

Froebel Trust Podcast 23 EDI Final

[00:00:08] **Colin Kelly:** Hello, I'm Colin Kelly, and in this episode of the Froebel Trust podcast, we're exploring equality, diversity, and inclusion. How can a Froebelian approach help to ensure that educators practice inclusion, taking into account different backgrounds, needs, cultures, and family structures? How might this look in baby rooms, [00:00:38] nursery and preschool settings, as well as primary school?

[00:00:42] **Colin Kelly:** This episode is released to coincide with the launch of Rachna Joshi's book, *Froebel and Social Justice*. This is the first in a series of *Froebel in Practice* books in partnership with Bloomsbury Publishers and the Froebel Trust. Well, I'm delighted that Rachna joins me on this podcast to discuss her book and this very important and relevant issue.

[00:01:03] **Colin Kelly:** Rachna is an early childhood teacher, action researcher, and consultant. She [00:01:08] works with under threes, nursery, and reception children in classroom settings. Rachna is joined on our panel by Dr. Stella Louis, director of the Froebel Trust short courses. Stella is also an early years consultant, trainer, and author working with individual early years settings, parents and carers, nursery schools, local authorities, government departments, and charities.

[00:01:32] **Colin Kelly:** And we have Professor Carole Bloch joining us. For most of her career, she's worked in South African [00:01:38] multilingual settings. She's director of the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa and extraordinary professor in language education at the University of the Western Cape. You'll find full biographies for today's guests in the podcast description, as well as links to various resources that may be useful as you apply some of what we discuss today.

[00:02:01] **Colin Kelly:** And you can also find out more by visiting the podcast page at the Froebel Trust website. That's at [00:02:08] froebel.org.uk. Now, before we begin, keep in mind that this discussion focuses on best practice for educators in early years settings and how they can use the Froebelian principles to provide the best possible environment for every young person and every family that they deal with.

[00:02:25] **Colin Kelly:** We don't discuss what to do if a family is extremely racist or biased. Our panel consider that to be an example of a safeguarding issue, which would need to be reported as such. [00:02:38] I hope you enjoy

this discussion and find it helpful. And as always, if you've any questions, comments, or feedback, we'd like to hear them.

[00:02:44] **Colin Kelly:** You can get in touch via office@froebeltrust.org.uk. Well, we'll start with a pretty huge question to begin with. Dr. Stella Louis, maybe you could kick us off. What, what does equality, diversity, and inclusion actually mean in practice, and how important is it?

[00:03:05] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think, I think what's really important, [00:03:08] first of all, Colin, is just to clarify, just to define what those three words actually mean in practice.

[00:03:16] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think for me as a Froebelian, equality doesn't mean treating everybody the same, and I think it's often misunderstood to mean that. Equality for me means treating everyone fairly, and that means equity. You give them, you give them what they [00:03:38] need. Um, inclusion for me is about valuing all the assets that they bring with them.

[00:03:45] **Dr Stella Louis:** So inclusion is a process rather than, rather than one thing. Um, and I think when I think of EDI and I think of Froebel- Froebel has this one quote that says, "Every child should be treated as an indispensable member of the human [00:04:08] race." Which means that children should be seen as whole, active members of their families.

[00:04:13] **Dr Stella Louis:** But it also means something else. I think when we think about the word indispensable, first, no child should have to earn their place by being quiet or clever or, or even having English as a second language. They belong because they exist, and I think that's, that's, that's absolutely fundamental. And I think secondly, humanity would [00:04:38] be less without them.

[00:04:39] **Dr Stella Louis:** When Froebel says you're an indispensable member, he means that you fully belong, and the approach, the Froebelian approach, will also help you to belong. That's, for me ... inclusion. Yeah.

[00:04:52] **Colin Kelly:** And Rachna, I'm keen to get your take on this as well. I'd imagine there's a lot that you'd agree with what Dr. Stella Louis is saying.

[00:04:58] **Colin Kelly:** But you're in there in inner London, teaching in the school. In terms of the day-to-day, where does equality, diversity, and inclusion fit in?

[00:05:06] **Rachna Joshi:** I guess to build on what Stella [00:05:08] said around those different terms, um, Stella talked about equality and equity, and I even think if you think about diversity, I think of what does diversity mean?

[00:05:18] **Rachna Joshi:** That means difference, and it's about how do we see and celebrate children's differences, and do we fully see children's differences? Um, and, and I think a Froebelian approach starts with finding the similarities as well. So it, I guess it's, there's [00:05:38] lots of different layers here. And I think the first thing is that I'm thinking about an example in the s- setting that I'm in.

[00:05:45] **Rachna Joshi:** Every single child comes with a part of themselves. And in a way, they all live in a certain area, so that's where they are the same. Um, they all attend a same class. That's where they are the same. But each of them have difference. Each of them are completely individual and unique in their own way. And that is diversity, and that is the [00:06:08] diversity that we have in the classroom that I, I work in.

[00:06:11] **Rachna Joshi:** The other layer on top of that is the educator and the educator's role, and what do they see? Do they see those differences? Do they celebrate those differences? And are they kind of culturally aware and have that cultural knowledge, and do they learn about different children's backgrounds and lifestyles and their culture?

[00:06:33] **Rachna Joshi:** For example, I've got a, um, Irish Traveler community in my setting. [00:06:38] Do the staff fully understand what this community- Has to face, but also what their life is like. What is their life like at home? What do they celebrate? And how do they celebrate those things? I mention in the book that the Gypsy Roma traveler community is probably one of the most marginalised communities.

[00:06:56] **Rachna Joshi:** These children are in our settings do we actually give them that, that space and time to be who they are?

[00:07:04] **Colin Kelly:** Okay, so if we stay with you for a moment, Rachna. Now, I'm interested, [00:07:08] are you suggesting that there are some people who don't celebrate diversity, who are perhaps narrow-minded, perhaps racist, or is it that they feel awkward about it and that they're not sure how to articulate what you're talking about?

[00:07:22] **Colin Kelly:** They're not sure how to get that information or to speak to people who are different from them. Maybe there's a clumsiness about it, or are you saying that that's a lame excuse?

[00:07:34] **Rachna Joshi:** I think every individual is shaped by the [00:07:38] world around them. I don't like to say that people are certain ways or not. I think that, yeah, people inform their opinions and their ideas based on their world.

