

"CREATING CONVERSATIONS"

ARTS AND EDUCATION COLLOQUIUM

It is
d
A
re
d
ve p
sities,
father transp
es the form-conte
that does the form, co
garded as belong
is not an easy c
the intellectual age
students. In fact, it r
tent relationships of
an inclination to pursue the
study.
That the arts can teach eac
nd, as intimated ear
e arts, imagination
—academic fi
time and atten
entive scholars of
the delights that in
we tend to emphasize
We tend to un
cesses that ar
and even pri
capacity
• func
abel

MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE, LIMERICK

29TH AND 30TH JANUARY 2010

Furthering Conversations

A Report on the *Creating Conversations* Colloquium

© Dept. of Arts Education & Physical Education, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Furthering Conversations

A report on the *Creating Conversations* Colloquium

Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, 29-30 January 2010

Index	2
Foreword	3
Aims & Objectives	4
Creating Conversations Timetable	5
The House of Possibility - Martin Drury	6
Furthering Conversations - Voices from the Plenary	22
Furthering Conversations - Actions for the Future	26
List of Delegates	27
Images from the Colloquium	29

Foreword

On the 29th and 30th January 2010, the Department of Arts Education & Physical Education at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick convened a gathering of arts educators, stakeholders, policymakers, artists, arts education/resource agencies and researchers. This colloquium was planned as an initial response to the publication of the Points of Alignment report by the Arts Council in June 2008, but was also an opportunity for the staff of the Department to showcase their own work and forge alliances throughout the sector. The event was part-funded through the Training of Trainers programme, which is part of the National Development Plan.

The colloquium was designed in such a manner to present delegates with stimulating, relevant talks and workshops, but also to allow them the formal and informal space to converse. The chosen theme of 'Creating Conversations' was also quite a deliberate effort to prompt dialogue. The initial invitation to Limerick suggested that conversations have always taken place in the arts and education, but they have often been disparate, scattered, fragmented, isolated. Too often the conversations have focused on what we are, or indeed are not. Often the conversations have never managed to get beyond the meet and greet stage. Sometimes we can't even figure out which room the conversations belong in.

Creating Conversations was an attempt to connect the conversations, question the practices, explore the ideologies and influence the policies and practices of the future. It was an effort by the staff of the department to publicly engage with and address the principles and practices within the arts and education through presentations, discussions and workshops. This engagement as a part of the community of arts and education, is at the heart of the future direction of the department.

This report, entitled 'Furthering Conversations' is part of the commitment made in inviting delegates to Limerick in January: it forms part of the aspiration that this event would not just be another undoubtedly well-intentioned but singular gathering that so characterise the arts and education.

We invite you to continue the dialogues that began in Limerick and to pursue the advocacy, research and practice so vital to ensure that the arts are a vital and consistent part of every Irish childhood.

Dr Michael Finneran
Head, Dept of Arts Education & Physical Education
Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

October, 2010

Creating Conversations Organising Team

Michael Finneran

Ailbhe Kenny

Eamonn Mitchell

Dorothy Morrissey

Administrative Support

Zeta Penny

Richard Hayes

The Department of Arts Education & Physical Education (AEPE) at Mary Immaculate College

The Department of Arts Education and Physical Education was formed in September 2007 as a result of restructuring within the new Faculty of Education. It emerged from the amalgamation of four pre-existing teams; Drama Education, Music Education, Physical Education and Visual Art Education. Whilst the four specialist teams still remain in place, they now exist within a departmental environment which is geared to the special needs required in teaching and researching creative, imaginative and active subject areas.

Staff of the department service the areas of Drama Education, Music Education, Physical Education and Visual Art Education on the Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Education & Psychology programmes. Staff also contribute courses to the Graduate Diploma in Education, the BA in Early Childhood Care & Education and courses to Masters level.

The arts and physical education have a long and valued tradition within Mary Immaculate College, both as academic pursuits within programmes of initial teacher education and as student activities outside of College programmes. The department aims to build on that strong tradition, and to forge new and innovative ways of developing its work in initial teacher education, as well as striving for excellence in research, and providing a valuable service to the wider community.

What was the Creating Conversations event?

- It was a small gathering designed to foster conversations, provoke questions and forge alliances within the broader community of Irish arts and education.
- It was a colloquium that sought to platform prominent voices in the national and international communities of the arts and education to stimulate thought and reflection through a combination of discussion and practice.

What did it hope to achieve?

