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**The Highs and Lows of Childhood: Challenges for a Froebelian Concept of Childhood Today**

This paper will consider some of the different perspectives on childhood arising historically. It will look at some of the fortunes and misfortunes of childhood in the context of Froebel’s understanding of early years education. By considering Joe Dunne’s taxonomy of childhood, I will briefly discuss the following historical perspectives on childhood: a ‘privative’ view, a ‘therapeutic’ view, and a ‘privileged’ view, the latter being firmly rooted in the Romantic tradition and championed by Froebel among other modern thinkers. Building on Dunne’s perspectives I will introduce a fourth view, namely an ‘emancipatory’ view which exists in tension with its historical predecessor accounts (Holt, Archard). Some of the principal challenges to a Froebelian concept of childhood exist in the often-thorny issues of ‘authority and freedom’, ‘child agency’, ‘developmental readiness’ and ‘appropriate time,’ alongside the increasing pressure on children to take responsibility for our fragile planet. In a time when adult preoccupations with childhood as an ideally carefree period of play and learning are continually called into question for their covert politics, how might educators still appeal to the freshness and wonder of a child’s imagination. By examining the conference themes of ‘childhood in its own right’, and ‘child agency’, this paper rethinks some of our concepts of child and adult development and argues that we need not forfeit what is good when faced with the considerable challenges to a Froebelian concept of childhood today.

**Key words**: freedom, agency, development

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