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| **International Froebel Society 10th Biennial Conference** |
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| **Category** | Presentation  |
| **Description** |
| This presentation details the findings of a self-study action research project, which support Froebel’s focus on child agency and endorse the notion that children learn best when they are respected as autonomous learners. In the 2020-21 academic year, school closures and social distancing requirements had a profound impact on the way in which children learned and teachers taught. Through self-study action research, I explored how I attempted to address the constraints of a new, restrictive learning environment with an intervention that used digital technologies to facilitate cooperative learning in my 6th class classroom.Qualitative data was gathered from the written and oral reflections of my students and a group of four critical friends, as well as from my own observations and reflective journal. An analysis of this data led me to conclude that digital technologies could be used to facilitate cooperative learning by supporting dialogue between group members and offering a sense of agency to students. The motivation that this could generate proved especially important in the context of online learning and the socially distant classroom. The negative emotions fuelled by the restrictions of the pandemic were not, however, always counterbalanced by the affordances of digital tools or by the open-ended nature of the task; and children's motivation often suffered due to a perceived lack of autonomy over various elements of the project. Without the right balance between structure and freedom, the children were stripped of sufficient opportunity to explore and imagine (Davies et al, 2013).These findings are examined through a Froebelian lens. His assertion that, without the freedom of play, a child is merely following a task prescribed for him by another and, as such, ‘does not reveal his own creativeness and inclination but another’s’ (Bruce, 2020: 39) is explored; and implications for playful learning in the senior classroom discussed.ReferencesBruce, T. (2020) *Educating Young Children: A Lifetime Journey into a Froebelian Approach* [e-book]. London: Routledge. Available at: Maynooth University Library https://doi-org.jproxy.nuim.ie/10.4324/9781315658186 (Accessed 20th May, 2021). Davies, D.,Jindal-Snape, D., Collier, C., Digby, R., Hay, P. & Howe, A. (2011) Creative learning environments in education—A systematic literature review. *Thinking Skills and Creativity* [online]. 8, 80–91. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2012.07.004 (Accessed 10th July 2021).  |
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