- To probe the issues surrounding the arts and education in order to examine how growth in the community can be stimulated and sustained.
- To consider the recommendations of the *Points of Alignment* report with a view to identifying priorities for implementation, particularly in the light of the current economic climate.
- To debate what role the 3rd level sector, especially teacher education, can play in further developing the arts and education community and practices, specifically in the areas of formal education, research, policy and leadership.
- To explore how the community can share, develop and evaluate models of practice that have particular relevance in Ireland.
- To examine and play with the dual role of teacher/artist in order to unpack, tease out and problematise some of the complexities surrounding it.
- To develop some concrete outcomes from the colloquium that can be progressed in a tangible fashion.

Creating Conversations – Timetable

Friday 29th January 2010

Venue: Tailteann (Sports Building), Mary Immaculate College, South Circular Rd., Limerick

- 1pm:** Registration opens (Tailteann)
- 3pm:** Opening & Welcome
Prof Teresa O’Doherty – Dean of Education, MIC
- 3.15pm:** Keynote Address 1: **Martin Drury** (The Arts Council - Arts Director with responsibility for Festivals, Venues, International arts, Arts participation, Arts & education, Young people & children, Artists' supports, Local arts). Chair: **Dr Michael Finneran**, MIC
- 4.15pm:** Tea/Coffee
- 4.30pm:** Sharing Practice Session (short presentations). Chair: **Ailbhe Kenny**, MIC
Eina McHugh, Director – The Ark Cultural Centre for Children
Helen O’Donoghue, Senior Curator: Head of Education and Community Programmes – The Irish Museum of Modern Art
Lali Morris, Programme Director – Babaró International Arts Festival for Children
Aisling Roche, Acting Chief Executive – Music Network
Helen Hallissey, Cork Arts Circle
- 5.30pm:** Chaired Panel Session: *The Arts, Education & Ireland – the current state of play*
Chair: **Mary Nunan**, University of Limerick
- 6.15pm:** Close
- 8.00pm:** Colloquium Dinner (Clarion Hotel, Steamboat Quay, Limerick)

Saturday 30th January 2010

- 9.30am** Master-Class 1: Choice of Two Sessions
Professor Jonothan Neelands – Chair of Drama & Theatre Education, University of Warwick (Room T1). Chair: **Eamonn Mitchell**, MIC
Leonora Davies MBE – Music Education Consultant/Chair, Music Education Council, UK (Room T2). Chair: **Ailbhe Kenny**, MIC
- 11.30am:** Tea/Coffee
- 12.00pm:** Keynote Address 2: **Sacha Abercorn** (Founder of the Pushkin Trust) Chair: **Dorothy Morrissey**, Mary Immaculate College
- 1pm:** Lunch
- 2pm:** MasterClass 2: Choice of Two Sessions
- 4pm:** Tea/Coffee & Final Plenary Session: *Furthering Conversations in the Arts & Education*
Chair: **Dr Michael Finneran**, MIC
- 5pm:** Close

The House of Possibility – Martin Drury

Address by Martin Drury, Arts Director, the Arts Council at the arts and education colloquium 'Creating Conversations' in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick on 29 / 30 January 2010.

It is a New Year. It is the first month of the New Year (just about) and it is a new decade. The American poet Emily Dickinson once wrote:

I dwell in possibilities / A fairer house than Prose

And so we might, at the start of this New Year and new decade, see ourselves as dwelling in possibilities.

This weekend, that seems the right place to dwell as we have been invited to create conversations and if there's a specific point of reference for those conversations, it is a report called (with a deliberate note of possibility and invitation) Points of Alignment.

And this weekend's conversations are occurring in a context where our hosts have invited us to be numerous enough to ensure diversity and few enough to promote collegiality.

We gather, it might be said, in a clearing originally made by a report of thirty years ago: The Place of the Arts in Irish Education. Into that clearing much work of value has occurred these past three decades and we are fortunate that some of its contemporary manifestations will be presented later. There is now a tradition and practice of arts in education work in Ireland that did not exist 30 years ago. That is both a cause of celebration and a reason to question how it can be sustained and moved from the margins into the centre, or otherwise rendered more systemic rather than random, occasional and over-dependent on key individuals. Those are some of the issues that underpin the report on the other side of the clearing, the more recent Points of Alignment which will be one focus of our conversations.