[00:07:48] **Rachna Joshi:** Do people do enough to learn about other people's worlds? And do people do enough to learn about the lives of other people that they are around? Whether it be their neighbour, whether it be their colleague, whether it be the child that they work with, whether it be the family that they work with. And sometimes I think that we make [00:08:08] assumptions, and we can kinda create categories in our minds, and that's kind of examples of bias really.

[00:08:16] **Rachna Joshi:** That's where, you know, that bias kind of sets in, unconscious bias sets in, and we don't even realise that that's our way of thinking until we have something that kind of tests that or, um, disrupts that way of thinking. There are also, I think, people who are a bit more proactive in addressing that bias. I think that's really hard work [00:08:38] because it's really self-reflective, and you're kind of unlearning or unpicking things about yourself as, even as an adult or, you know, things that you've learned as a child that you have to unlearn as an adult.

[00:08:47] **Rachna Joshi:** Because I think that all humans are striving to be the best versions of themselves. I try to see, all people as good people and wanting to do the best and perhaps shaped by their world, like I said.

[00:09:01] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah. Thank you, and Carol, just to bring you in here, you know, we're talking about some quite big themes, I [00:09:08] suppose, that sometimes go right to the heart of who we are as humans.

[00:09:11] **Colin Kelly:** So from your experience, where do you think equality, diversity, and inclusion fits day to day in an early years setting?

[00:09:21] **Professor Carole Bloch:** Yeah, I mean, I think there are issues of power, and there are issues of status that are happening. Rachana talked about levels, and at a certain level in early years settings with young children who come in with their families, [00:09:38] they are part of society, and the kind of power and status issues are affecting them.

[00:09:48] **Professor Carole Bloch:** It's also actually affecting early years generally because often early years is seen as less important as, as than primary schooling. So, we have issues around thinking that some are more equal than others, basically, I think, and those issues come into [00:10:08] the early years settings sometimes in the form of language if family don't speak the same language.

[00:10:14] **Professor Carole Bloch:** I mean, Froebel talked about starting where children are and with what they can do, so he had an immediately positive, um, and not deficit, um, idea about people and young children as well. So that thing of thinking that you are more- You are better than the other, I [00:10:38] think comes into play right from at the moment that the family walks into a setting where maybe English isn't their first language, and there are attitudes about that.

[00:10:49] **Professor Carole Bloch:** Now, I'm not saying that people intend to have those attitudes or that they, they mean anybody badly, but languages do carry status and power, and English is a very high-status language globally, not only, you know, in Britain. And if [00:11:08] educators are not aware of their own position in, in society and the position of the families who are coming into them, it's hard for them to see that they are maybe not, um, valuing some children in an equitable way.

[00:11:25] **Professor Carole Bloch:** So, some children are, are maybe valued more than others.

[00:11:30] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah. And, and this is obviously an issue that lots of schools and early years settings are now aware of. It's something lots of educators are grappling [00:11:38] with or exploring, maybe trying to get better at. Now Carol, you've spent a considerable part of your life and career in South Africa.

[00:11:45] **Colin Kelly:** You talked about differences in power. How has your experience in South Africa informed your own opinions about this? What can the, the rest of us learn from what you've witnessed?

[00:11:58] **Professor Carole Bloch:** Well, one of the, the main things that I've witnessed and been part of trying to fight against is that children [00:12:08] start their educational career on very uneven terrain, and it has to do with resources.

[00:12:15] **Professor Carole Bloch:** It has to do with the environment that they're brought up in. And then when they go into early years settings, it also

has to do with the training of the educators who are, who are going to be working with them. So, my understanding, and this is a Froebelian understanding, is that all children deserve what [00:12:38] they need.

[00:12:38] **Professor Carole Bloch:** I think Stella was talking about that right in the beginning. All children deserve to have rich, enriched, nurturing, nourishing experiences, um, in an early years setting, and that is certainly not the case in South Africa. And what I have seen are very well-meaning attempts to leapfrog- Over that need to kind of put in place basic skills programs for children who are, [00:13:08] um, in less well-resourced, um, settings and who don't speak English as a first language, and it doesn't work.

[00:13:14] **Professor Carole Bloch:** All children have to have the kind of nurturing that more affluent children have and that English speakers have. You know, in South Africa, for example, we talk about mother tongue education, and when we talk about it, often what people are meaning is African language education, and English is seen as the norm.

[00:13:36] **Professor Carole Bloch:** So, it's mother tongue and English.

[00:13:38] And I often have to point out to people, actually, English is a mother tongue as well, you know? And often people don't realise that. Yeah. Because it just has such higher status. Yeah.

[00:13:50] **Colin Kelly:** So, Stella, as practitioners try to navigate this, of course there are various sources and places they can go for help.

[00:13:56] **Colin Kelly:** What does Froebel offer them? Those teachings of Froebel, the Froebelian practice, how can that help with diversity, equity, equality, and inclusion?

[00:14:07] **Dr Stella Louis:** I [00:14:08] think Froebel starts with unity and seeing the child as a whole. And, and by that I mean the child is connected to a family, a culture, a community. Inclusion isn't something that you add on.

[00:14:22] **Dr Stella Louis:** And I think I need... Yeah, that's, that's really clear from a, a Froebelian approach. And I think for me, inclusion is removing the barriers that split them from parts of themselves. That's the problem we are facing in practice. And, and for [00:14:38] me, that's a big thing is about engaging with parents in, you know, a real flow of information between home and school, helping educators build on what children know and can already do.

[00:14:54] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think the Froebelian approach in practice, things like freedom with guidance, that gives children the freedom to be who they are, and the guidance. The educator will guide in making them feel that they [00:15:08] belong. I mean, this means the room has to be really flexible, not the child. Um, that's really important.

[00:15:15] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think Froebel also sees children as an active agent, and he rejects the idea that children are seen as this blank sl- slate. He talks very much about the inner life of the child, their culture, their language, their family ways. And it's like, I'm going to build on, I think, what Carol just said. Inclusion is about building, yeah, starting with where the learner [00:15:38] is, not where we think they should be.

