebel Trust traveling tutor, author, and an early years creative consultant who works with schools and educators in early years settings all over the UK, and Matt Langton, educator at Outdoor Owls, an outdoor-based early years setting in South London, speak about the role of relationships with male educators.

[00:13:02] **Colin Kelly:** Children will come into contact with different sexes, whether that be other children or teachers as [00:13:08] they go on to school. So let's hear what Pete and Matt had to say on the role gender plays in developing emotional and social skills.

[00:13:16] **Pete Moorhouse:** And I think, it's important to have positive role models. a lot of children won't have any men in their lives.

[00:13:21] **Pete Moorhouse:** I've had quite a lot of parents who've come to me in the past and said they really like it that there's men w- working within this setting because they have very little experience to having positive relationships with men in their children's lives.

[00:13:33] **Colin Kelly:** Let's bring in Matthew then. when you look at the work that you do at Outdoor [00:13:38] Owls and what's, what you do in a typical day and the other members of staff around you, I'm not asking you to justify your position here, but do you think there is anything, that is, uniquely male that you bring to the job that they wouldn't have if they didn't have you?

[00:13:52] **Matt Langton:** We've had a big shift towards, emotional competency in language and self-regulation, and I feel from personal experience from growing up, not having emotionally available men in my life has

contributed to me not expressing myself quite as [00:14:08] freely as I would. I think, it's important that there are men in the setting that are emotionally available, so specifically little boys know that it's okay to feel and to express themselves and to have negative emotions and show their sadness and cry without it being like Man up or get on with it, that sort of thing.

[00:14:28] **Matt Langton:** Men play in a different way to women as well. It's a lot more rough and tumble. It's a lot more physical. Rough and tumble play with young boys is a good way for them to learn empathy through their [00:14:38] actions. Having that space with me and the other men that I work with to be able to engage in that without quite as much, hesitation around the rough and tumble play I think is really important as well.

[00:14:48] **Matt Langton:** If you look at male suicide rates in not just this country, but across the world, a lot of it is because they're not talking about things. In their most formative years, it's really important to set that standard for them where it is acceptable for you to feel bad, and it's acceptable for you to express what you're feeling as well and not hold it in and it [00:15:08] come out in terms of, as you say, aggression or something like that.

[00:15:10] **Matt Langton:** I think it is just, it is quite a big reflection on my experiences that I want to give the children in my care as much of what I felt like I should have had when growing up so that then when they are older, they're not gonna be hiding things and not talking about things and being ill, essentially.

[00:15:30] **Colin Kelly:** Episode 18 was all about connections and relationships with parents and families Here, Holli Williams and Rachana [00:15:38] Joshi, co-authors of the Froebel Trust pamphlet, Connecting with Parents, Families, and Communities: A Starting Point, explain how these support educators' observations of children and enable them to better support children.

[00:15:53] **Colin Kelly:** But how do you go about this?

[00:15:55] **Colin Kelly:** And so when you're getting to know these families,

[00:15:57] **Colin Kelly:** I guess they might get shown around, there might be a visit, there might be a conversation. You get that, oh, it's mommy and mama or th- they're attached to this little toy rabbit called, Fluffles or what- or whatever.[00:16:08]

[00:16:08] **Colin Kelly:** Does that get written down and then shared among the staff? Like how... or is it just in somebody's heads? Like, how much time does it take?

[00:16:16] **Holli Williams:** I think the initial stuff, we touch on some of it in the pamphlet around all about me forms, starting points, telling us all of that important fundamental stuff.

[00:16:24] **Holli Williams:** Who is in your family? Who is in your house? Do you have any pets? have you relocated here? are there any other special people we should know about? Is there a Fluffles that we need to make sure is always at sleep time, always goes in the bag at the end of the day? Things like that, yes, are all [00:16:38] written down.

[00:16:38] **Holli Williams:** we use digital online, learning journals, which information is all collated and then shared amongst the team. But you generally will have a key person. Settings will use a key person approach. some settings will assign a key person beforehand, and then that's that key person's responsibility to make sure they are developing those relationships, or they will wait and see if a child gravitates towards a particular person, develops those relationships more naturally, and then they will become, become their key person.

[00:17:04] **Holli Williams:** And that is the person that families are pointed at, if you [00:17:08] like, to know their children specifically. It's the time that you take, but you have to want to. You have to have that desire to develop those relationships with the families and the children that you come in because otherwise, what's the point?

[00:17:21] **Holli Williams:** we're a very caring profession, and these children genuinely matter to us. That's where it really comes from, that desire to form that connection.

[00:17:29] **Colin Kelly:** so you said you have to want to. Now, you're both working in busy settings. Is the time there then for those that [00:17:38] want it? Or do you think there might be people listening to this who would think, that sounds great.

[00:17:42] **Colin Kelly:** I'd love to take that time, but I'm not given that time"?

[00:17:45] **Rachna Joshi:** I just don't think you can do your job as an educator if you don't spend the time to know the children, because that's where you're

teaching from. You observe the children, you get to know them, you interact with them, and that's that supporting and ex- and extending.

[00:17:59] **Rachna Joshi:** You have to know the children really well to be able to effectively teach

[00:18:06] **Holli Williams:** Yeah, 100% agree. [00:18:08] And you have to have the support processes in place within- Yeah ... your setting to make that happen. and it's the culture that you create and the team that you have and where we are. some of our children are only in two days a week, some of our children are in five days a week.

[00:18:20] **Holli Williams:** So it's like, how much time are you making sure you're spending with those children who are only in two days a week? and do you know them as well? And if you don't, how can you get to know them more? And you really need to have that support processes a- around, and the, management team around who also make sure that is a key part of the [00:18:38] day-to-day.

[00:18:38] **Colin Kelly:** there you have it, a summary of the abundance of information shared throughout the podcast series so far on the importance of relationships in a child's life, and how a Froebelian approach can support children with developing meaningful relationships and communication skills. If you've enjoyed listening today and would like to hear more from any of the guests we've highlighted in this episode, you can go back and listen to any of the episodes on the Froebel Trust website.

[00:19:07] **Colin Kelly:** There's [00:19:08] also a video linked in the podcast description which shows a Froebelian approach to developing relationships and communicating in action.