It is good to note, in passing, that the black cover with the trail of orange and red has become in thirty years an orange report trimmed with red. That sunburst of optimism has, as yet, proved unfounded for several reasons, but it should not go un-remarked that while the 1979 report was produced and published by the Arts Council, the more recent Points of Alignment was overseen by a committee with representatives of both the Arts Council and the DES and initiated by the Minister for the Arts. We may worry that the seed has fallen on stony soil in our clearing but in part we are

here this weekend to see if there is something we can do about that, given our shared interests. Michael Finneran and his colleagues deserve our thanks for this opportunity.

There is a respectful tentativeness about the way this weekend's programme has been described but you will see there are sessions later this afternoon and again a final plenary tomorrow where the current state of play and the possible next steps are at least implied as topics. At the outset I'd like to say that I think it would be an opportunity missed not to explore if there are at least points of engagement that might in time lead to points of alignment.

Later, I will turn to some of those more practical issues. But as my address is at the start of our conversations, I want to set some key notes vibrating that have to do with the nature of art, of education, of creativity. This is to remind us of the importance of our enterprise and also to challenge any lazy consensus. We will have better conversations, I think, if our reaching for implementation strategies is informed by reflection on some key issues concerning the arts and education.

To bridge the gap between the reflections on the practice and the need for implementation, I will also strike notes, which will be more 'political'.

And like all political speeches (and this is in part a political address) it takes account of its constituency. Which is why I want to dedicate this talk and - if I may abuse my position as keynote speaker on day one - dedicate our weekend to the 70,000 babies who were born last year: the newest citizens of Ireland.

They know nothing of us or of our preoccupations with education and the arts, yet I am going to suggest that they should be our main preoccupation because, whatever our particular place in the ecosystem of culture or education, the basis for our conversation, perhaps the point of absolute alignment between us, is a concern for and commitment to the development of children and young people.

Not all of us here are biological parents, but I venture to suggest that we are all 'psychological parents' and, as an extension of that, I want to invite you to be also 'political parents'. It is as such - as 'political parents' - that I want to direct our attention to the well-being - in the fullest and richest sense of that term - of those 70,000 new Irish citizens and to their 75,000 peers born in 2008 and their predecessors in 2007 and so on up until we realise that in the 18 year span between infancy

and the Leaving Certificate, there are well over 1m children and young people whom we might legitimately consider as our key shared concern.

The reason I focus on the 70,000 babies born last year (apart from cheap sentimental effect!) is that they represent a challenge to us: what might we say this weekend; what actions might we imagine and even initiate this weekend that would affect the quality of their experience over the next 18 years?

- If we were architects faced with this challenge, we would consider matters to do with the built environment of our schools.....
- If we were nutritionists faced with such a challenge, we might consider matters to do with food and possibly school vegetable gardens and even home-school food programmes....
- If we were involved in physical education, we might even invite some of the nutritionists to our conference to discuss the points of alignment between their interests and ours....

But we are educators and artists – so what have we to say to one another? What joint actions might there be for us to take?

Having dubbed us all ‘political parents’ I want to root that otherwise rhetorical flourish in a notion that is fundamentally political and that needs to be constantly referenced and made visible because paradoxically, it is so embedded that it may escape our attention.

I will explain with reference to our 70,000 babies. Earlier, I used the term ‘citizens’ in relation to them. So how do babies become citizens and of what relevance is that to our conversations? The first intervention the State makes in our lives is to insist that our birth is registered. The birth certificate carries a harp on it to indicate that this is an official state document. From day one, literally, a process of claiming us as citizens begins. The birth cert is the first marker in a life-long relationship between the State and the citizen, a relationship often characterised by certain tensions between rights and responsibilities.

The next significant formal intervention by the State is the shaping of each citizen’s mind, his or her intellectual and wider personal formation, through compulsory education, *via* a national curriculum. A transaction is proposed between the claims of the State and the rights of the individual. The proposition goes like this: the State insists that for a dozen years young citizens attend school and follow a prescribed course of learning. That is a weighty demand which, just because we are

accustomed to it, does not mean that we should underestimate it. There is a counterweight to compulsory schooling, at least in the contract offered. This is the complementary proposition, wherein the State acknowledges its responsibilities to educate the whole child, and declares its commitment to allow its young citizens develop the full range of their potential, to nurture the multiplicity of their intelligences.