[00:15:40] **Dr Stella Louis:** And then you have Froebel's other strand that goes in here, which is about unity in the family. You can't include a child if you exclude their first educator. You can't talk about inclusion if you're working against their parents. Froebel wasn't about correcting children's behaviour. He was very much about nurturing them and, and guiding them.

[00:16:02] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think, so unity with the family, children as an active learner, [00:16:08] and freedom with guidance are the things that really bring around inclusion in a Froebelian practice, practice setting.

[00:16:15] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah. Thanks, Stella. And Rachna, now you've been exploring this in some detail in your new book, Froebel and Social Justice, and we'll talk in depth about that a little later in this episode of the podcast.

[00:16:27] **Colin Kelly:** But, but how did Froebel address socially unjust practices? If we go back to his time, there was a lot going on that he was railing against. Can you tell us a bit more about that? [00:16:38]

[00:16:38] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah. So he, he definitely wouldn't have used the same language that we're using today, you know, equity, equality, especially in that explicit way.

[00:16:46] **Rachna Joshi:** But I think implicitly we can see, like Stella said, his approach to education has that kind of foundation of, um, that equality of celebrating diversity with the community at the heart. Some of the things that Froebel did was that he, he wrote letters and books about education for young children and shared these ideas constantly.

[00:17:07] **Rachna Joshi:** He was [00:17:08] always trying to get that message out to families about, um, supporting families, working alongside families. Again, like Stella said, like, the room has to be flexible. His, his own ideas, um, evolved and always changing. Um, and that kind of links to, uh, Paulo Freire, who looks at, um, that critical consciousness and that constant self-reflection of ourselves, and I see quite a lot of similarities between the two.

[00:17:32] **Rachna Joshi:** And there's a really nice quote that, um, Froebel must have said. He says exactly, "Don't allow the [00:17:38] matter of childhood to become a tool for political parties." And I think that's a really powerful quote because it, it kind of shows what he was fighting for and shows that he was really advocating for children.

[00:17:49] **Colin Kelly:** It's almost like a whole... It's a full commitment, isn't it? It's a way of being, rather than just, "Oh, I need to be inclusive and diverse." It's just who he was. It's well- ... every day, all the time.

[00:18:02] **Rachna Joshi:** I think that's exactly what Froebel was like. It almost was, like, running [00:18:08] through his approach and his way of being.

[00:18:11] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah, way of, way of thinking and his way of thinking about children. Um, but I think that's also something that we should learn from, from him because often it, it comes last, and that's the, the real life, that's what it's like. It, it comes last and it shouldn't. It should come first. It should be the foundation of what we do, and because it runs through everything that we do as educators.

[00:18:33] **Colin Kelly:** So we're trying to take some quite profound, big ideas here and actually apply them [00:18:38] into early years settings. You've said it shouldn't come last, it should come first. What other simple changes, simple steps that people can take that would help them get this right or at least maybe help them do a bit better?

[00:18:50] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah. I think if we take that Froebelian frame of starting with ourselves, reflection, our self-awareness, do we know about ourselves fully, and do we have a relationship with ourselves and understand who we are and our, where we come from, and do we locate ourselves in [00:19:08] our situation and our world that we're in?

[00:19:11] **Rachna Joshi:** That, those are all simple things that you can start thinking about, you know, about you and your practice. What do you bring to your setting? What do you bring with you each day? And then think about what

do you bring with you into those relationships, and how do you interact with certain children? How do you interact with other children?

[00:19:27] **Rachna Joshi:** Do you notice anything? Um, what is your relationship like with certain areas within the room? What, what's your relationship like with the outdoors versus the indoors? [00:19:38] All the- all those things that you think about your practice, I think that strengthens your sense of self. That then enables you to support children in their development of self and their development of their identity as well.

[00:19:53] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah, absolutely. And Carol, I'm interested in how this might apply to children of different ages. So does equality, diversity, and inclusion look different in a, in a baby room versus a primary school setting? Does it become more or [00:20:08] less important at different stages?

[00:20:11] **Professor Carole Bloch:** No, I don't think so. I think it's, it's equally important from...

[00:20:16] **Professor Carole Bloch:** You know, we, we know from research that babies s- from very, very early on, they, they feel empathy if another baby cries, for example, and they start to develop attitudes as well. And I think empathy's really important with this because babies and young children have an emotional part of empathy, [00:20:38] and then they have a cognitive part of empathy.

[00:20:40] **Professor Carole Bloch:** As soon as they start picking up the attitudes and, and messaging from the family, the community, and so on, that influences them in terms of what they will start, um, how they will start behaving towards others. So Louis Moll, who, I think he was at Arizona in, in the US, he talked about funds of knowledge, and I think those funds of knowledge would come from [00:21:08] families, and it's really a resource, as Froebel intended it as well.

[00:21:14] **Professor Carole Bloch:** It's this resource from the family, so their oral histories, their stories and so on. That's what, um, an educator needs to be aware of needing to know about right from babies in fact, all the way through education. It, it, it doesn't have to stop anywhere. I mean, Froebel recognised how important context was, and that's what made him [00:21:38] very different.

[00:21:38] **Professor Carole Bloch:** I think one of the things that he, um, distinguished between his ideas and Pestalozzi because context was so important for him and so contextualised learning and real-life learning is so

important for him. And so, you know, with babies, obviously it's much more to do with oral, oral language. It's to do with that kind of reciprocal interaction between the adult and the child.

[00:22:07] **Professor Carole Bloch:** But that [00:22:08] caregiver needs to know, like Froebel wanted. That's why he wanted women to be teachers because they, they had that, in his mind, the way he described it, they knew babies and young children like mothers. And the way to build that bridge between the center where i-in early childhood from babies up is through the, the singing, the rhymes, the little stories that start as babies and [00:22:38] his mother songs and then become fully fledged stories with older children.

[00:22:42] **Professor Carole Bloch:** So I think storying and storytelling is one of the big ways for people to connect with.

[00:22:48] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah. And Rachna, have you got something to add to this as well?

[00:22:52] **Rachna Joshi:** You know, you, I think exactly, exactly it, Carol. The educator holds so much power when they're working with really young children, with babies, and so are they really listening?

