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**3. Abstract**

Concepts of children and childhood are time specific and linked to contextual issues such as social, economic, religious, cultural and political factors (Cleary et al. 2001). Contemporary understandings of childhood are also influenced by historical developments which are embedded within the fabric of both societal and educational discourses.

This presentation will focus on one significant shift in understanding and celebrating the unique needs and individual capabilities of the child in the Irish context: the publication of the *Revised Programme of Instruction* in 1900 (Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, 1902). This programme/curriculum was developed in the late 1890s following the comprehensive report of the Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction (1898) which analysed existing national and international policy, practice and research. Debate, discussion and contestation regarding the philosophy and pedagogies of Friedrich Froebel were central to the discourses informing the Commission’s report regarding conceptualisations of childhood. The resulting *Revised Programme of Instruction* (1900) was infused with Froebelian thinking by recognising and celebrating the importance of play-based and discovery learning, by placing an emphasis on adult-child relationships, by focusing on child well-being and enjoyment, and by promoting the use of the local environment. Such approaches and principles contrasted greatly with the pedagogies which were promoted under the previous Payment by Results era (1872-1900) and indeed with the subsequent curricular reforms introduced in the 1920s following political independence (Walsh, 2012). An analysis of the successes and shortcomings of enacting the Froebelian-inspired elements of the 1900 programme, as well as its legacy in contemporary understandings and conceptualisations of childhood, will form a central element of the presentation.

**References**

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