This educational contract has many shortcomings. Successive Ministers for the Arts and for Education have acknowledged that one such shortcoming is the relative failure of the State to fully honour its commitment to develop and nurture the artistic and aesthetic intelligence of young citizens. The relative neglect of the arts remains a significant deficit. To address that deficit, generations of parents have intervened to the benefit of their own children's development. While one cannot but applaud their commitment to their children, their private action and the State's partial action combine to ensure that, in Ireland, the development of artistic and aesthetic intelligence is to a considerable extent determined by socio-economic circumstance. The educational and cultural consequences of this are significant and remain a challenge to all of us who believe that the arts are primary human disciplines and ways of knowing, and who believe therefore that arts education is a fundamental clause within the educational contract struck – even if not negotiated - between the State and the individual citizen.

Engagement with the arts, we know, is socially determined. And more recently we have come to know that engagement in the arts is educationally determined. The source for this is a report published in 2008 and called In the Frame or Out of the Picture: A Statistical Analysis of Public Involvement in the Arts. It was commissioned by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and undertaken by the ESRI (the Economic and Social Research Institute). The report was a detailed analysis of the findings of the 2006 major study of public behaviour and attitudes to the arts called The Public and the Arts.

Again and again, like a tolling bell, the NESF report points to educational attainment as a key element within a wider set of socio-economic factors that determine public engagement in the arts. One of the ways in which, as a society, we attempt to 'level the playing pitch' of social inequality is through the education system. But, as we know (and especially as a child moves through the primary years) the presence of the arts on the school radar reduces as other imperatives assert their importance. Some offsetting of this effect is afforded by out-of-school access to the arts, but in many cases such access is subject to parental income. The consequence (no doubt unintended) is

that schools become mechanisms for perpetuating cultural exclusion rather than instruments of redress. An already bad situation has been exacerbated recently by the withdrawal of the support of the Social Inclusion Unit of the DES for arts programmes and services provided by a wide range of arts organisation to schools serving disadvantaged areas.

So our conversation this weekend needs to take account of the fact (for it is no longer anecdotal feeling but evidence-based from quantitative sociological research) that something that should inter-lock and hinge well is mis-aligned. The misaligned 'something' is the relationship between the arts and education. But expressing it in those terms might be too narrow and to read only the symptoms of a perhaps more worrisome misalignment between formal education and the stated commitment to nourish and nurture the individual and whole self of the child and young person. So, while our immediate area of focus is the arts and education, I think the wider frame of reference is that of creativity.

Now before we enter a fog of false consensus around 'creativity', can I enter the *caveat* that 'creativity' is a notoriously slippery term, often employed lazily. Of late there has been some extraordinary waffle talked and written about it. Much of this relates to the glib, restrictive and opportunistic use of 'creativity' as the Holy Grail of education if we are to build a 'smart economy' that will be our calling card for future wealth generation and economic prosperity. In this context the advocates of creativity often link it with science and technology and with the skills that are associated with business entrepreneurship. In saying this I don't want to be misunderstood as setting up a false opposition between the sciences and the arts. My partiality to the arts, in this context, is no more useful or laudable than an inappropriate bias towards the sciences would be.

I want to invoke 'creativity' in two senses, neither of which claims any exclusive or privileged domain for the arts. Creativity, in fact, may (or may not be) applied to or found within the disciplines of the sciences or the arts. But we need to think of it as being 'discipline-neutral' and explore it instead as a complex function or set of processes involving several attributes. In its deliberations the Special Committee on the Arts and Education considered this issue of creativity and therefore in editing the committee's final report I shaped a short section on creativity. I chose to reference Ken Robinson's statement in his book Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative that creativity '*is not a purely intellectual process. It is enriched by other capacities and in particular by feelings, intuition, and by a playful imagination...[it is not a] single aspect of intelligence [but] a dynamic process that draws on many different aspects of a person's experience and intelligence*'.

It is this focus on *many different aspects of a person's experience* that I emphasise and I draw your attention to two ways of considering creative experiences. One puts the emphasis on the event, on the fact that *something happens*, and the other places the emphasis on the person or persons involved and the fact that *they become other or different or changed*. There is a quality at the heart of this personal state, or change of state, that I am going to call *authenticity*. I acknowledge that *authenticity* is another term with the properties of mercury, but within our frame of reference, I am going to characterise the development of personal authenticity as the need for children and young people to build resources of lived experience that are appropriate to their developmental level. It is important of course that the young people are both makers and receivers of those experiences. Such making and receiving (though I speak about them separately) should not be separate or sequential but rather they should be symbiotic, even if one is in the ascendant at any particular time. It is in the nature of 'an experience' that the double helix of making it and receiving it is present and active.