[00:23:03] **Rachna Joshi:** Do they really see that a- and observe what's actually going on for that child? [00:23:08] And are they looking for all the details, and are they thinking about children's consent and dissent, and, um, do they want to be picked up? Do they want to be moved this way? Do they want to, um, have their nappy changed? Or I think, I'm just thinking about those daily routines that with the, with those younger children, the, the, the educator holds so much power, and that's why it's such a huge responsibility.

[00:23:33] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah. Which is, which is, which it shifts, which I think it evolves, and it shifts. It looks quite different [00:23:38] as children get older and as they become potentially more independent in the, in the room, um, where they might free flow, play inside and outside without that adult c-perhaps being so close by.

[00:23:51] **Colin Kelly:** Hmm, and, and Rachna, when children are older, when they're at that stage, you've got quite a lot of responsibility as an educator the, i-in the way that you speak to other adult educators because that can tell us quite a lot about how you view other people, doesn't it?

[00:24:05] **Colin Kelly:** And children will pick up on that.

[00:24:07] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah, [00:24:08] absolutely. I think as an educator, like I said, you have so much responsibility. You're constantly, like, modelling to the children, even in interactions that you're having with your colleagues, how, how an interaction is. Mm. And they will pick up on the non-verbal communication.

[00:24:24] **Rachna Joshi:** They will see if someone is treated differently, and they'll start to create categories for themselves in their minds.

[00:24:30] **Colin Kelly:** Stella, I'm always mindful of people who might be listening who think, "Well, this is great. I get it. I agree. I want to [00:24:38] do better, but..." And, and I wondered if we can try and knock out some of these challenges that might get in the way.

[00:24:45] **Colin Kelly:** And, and one of the big ones, I'm sure, is time or lack of time. Now, Rachna's painted pictures of, you know, someone joins the setting from the traveling community, and there's lots of different variations of the traveling community. That's not all just one. There might be someone in a setting under the Ukrainian resettlement scheme.

[00:25:04] **Colin Kelly:** Rachna mentioned that, "I need to come to terms with my own [00:25:08] identity," and, you know, there's a lot to unpack there. What, what does it mean to be Scottish or British or white or male or, or middle-aged? How do we fit it all in, Stella?

[00:25:20] **Dr Stella Louis:** That's a huge question, Colin. I, I don't know if I can answer how they, how they fit it all in.

[00:25:27] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think it's about, it's gotta come from within. But sometimes people can't see what they need to do. [00:25:38] And I think that's where leadership comes in. And I think leadership for me becomes really important. Um, leadership saying, "Look, you know, I've noticed that you're using a particular type of language to describe Black children or Asian children.

[00:25:56] **Dr Stella Louis:** I don't see you doing this with other children. What evidence do you have?" And I think leaders have an obligation under OFSTED, and the EYFS, [00:26:08] and the Scottish curriculum, and the Welsh curriculum, and Irish curriculum to lead their staff and to challenge stereotypes. Because, you know, you asked a really interesting question about racism earlier on, and there's a huge part of me that believes that racism is not just born out of fear, but it's born out of stereotypes of different people And I think that's what we need [00:26:38] leaders to, to tackle.

[00:26:40] **Dr Stella Louis:** We need leaders not just to give time for reflection, give time for educators to not superficially reflect on their work, but do a, do a deep dive. But it is, it's a personal journey. It's, it's a personal commitment. You can't make somebody reflect. You know, Froebel talks about the weightiest part of, of the role of educators is [00:27:08] getting children to reflect, and I think it's weightier still to get educators to reflect.

[00:27:17] **Dr Stella Louis:** I, I think it is for me. I don't know about Rachna and Carol, but I think reflection, it's something that has to come from within. But I think time, time becomes, time becomes really, really important, and I don't think enough schools and setting- settings build in [00:27:38] supervision where staff can reflect on the challenges of the, of the really important work that they're doing and how they're linking their curriculum to children's experiences, whether they're zero to two, or whether they're a bit older.

[00:27:54] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah, and Carol, if I could bring you back in here. A- a- another obstacle, I suppose, uh, to some of this is where we might have values or cultures that conflict with each other, so perhaps with [00:28:08] religion, what's permissible in one religion might be forbidden in another. How can we navigate things like that correctly?

[00:28:14] **Professor Carole Bloch:** I think it really is about finding ways to see the humanity in the other person. It's about the relationships that we can build with other people so that we can start to see the commonalities as well, as well as the uniquenesses. But the commonalities is through an emotional connection, so we need [00:28:38] to spend time to value what each other brings, and I think that speaks again to Stella's point about leadership because, you know, educators are busy with the children, and they need help from people who are seeing the big picture in the setting maybe to bring people together to talk about things, to see how, with the example of different religions, how people m- understand what, what their, their different, um, practices mean and what it means for [00:29:08] the little children who are coming into the centres.

[00:29:10] **Professor Carole Bloch:** So I think it's that, and then it's also... Yeah, it's about respect, you know? It's about respect and valuing, and that comes from getting to know other people, so how, how we get to know other people. Stella, yeah.

[00:29:26] **Dr Stella Louis:** I absolutely agree 'cause... But, but I also think for Froebel, it's about training And I think sometimes that's also kind of a missing link.

[00:29:36] **Dr Stella Louis:** You know, [00:29:38] Froebelian educators are constantly self-active, and they're also constantly reflective. That becomes really, really very important.

[00:29:47] **Colin Kelly:** Okay. Now, Rachna, does Froebel have much to say about how we might discuss these issues with very young children? How do we instill in them these values of equality, diversity, and inclusion when they're still very much trying to make sense of the world?

[00:30:03] **Colin Kelly:** Now, I, I was quite surprised by the, the quote from earlier about babies as young as [00:30:08] six months recognising different color skin, because I was always told babies don't see colour that way, that they don't see a difference. But clearly there's research that they do. Uh, so rather than hide away from it, maybe we should go there, but how do we go there?

[00:30:24] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah. Well, I think it, uh, again, it builds on kind of what everyone's been saying, w- we've all been saying today around those relationships that you have with the children, and you address situations in child-appropriate [00:30:38] ways, celebrating, but also protecting child's, children's differences. Um, and it's kind of centering the needs.