It is important also that the experiences are both real and imagined, or that the notion of reality is expansive enough to include the imagined. This is because humans have *ab initio* a life of the mind which includes very real things like memory, dream, wonder, aspiration, ambition, and feeling. These experiences will be both private and individual in their focus and they will also include the personal versions of the archetypal or communal human experiences that are, for example, embedded in fairytale, myth, and legend. This kind of self-actualisation, this construction of a resolved interior self, linked to a sense that one's fellow humans have equivalent interior selves, is one of life's ongoing projects for us all, and is a central goal of child formation and education. It is to this project that I think the arts have a particular contribution to make because in the arts are embedded much of the DNA of what it is to be human, by which I mean what it is to experience the condition of humanity, or to be accurate the multiplicity of experiences and conditions that constitute being human. This multiplicity relates in educational terms to Gardner's idea of multiple intelligences and to the notion of the 'hundred languages of children' espoused by Loris Malaguzzi of Reggio Emilia.

This broadly educational project of generating the double helix of the creation of self through personal authentic experiences, and the creation by the self of authentic experiences, is at odds with the dominant cultural project of our age. For the mass cultural industries operate by quite different principles. Their interest is not the authentic citizen but rather the non-authentic consumer. Their target is to accelerate the process whereby the 70,000 babies and indeed all young citizens become consumers. So, at home, in the street, or in the marketplace they favour that which is 'common',

‘mass’ and often ‘derivative’. (And for our purposes ‘derivative’ is the polar opposite of ‘creative’). Without wishing to over-generalise and then demonise many aspects of the cultural industries, I do want to suggest that the space for the development of authentic cultural selves is shrinking and is increasingly contested. The responses to this will have to be many and varied because the causes and effects are themselves many and varied, but one response has got to be a much greater alignment between those who work in education and care about such things and those who care about such things and work in the arts.

The alignment will be more easily and lastingly achieved if it is based on mutual understanding and respect. To build some shared convictions which might in time become shared commitments, let me re-enter the house of possibility, that *fairer house than prose*, and invoke another American poet, this time Walt Whitman:

*There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon and received with wonder or pity or love or dread, that object he
became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day
or for many years or stretching cycles of years.*

Those opening lines of Whitman’s poem ‘There was a child went forth’ are at one level immediately graspable and at another we recognise that Whitman is capturing and exploring a central and complex idea about what I described earlier as a double helix of experience. Perhaps in the Whitman poem it feels more triangular than double as there is interplay between (i) the object of absorption; (ii) the experience of absorption; and (iii) the self that is absorbed. The context of the experience appears to be the natural world (the child we are told ‘went forth’), but it is not beyond bounds to suggest that it might be a domestic object which is the focus of his absorption. Nor is it too fanciful to suggest that the child ‘going forth’ is perhaps a figurative journey: an entering into another dimension beyond the immediate. What Whitman in his poem is capturing is really a proto-aesthetic experience, or a pre-figuring of a more formal or art-based aesthetic experience, and we can recognise the truthfulness of the poet’s observation and the particular intensity of experience he is marking.

We are familiar in Ireland with the double-helix of Yeats’ lines: *How can we know the dancer from the dance* (though it is worth noting the presence of a third element, for the dancer’s body we are

told is *swayed to music*). And speaking of music, some of you will know T. S. Eliot's famous lines from Four Quartets where he writes of:

*Music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts*

Isn't that true? Or if you have ever been 'lost in a book', as we say, you will surely recognise the truth of Wallace Stevens' lines:

*The house was quiet and the world was calm.
The reader became the book; and summer night
Was like the conscious being of the book.*

These are inspired and insightful capturings of the extraordinary, indivisible phenomenon of aesthetic experience. In order to describe and analyse them we need to pull the butterfly apart and separate the self from the experience or action, and from the object being experienced, but that is *ex post facto*. In real time the self, the experience, and the context or stimulus, are distilled into one concentrated, compacted, and indivisible entity.

Though poetry has been my point of entry into this, Whitman, Yeats, Eliot and Stevens have provided us with examples from the worlds of the visual, dance, music and literature to demonstrate that, though the artforms are distinct, there are common features of aesthetic experience. One of those common features is the state of being. This is an active dynamic state, such that Whitman speaks of *that object he **became**, / And that object **became** part of him*; this echoes Wallace Stevens' *The reader **became** the book*, and Eliot's idea that intense listening dissolves into an altered state of being in which *you **are** the music*.

We are at the foothills of understanding that, though the concentration in our critical discourse and our pedagogical modelling is often focussed on the art object, it really does not exist in any meaningful way until it is apprehended, and that when it is so apprehended, it is the self of the listener or reader or spectator that engages with the work. The reader *became* the book is the act of 'receiving' but the dancer *becomes* the dance is the act of 'making'. They are really mirror images of each other: receiving art and making art are ineluctably bound together: the dancer and the dance

require to be observed – Yeats’ question is posed from the perspective of us as spectators: *How can we know....the dancer from the dance.*

The meaning of art does not exist exclusively in the art object, but is in fact located in the space between the object and the receiver. So the meaning will be different according to the circumstances of the receiver. Even something as seemingly immutable as a work of literature changes according to the circumstances of its apprehension. Reading Conrad’s Heart of Darkness as a seventeen year old and reading it as a forty-seven year old are likely to be two different experiences. In those thirty years not a word of Conrad’s story has changed, but the reader has. So the reader alters the meaning and the art object or experience alters the reader. I grew up in a tradition both cultural and pedagogical that cast me in the role of ascertaining the meaning of the work of art (this is what I call the ‘*what is the poem about?*’ syndrome). The more contemporary understanding of arts experiences suggest that it is the function of the work of art or of the arts experience to unlock the meaning of the spectator. In practice this is much more dynamic than the grammar of that sentence would suggest and especially when the experience is that of engaged making and participation, as would characterise many arts experiences for young people.

In the context of this conference I’d like to set two key ideas beside one another. One is the idea of children and young people ‘making their selves’ which is almost their sole purpose and which teachers are the privileged witnesses to and facilitators of. The other idea is the distinctive ways in which the arts allow for that making of self to occur. In practice (and you have all seen this) these two ideas coalesce in activities involving engagement or participation. With the formal arts experiences conjured by Yeats, Eliot and Wallace Stevens in the back of your mind, call up in your mind’s eye a young child engaged in play or in dancing freely or in listening to music or handling clay or absorbed reading. Think of high-quality and deeply-engaging arts experiences you have witnessed where children were participants either as witness-spectators or agent-makers. Would you agree that, especially if occurring over an extended period of sustained commitment and in a supportive environment, the very formation and richness and texture of those experiences mirror and indeed engender some equivalent enrichment and texturing of self? Evaluations of arts projects in schools often throw up observations by teachers or parents of the order of: *I didn’t know she had it in her....she really came into her own....she has become a different person.* These are the colloquial versions of understandings about how the arts reveal or enrich other selves which formal school practice sometimes ignores, or relegates, or finds it difficult to nurture.

I have probably explored this more deeply than I had initially intended, and now need to surface for air. And yet there are many ideas that must remain unexplored. One which is important to reference is the distinctive nature of the different art forms. For, though we are meeting and talking about ‘the arts’, they are quite distinct forms and disciplines and ultimately are not interchangeable. Music, literature, dance, the visual arts, drama – each has a distinct set of properties: traditions, materials, symbol systems. I can only assert and underline that now; to elaborate would require much more time than is available.

To feed our conversations I want to shift focus to give a little consideration to the roles of the teacher and the artist. In truth I think there is a continuum of expertise and function at work here. It is usually professional traditions and social organisation (chiefly the dominance of the schooling model to the exclusion of most other educational paradigms) that determine at what point on the continuum someone sits, as much as matters of personal disposition, skill and inclination. But it is also the case that some artists are disposed personally, and skilled professionally, to work in education contexts (in school and out of school), and some teachers are disposed personally, and skilled professionally, to create and facilitate arts experiences for young people. By implication there are teachers and artists who are not so disposed and skilled.

In the many things to explore here, it may be helpful to take the child as our reference point, and to focus on the nature of the relationship between the child, the artist and the teacher. To use my Whitman poem again as a touchstone, let me remind you that the opening line says *there was a child went forth every day*. It seems to me that this ‘every day’ is a critical factor when we come to consider the teacher: he or she meets the child every day. This allows for all sorts of possibilities. The child-teacher relationship occurs on what I might describe as a kind of axis of latitude. As the child travels through 4th class there is the possibility for the teacher to develop a sequential series of arts education experiences, building day by day, week by week, into a year that sits on the 4th line of latitude, above that marked 3rd Class line of latitude, and ahead of next year’s line marked 5th Class. This assumes, of course, that our cohort of teachers nationally are in general terms skilled and confident teachers of the arts – a question that needs to be addressed for many reasons, only one of which would be to examine ways in which artists, the arts community, and arts providers can support arts education in the formal curriculum and beyond it.