[00:30:45] **Rachna Joshi:** So for example, if an incident happens where something's happened that is unfair for another child, uh, we center that child who's been a victim of it, whether it be something that, you know, name-calling. This is, you know, real life. It happens in the, in the classroom. Being rejected, um, being told they can't play because of, you know, whatever characteristic they might have.

[00:31:07] **Rachna Joshi:** That [00:31:08] we actually, we center that child, and we protect that child, and we make sure that they understand that they're still valued, that they're still loved, and that, um, their characteristic is beautiful, that part of them is beautiful. And then we also need to address the child that has done the, kind of done that action, done the name-calling, whatever it might be, and I think we address that in a real, in a really child-appropriate way as well.

[00:31:35] **Rachna Joshi:** I think we need [00:31:38] to help them to understand that and recognise that that child is learning, and they're learning from that world around them, and that those views are being absorbed. But our role as educators is in helping children to see these things differently and work alongside the parents in that same way.

[00:31:55] **Rachna Joshi:** Changing hearts and minds is actually really difficult work. When a child has, has certain view- viewpoints and a family, and they've absorbed that from that, that world around them, we have to, we have to work at, at changing [00:32:08] that world really- Mm ... don't we? Yeah, we need to try and ch- um, see that what they have done is unfair and unkind, and that it's...

[00:32:16] **Rachna Joshi:** And, and label what they have done. But I also think-

[00:32:19] **Colin Kelly:** No, that's, that's incredible what you... I think, think- Yeah ... sorry to interrupt, but it's incre- Please ... I think it's incredible what you said there, a- and I don't want it to go unnoticed, was that we need to work at changing that world. Like, that is such a- Yeah

[00:32:31] **Colin Kelly:** some would see it as a burden. Like such a thing to put on yourself.

[00:32:37] **Colin Kelly:** a- And you're [00:32:38] just going in to do your day's job, isn't it, you know?

[00:32:40] **Dr Stella Louis:** But, but, but sorry to interrupt, those moments are teachable moments. Mm-hmm. You know, Colin, children aren't colourblind. We spend time teaching them red, orange, blue, and green, and we think they don't notice color.

[00:32:55] **Dr Stella Louis:** You know, children will think in quite a literal way and say, "Look, my skin is caramel," or, or, "My skin is, is, is chocolate." They're thinking symbolically. Adults need to understand [00:33:08] development, hence Froebel saying that, you know, if adults are going to use children's play for assessment purposes, they need to understand what it is they're seeing.

[00:33:19] **Dr Stella Louis:** I don't want to, um, underestimate how important training and knowledge of how children learn. You know, children will take on board everything they see. They will enact these behaviours. They will imitate. They will pretend. And they need guidance, [00:33:38], hence freedom with guidance. And I think sometimes when children are noticing differences, it's the best moment that we can, you know, give them factual information that will counter those stereotypical views, and that takes courage.

[00:33:54] **Dr Stella Louis:** And that's why a Froebelian educator is not just self-active They're constantly reflecting

[00:34:02] **Colin Kelly:** Carol, go ahead.

[00:34:03] **Professor Carole Bloch:** Yeah Well, I was just going to add to that, that also I think [00:34:08] sometimes the kind of guidance, if one's thinking about freedom with guidance, sometimes guidance in a classroom community or a setting community is about talking to the children about rules.

[00:34:22] **Professor Carole Bloch:** And maybe you can also work with children and hear how they understand things like not letting children play because they don't like the look of them or whatever it is. And then how would you feel? And that [00:34:38] comes back to that notion of empathy or compassion. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm and understanding that children have that, and that we can either, um, let it just sort of fade away in these contexts, or we can try and help children really feel what it feels like.

[00:34:54] **Professor Carole Bloch:** Put yourself in that child's shoes, and I think that that is the knowledgeable and nurturing adult that you have in the room- Mm-hmm ... who is able to work with the children in that way. Yeah.

[00:35:05] **Colin Kelly:** I wonder if any of you might want to come in on this one. [00:35:08] Just thinking about maybe recommended resources that might help with this, if there are books or songs, maybe examples of Froebel's occupations or the gifts.

[00:35:17] **Colin Kelly:** Can any of that help with conversations around diverse identities?

[00:35:22] **Dr Stella Louis:** I'm going to jump in and recommend Rachna's book, Froebel and Social Justice. It's very thought-provoking read. I think Tina Bruce, Early Childhood Practice, um, Froebel Today, there's a chapter on inclusion and [00:35:38] anti-bias practice. Jane Whinnett's Putting Storytelling in the Heart of Early Years Practice shows the importance of practice.

[00:35:47] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think Julie Fisher, Interacting Not Interfering. Liz Pemberton published a little video about anti-racist practice. There are lots of children's books. There's a an amazing series of books that's been published by Barefoot Books. They capture the life of a child from various different [00:36:08] places, but the wonderful thing is the authors are from the place themselves.

[00:36:13] **Dr Stella Louis:** So, it's coming from a real lived experience. There's my book, Let's Talk About Race in the Early Years. I can't remember

the title of the- But with early education, they published it for the 100th anniversary. I'm hoping we could, at the end of the podcast, at least pop it up. There are lots of resources.

[00:36:34] **Dr Stella Louis:** Do you want to add any more? And your-
[00:36:38] I was- ... wonderful pamphlet as well, Connecting Family. Yes.

[00:36:41] **Rachna Joshi:** I was just going to add, um, Inclusive Books for Children have, um, really... It's a website that educators can go on that looks specifically at representation in d- and lots of diverse representation in, in the stories.

[00:36:56] **Professor Carole Bloch:** There's a website called Mother Tongues as well, and it's got a beautiful set of lullabies from around the world. And I think, you know, bilingual books, there, there, there are still, [00:37:08] um, publishers who produce, um, Madeleine Lindley, I think, um, creates beautiful mother tongue books, and I think it, that's really important for children also to feel that they are part of what everybody else is doing, but they're accessing it in their own language.

[00:37:24] **Professor Carole Bloch:** So that's part of it as well.

[00:37:26] **Colin Kelly:** Well, thank you. Some great resources there. Uh, thank you all very much. We'll gather these and put some links in the podcast description. Rachna, let's talk a bit about your book, Froebel and Social
[00:37:38] Justice. Could you summarise what you're hoping it achieves, and how do you think it might change things?

[00:37:45] **Rachna Joshi:** I think it's a starting point of renewing, like, a sense of commitment as a educator, as a person, to the work that we do, and laying the foundations of a pathway towards working and navigating kind of the world that we live in today through that social justice lens, and maintaining the Froebelian principles, which [00:38:08] I've tried to thread all the way through it.

[00:38:10] **Rachna Joshi:** You know, the first few chapters look at kind of big picture and huge topics of equity, equality, diversity, and identity. But then I use the four freedoms, freedom from fear, freedom from want, freedom of speech, and freedom of worship. In the freedom of worship, I kind of focus more on culture, beliefs and nature.

[00:38:36] **Rachna Joshi:** And those four [00:38:38] kind of freedoms- are different ways to explore what's going on in your settings and what's going on in, in your communities, what's going on in your wider networks, and explore ways of kind of maintaining those Froebelian principles, but also working towards social justice in that way.

[00:38:56] **Colin Kelly:** You dedicated the book to the children of Gaza and the educators working with them right now. It's quite a thought that with all that's going on that there are people, you know, just like us doing [00:39:08] that work in such challenging circumstances.

[00:39:11] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah. Absolutely. And I think I wrote a lot of this book when that, um, when that time started.

[00:39:18] **Rachna Joshi:** So I think... Oh, I don't know why I'm getting so emotional. But I think, I think that what we do is really hard. And imagine if we were in a war. I, I find my t- job hard from day to day. Imagine if [00:39:38] we didn't have a home, a school, anywhere to go-

[00:39:46] **Colin Kelly:** It's a fascinating book. I think it's got real depth to it. There are simple things there that people can apply to their own circumstances. I wonder, Rachna, when you were writing it and exploring the- these themes and taking on these issues, I, I suppose sometimes it's quite easy or, or natural maybe to feel [00:40:08] overwhelmed by the challenge and, you know, we've had decade after decade, we're still here, we're still discussing these things, that there's still war.

[00:40:16] **Colin Kelly:** But I did feel some sense of hope from you as I was reading the book. And, uh, i- is that something that you were aware of yourself?

[00:40:26] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah, I think so. I think, I think the Froebelian approach gives me that kind of... I think it's a hopeful, a hopeful approach. I think it, it, it just makes sense. It- I know when I've introduced it to other people, they're [00:40:38] like, "Oh, why didn't we have this the whole time?"

[00:40:39] **Rachna Joshi:** Like, these Froebelian principles just align with who we are as humans, and why should we not use this th- for social justice? Like, sh- why should we not put these two things together and do what we believe is right? And like I said, like, why don't we try to change that world?

[00:41:00] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah, absolutely. Rachna, thank you so much for sharing that with us.

[00:41:05] **Colin Kelly:** I hope people will read the book. It's the Froebel
[00:41:08] Trust in partnership with Bloomsbury, and it's called Froebel and Social Justice. Uh, Carol, let's talk a bit now about unconscious bias in educators and within teams. You know, we might overhear a colleague say something that we considered inappropriate.

[00:41:23] **Colin Kelly:** What's the best way to manage these situations? And keeping in mind, of course, it might be someone more senior than me that has stepped out of line.

[00:41:30] **Professor Carole Bloch:** Yeah. You know, that's very difficult. Sometimes you have to use the [00:41:38] human resources structures that there are. Sometimes that's the only recourse, but that, uh, one would hope is the end attempt.

[00:41:49] **Professor Carole Bloch:** At first, I think it is about opening up space for, for training and for talking about issues of stereotyping, prejudicing, and respect for one another. Bringing people together, doing things sometimes that, [00:42:08] that are, for example, music or dance or sport or something that isn't that so that people get to know each other in a, in a defused atmosphere.

[00:42:19] **Professor Carole Bloch:** That can also sometimes help. You know, in the Froebelian materials, I was just thinking as well, in terms of helping adults who work with children see one another and see children as equals, [00:42:38] as, uh, I think it goes back to what Stella was saying right at the beginning, as equals in the space, as having an inalienable right to be there.

[00:42:47] **Professor Carole Bloch:** The Froebel gifts and occupations are brilliant for that because they're completely open-ended, and they allow everyone to be capable and even expert in what they are trying to do, be they children or be they adults. Yeah. And that also connects to Rachna saying, "Why can't we have this?" Because it [00:43:08] makes sense, and it, it helps people communicate so that you can then work with the difficult issues in a, not a fraught atmosphere.

[00:43:17] **Colin Kelly:** Well, it's interesting what you're saying about children and adults on an equal footing because we've talked quite a bit about race in this podcast. But there's an example in Rachna's book where it's actually a young mother, and she feels that because of her age, she thinks she wouldn't be taken seriously by the educators.

[00:43:35] **Colin Kelly:** So i- it's really worth stressing, isn't it, that [00:43:38] when we talk about inclusion and diversity, it's not just where you're from and the color of your skin. It could be your accent, a level of education, the part of town you live in. There's huge emphasis, of course, and increasing awareness around children with additional support needs or parents with additional support needs.

[00:43:55] **Colin Kelly:** And there's so much more to it than simply race, isn't there, Rachna?

[00:43:59] **Rachna Joshi:** I think that's one of the main reasons why, um, the book is called Froebel and Social Justice and not Froebel and Race, because Froebel and Social Justice, uh, [00:44:08] social justice issues are so interconnected. They all intersect each other.

[00:44:13] **Rachna Joshi:** That family's real, that mum that felt that way. And it, it was so hard to, like, engage with her, and we really didn't understand why. It was only when she went to a key person from the year before where she disclosed that, "Actually, I find it really hard because I go to these doctors and they don't listen to me, and they see me as a 17-year-old who doesn't know what, what, what she's doing."

[00:44:37] **Rachna Joshi:** A lot of [00:44:38] these, the stories that I've put in the, the book, they're real. They're from my experience. They're, they're things that I've seen or heard or have experienced myself, um, as a teacher or even as a, as a child. So it's all inter- interconnected. It's social justice because it is so interconnected and each layer and each different intersection all, all impact on each other.

[00:45:00] **Rachna Joshi:** And that includes children with additional learning needs. It includes neurodiversity, disabilities, gender, economic and social class [00:45:08] positionality too. All of those, they all intersect in an individual's life. So through these intersections, I kind of explore how access and participation are really key to supporting that, uh, socially just practice, um, within kind of education today.