Would it help, would it be more than pedantic wordplay, would it be usefully provocative, if I suggested said that the teacher is charged with the teaching of the arts syllabus, but that artists and

arts organisations have a role in enriching the arts curriculum? Would it help if I suggested that while the teacher travels with her pupils or students on the line of latitude, the artist can provide encounters that are on the longitudinal axis, and that every now and then, in the course of travelling extensively across the 4th Class latitude line, it is really useful to stop at a point of longitude and to have a deep arts experience characterised by intensive engagement and that this is both inherently worthwhile as well as an enrichment of the more regular 'every day' arts education. I am not saying that such deep encounters never happen led by teachers in the course of travelling on the latitude of a year's arts education. Indeed some school arts experiences have just that quality of intensity that I am referencing. But I think you will accept that this is not common and that perhaps, given the status quo of resources (time, space, money, teacher education) the rarity is almost inevitable. What I am suggesting therefore is that these points of intersection between latitude and longitude might be the points of alignment we are looking for.

In meeting them every day, and in being a trained pedagogue, the teacher knows the children and their needs. That is the teacher's expertise and allegiance. The artist, I would suggest, might be characterised as having a complementary expertise and loyalty, defined more by their relationship with the artform. I don't suggest these loyalties or allegiances are exclusive, but I want to suggest that the professional alignment of the individual teacher and artist or, more generally, of the teaching profession and the community of artists, occurs around creating encounters that are high quality arts experiences that meet the needs of the children. While we often think about artists as the possessors of skills and techniques that the teachers do not have, this is to perhaps underplay the skills attached to good pedagogy that teachers have. Just so, placing the emphasis on the skills and techniques of the artist may not acknowledge adequately that the artist is also a carrier of tradition. This may not be a fashionable concept but when children encounter a poet or musician or storyteller, particularly in the context of a project, it is the case that he or she is usually embedded in a tradition, just as a weaver, a paper-maker, a photographer, a glass artist, a mandala maker will make work to some degree out of the tradition or elements of the traditions within such work is made. In encountering the artist, the children have the opportunity to encounter the tradition. They also have the opportunity of encountering someone who has a fluency in the language of their artform beyond what it is reasonable to expect a teacher to have and who is accustomed to making artworks, events and experiences. This aesthetic commitment complementary to the pedagogical commitment of the teacher seems an important point of distinction and alignment.

In 2006 the Arts Council and the DES published Artists~Schools Guidelines. That is a document I recommend to you for its practicality and for its swift, confident journey from ideas and values to specific guidelines as to how this practice can be best conducted. The confidence derives in large measure from the fact that the document grew from a great deal of consultation with practitioners – teachers and artists. It proposes a continuum under the rubric of artists~schools practice with four models offered as key points on that continuum:

1. Arts experiences available to the general public, school groups included;
2. Arts experiences available publicly and supported by complementary services and resources designed for school groups;
3. Arts experiences designed and intended specially for school groups
4. Arts experiences characterised by collaboration between schools and artists / arts organisations. This process leads to projects or programmes of work that are distinguished by intensive engagement between the partners.

It suggests that each of these four models has value and that the ideal would be for young people to have many experiences across all four models in the course of their schooling.

In a short section on the value of artists~schools practice, the guidelines offer four key points:

- (i) that such programmes enrich the curriculum;
- (ii) that such practice makes available to schools and to artists and arts organisations opportunities outside of their normal scope or capacity;
- (iii) that such practice helps to connect the school with the wider community; and
- (iv) that such programmes are important gateways to the arts.

As you will have noticed I am now well into the more practical end of my talk. The Arts Council currently spends €3m in its direct budget for Young People, Children and Education. To that must be added the youth and education programmes of other venues, ensembles and organisations that the Council supports. To that again may be added the education work of some of our National Cultural Institutions: we will hear shortly from Helen O'Donoghue of the Irish Museum of Modern Art which for twenty years has done exceptional work in this area and in the wider field of education, community and outreach. There is also a significant and increasing amount of work in this domain that is initiated and supported by the 34 local authority arts offices throughout the country.

It is clear that, as a country, Ireland allows for a wide range of activity in this area and there are examples of very good practice. In some cases work of international standing has occurred here and that is something of which we should be proud. However any fair analysis would have to conclude that in this domain things are allowed to happen in Ireland, but they are not provided for to happen and this remains the great challenge for all of us: how to turn the permission into a provision.