[00:45:23] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah. And Stella, do you want to come in on that as well?

[00:45:25] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think linking back to Froebel, what I would say is this: Froebel, nearly 200 years ago, Froebel wrote something that I think is still

relevant today. I'm just going to read [00:45:38] it. He said, "Kindergartens do not exclude any status, any social class, and educational level of parents.

[00:45:46] **Dr Stella Louis:** The child of everyone is recognised and treated first and foremost as a human being. Children of all classes should be educated from an early age in harmony, in the harmony of life." And I think when you, when you break that down, what Froebel's actually saying is that there's no exclusions. The kindergarten [00:46:08] isn't for some children, it's for every child, and it doesn't matter if the child is neurodivergent, if the child has a speech delay, if the child learns differently, the doors are open to every child.

[00:46:23] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think the more I break this quote down, the more powerful this quote becomes in relation to social justice, because access isn't a privilege. Access is a right, and I think back in [00:46:38] 1841, Froebel, Froebel made that quite clear. I think the second thing is when we're thinking about children with additional needs- Children are human beings.

[00:46:49] **Dr Stella Louis:** If we go back to the quote, we see a child, we see a person, we see their hopes, we see their curiosity, we see the ... Y- y- you know, they have something to give the world, and this matters so much with children, I believe, with additional needs because the world quite often sees what they [00:47:08] can't do. Mm-hmm. And Froebel reminds us of who they are.

[00:47:14] **Dr Stella Louis:** Froebel didn't see children as just being looked after until they were grown up. He saw them as part of society now. And I think when we include a child who communicates differently or who, who moves differently or who sees the world differently, we don't just help that child. We make a whole community richer.

[00:47:35] **Dr Stella Louis:** Mm-hmm. And I think [00:47:38] that's really, really important. And the other children, they learn things like kindness. They learn, they learn patience. They learn that there are many ways to play, to talk, to be a friend to somebody, and that's for the common good. That's all about unity and connectedness. And again, if I go back to that one quote, he talks about harmony, harmony of life.

[00:48:02] **Dr Stella Louis:** This means city, it means country, it means rich, it means poor. This, Froebel has a [00:48:08] lovely idea of opposites, contrasts. And this is it all learning together. It means the role ... And this highlights quite a lot of what you talked about, Rachna. It means our role is to adapt the room, the resources, the day so that every child can join in

[00:48:27] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah.

[00:48:28] **Rachna Joshi:** And I think as well our system right now, we have to think of, we have to think about it in the way you've said, Stella, because right now there is a [00:48:38] massive deficit approach, a deficit thinking. And so we really have to be strong to flip that narrative and really look at the harmony that, um, and w- and that unity.

[00:48:49] **Rachna Joshi:** I agree.

[00:48:50] **Dr Stella Louis:** Froebel didn't have words like SEND or equity, diversity, and inclusion, but what he did have was an idea. And the idea is this: that every early years where we practice should be the kind of society where we want to live. And [00:49:08] how we adapt resources absolutely matters. So I think for me, we need to ask ourselves, is every child in our care truly seen as a, as a human being first?

[00:49:20] **Dr Stella Louis:** Because ultimately we all have needs, but there are some children that have unique and very, very special needs that it's not just about integrating them, it's about understanding them. Um, the kindergarten should be a place where I believe [00:49:38] all children believe that they belong, and more particularly children with additional needs.

[00:49:44] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah, and C- Carol, go ahead.

[00:49:46] **Professor Carole Bloch:** With children who have what you might call special needs or additional needs, there is no approach that has a kind of more embracing capacity than Froebelian pedagogy from my perspective. Because there's this [00:50:08] quote, and I may be misquoting it, "Whatever the stage, be the stage." W- whatever stage children are at, and they're in childhood, and then you can break it down to try and understand what their development is and so on, what their needs are.

[00:50:26] **Professor Carole Bloch:** But for Froebel and for Froebelian educators, it is there where we need to look. We need to see where children are at, and we need to allow them [00:50:38] to be where they are, and to then through our observation, which we've been talking about, come to understand what children's needs are and offer them what they need.

[00:50:50] **Professor Carole Bloch:** So we're not pushing them to a kind of blueprint that- May be very disheartening, not only for them, but for their parents, may be under-motivating and so may actually crush the [00:51:08]

spirit of self-activity and, and self-motivation, which is so important to Froebelian thinking and which is so important to all young children.

[00:51:20] **Professor Carole Bloch:** That is what they need. Whatever their needs are, they need to have opportunities to, to express themselves, their inner life, and to be autonomous in, in what they do, to have that drive to make meaning for themselves be allowed to find [00:51:38] expression. And because of the insistence of Froebel that we allow children to be who they are now, and probably Froebel would have added now not rush them to jump over these hurdles that seem to be so, um, fixed in education in many parts of the world.

[00:52:01] **Professor Carole Bloch:** We don't allow that. We give children the space to be who they are. We look what their needs are, and we, [00:52:08] um, support them and, and help them to grow from that position.

[00:52:13] **Colin Kelly:** Well, I'll be surprised if there's anyone listening who isn't nodding in complete agreement, and it, it sounds like exactly what we need.

[00:52:21] **Colin Kelly:** But how do we get there? What, what practical steps can we take? And I wonder, do either of you have any maybe examples in terms of how educators can do this in practice?

[00:52:32] **Rachna Joshi:** So as part of this series, um, I know that there is a future book coming up [00:52:38] on Froebel and inclusion, and I think that will be a really helpful, um, practical guide for educators to explore these, these kind of themes in, in more depth.

[00:52:48] **Rachna Joshi:** But on top of that, until that comes, we still have, uh, the additional needs pamphlet that's available on the Froebel Trust website

[00:52:56] **Dr Stella Louis:** Yeah, and I would, I would just to add to that, observe children.

[00:53:01] **Rachna Joshi:** Yeah. That's

[00:53:01] **Dr Stella Louis:** where you start from. Observe. Once you observe, you will be informed. We [00:53:08] cannot do anything until we, we really begin to observe the children that we are, we are caring for.

[00:53:16] **Colin Kelly:** I'm wondering, Stella, if there's any advice and guidance around, well, how do I reflect? You know, is, is it a framework that

can help me with that? And if someone is trying to measure or articulate or reflect on, well, how inclusive is my setting, how would they know? What, what would it look like?

[00:53:34] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think reflection looks like lots of [00:53:38] different things, and I don't think the question is as easy as it sounds.

[00:53:44] **Dr Stella Louis:** Kind of almost going to go back to the question that you asked Carol in order to answer my question. You know, sometimes you can talk to someone about you seeing them being stereotypical with a group of students, with children, with parents... with people from the traveling community And they'll come up with a whole [00:54:08] jackanory of why they did what they did.

[00:54:11] **Dr Stella Louis:** I can't make you reflect. You need to be able to say to yourself, "Did I really see the child, or have I projected something from my own experiences onto the child?" You've got to ask yourself those honest questions. And it's not about making anybody feel shame. It's about changing that behavior and [00:54:38] acknowledging that behaviour.

[00:54:40] **Dr Stella Louis:** You see, the minute I come up with my jackanory of a story, I'm not going to acknowledge what I've done. You know, part of being human means that we're biased. We will make snap judgments about people based on just an instant decision. We all do it. It equals being human. What becomes really important is how we deal with it.

[00:55:02] **Dr Stella Louis:** Are we starting with what our children know, or are we just focusing on [00:55:08] the unknown? Reflection is personal, and reflection is deep. It's really deep. It's got to come from within. So, I think sometimes you can have quite superficial processes-

[00:55:19] **Colin Kelly:** Yeah ...

[00:55:19] **Dr Stella Louis:** that reflect nothing.

[00:55:21] **Colin Kelly:** So, you're talking here, I suppose, about being more open about it, accepting that these things will happen, getting to the heart of it, and that then enables reflection and growth, uh, rather than what society sometimes does at the moment, which is, you know, someone gets canceled, and there's this fear [00:55:38] around it.

[00:55:38] **Colin Kelly:** You seem to be saying, well, you should reflect and grow and, and then come back and carry on.

[00:55:44] **Dr Stella Louis:** And I mean, that's the thing. It's like I've had lots of people say to me, "Oh, we've had no incidents in our setting or our school of any kind of discrimination." And I just think that's a really sad statement.

[00:55:58] **Dr Stella Louis:** I think it's a sad statement because it's when you do have an incident that you can make sure that your equality, your equity, your diversity, [00:56:08] and your inclusion policies are responsive to that group and, and their need. The fact that you've got none doesn't mean it doesn't happen. It just means that what we're getting is quite, quite superficial.

[00:56:22] **Dr Stella Louis:** We've got a long way to go, and I really do think Rachana's book illuminates theory through really lovely examples of everyday practice that practitioners will be, will [00:56:38] be familiar with. And I think the stories, the examples will touch many.

[00:56:44] **Colin Kelly:** Yes, I agree. I'm sure they will. Thank you, Stella. Um, Carol, do you want to come in here?

[00:56:50] **Professor Carole Bloch:** I'd just like to emphasise the power of story. I mean, Stella was now talking about is, um, when people hold stereotypical views and they have all this jackanory story, th- they're full of reasons and defenses. And I think with young [00:57:08] children, one of the most positive aspects of working with young children is that they are so responsive to, to, um, to listen and to, to hear, and they grow and thrive on stories like we all do.

[00:57:24] **Professor Carole Bloch:** But so for educators to really get to know what books work with young children around all these issues, I wouldn't say it's not easy, but it, it's one of the simplest ways to [00:57:38] address a lot of, um, issues around prejudice with them and, and also to then share that with adults in a way that they can continue to do such things at home.

[00:57:49] **Professor Carole Bloch:** So yes, books and stories I think are really important.

[00:57:53] **Colin Kelly:** Thank you, Carol. And Rachna, how about you? How do you hope that, um, conversations like this on this podcast change things?

[00:58:01] **Rachna Joshi:** I'd really like people to read my book and to start reflecting on their practice or [00:58:08] continue reflecting on their practice and themselves as educators, and to share it widely and to do something that transforms their practice.

[00:58:18] **Rachna Joshi:** And not just their practice. Maybe something even wider than that.

[00:58:21] **Colin Kelly:** Great. Okay. Thank you. And, um, Stella?

[00:58:23] **Dr Stella Louis:** What I want to say also is if a child is indispensable, we can't put them on a waiting list for belonging. We can't say we'll include them when their behavior [00:58:38] improves. We've got to change ourselves.

[00:58:40] **Dr Stella Louis:** We've got to change our responses and not change the child, because I think humanity is missing a piece without them. And for me, that just captures Friedrich Froebel and his fight for social justice, you know, whether he was fighting the government because he wanted to educate children and let them be free thinkers and, and think for themselves, and he [00:59:08] educated boys and girls.

[00:59:09] **Dr Stella Louis:** At the time, it was just rich boys. He ho- opened the first women's teachers training college. I think Froebel's done wonderful things for, for social justice, and I think his, his approach is an approach to be not just embraced but, but celebrated, because just taking freedom with guidance has the ability to absolutely transform practice

[00:59:35] **Colin Kelly:** Well, transforming practice and as we heard [00:59:38] earlier, an opportunity to change the world.

[00:59:40] **Colin Kelly:** Thank you to my guests, Dr. Stella Louis, Professor Carol Bloch, and Rachna Joshi for contributing to such an illuminating and challenging discussion. Perhaps you found it hopeful, too. Full biographies for all my guests are available in the podcast description, along with links to the resources mentioned during our discussion, and of course, Rachna Joshi's new book, Froebel and Social Justice, published in partnership with Bloomsbury Publishers and the Froebel Trust.

[01:00:07] **Colin Kelly:** Now, my [01:00:08] guests have asked me to point out once again that issues around families displaying overt racism and bias should be considered safeguarding issues and reported as such. Please use the material

and advice in this discussion to reflect on your own practice rather than to deal with anything more serious.

[01:00:26] **Colin Kelly:** You can find out more via the podcast page at froebel.org.uk. There's a full transcript and all our previous podcast episodes there as well. Well, thank you very much for listening, and if you've any comments, [01:00:38] questions, or suggestions, remember, you can always get in touch via office@froebeltrust.org.uk.