A quasi-political question surfaces again on behalf of the 70,000 babies: why, if we accept the arts are a birthright, part of human inheritance, does it remain the case that access to the arts is socially determined, with social, economic, and in addition geographic impediments for certain populations? In the past, the level and state of provision for the arts for young people in and out of school was explained away by the scarcity of resources, but that is not a sustainable argument really, for in the 30 years since the Arts Council report, we have known times of economic plenty and times of scarcity. It is less a question of the scarcity of resources than it is about the choices that are made with the available resources.

The question is can we do any better. Points of Alignment offers one way forward, which is critically about seeking a step-change in terms of systematic provision in the field of arts-in-education. The report does call for more resources for arts-in-education practice (and how we could do with that!), but the significance of the report and the real measure of its success, if achieved, are attached to its call for a step change in systematic provision, overseen by DES, DAST and the Arts Council as both real and emblematic evidence of alignment at a policy and strategy level. The creation of a national development unit with a mandate for information, dissemination, research (including action research), professional development, and networking and partnerships was intended to propose a structure that could be the focus for national policy development and the provision of some of the overarching strategic pieces of the ecosystem required for the joined-up action called for in the preface of the report by the Special Committee chair Mary Nunan and towards the close of the essay by Professor John Coolahan which is an important element of the report.

Mirroring that national co-ordination was the recommendation around local arts education partnerships. The advantage of being 30 years after the original report on the place of the arts in Irish education is that there is quite a developed infrastructure of arts provision in many counties and a nascent one in others. When the education infrastructure is considered as a parallel set of interests and resources as would be appropriate when contemplating initiatives in the field of arts education, there are at local level people, organisations, agencies with mutually reinforcing interests

in seeing high-quality arts in education programmes. All counties have a local authority arts office; all counties have an arts centre or venue; all counties have a VEC; all counties have a library service; many counties have an IT and some counties have one or more other third-level institutions. A further set of resources lie in education centres, youth services, music schools, ensembles, arts organisations and individual artists. The search for alignment may not come from the top down, but it could come from elsewhere.

And it could be inspired by some international practice. Some models of such practice are set out in the appendices to the [Points of Alignment](#) report. There is currently exchange between key providers at European level to share information about provision and systems and initiatives in the domain of arts in education. There are countries which have broken through the stasis and introduced a system characterised not only by on-the-ground services but also and critically by joined-up thinking and action by cultural and education policy-makers and providers. In this regard the Norwegian 'Cultural Rucksack' model has much to teach us, I suspect.

It has taken most of a decade to go from 'germ of an idea' through to the threshold of a national system of local music education partnerships and I am sure Aisling from Music Network will have more to tell us about that initiative when she presents later. While it is fantastic to see the practical commitment of U2 and the Ireland Funds in resourcing or pump-priming the next five years of that project, from a political perspective it cannot pass unnoticed that it is philanthropy that has provided the €7m rocket launchers for a project which was carefully researched and negotiated for years and had representatives of both relevant government departments on its advisory committee. The seduction of the political establishment twice in a decade by an image of an international performance arts academy (the latest version of which was sketched at Farmleigh) when there are so many primary arts education needs to be addressed is either a call to action or to despair.

I hope it is the former and the answer may lie in this room. History will record that in terms of arts in education the past thirty years have been the 'hedge school years' - years of extraordinary achievement, much of it in spite of rather than because of the system. The implication is that we need in the next decade to move to an arts education equivalent of the national school system. There may well be a loss in that, for systemic provision sometimes breeds out good qualities from initiatives that had a vitality when they were independent of the system. On the other hand, there is the pressing unified call of the 70,000 babies who begin school in five years, just in time to be in

infant class for the centenary celebrations of the Easter Rising when doubtless the Proclamation will be quoted with its stated commitment to cherish all the children of the nation equally.

We dwell in possibility. We wouldn't be here without shared convictions and commitments which over-ride some more secondary allegiances. We are constantly being reminded by our political masters about the need for joined-up thinking; we are engaging this weekend in joined-up talking (if I can so define the art of conversation); the question is can we engage in the months and years ahead in some joined-up action.

The Emily Dickinson poem 'I dwell in possibility' ends with an image that might inspire us all:

The spreading wide of narrow hands

To gather paradise

Next Monday we will be back in our offices, classrooms, studios, back at our work, whatever that entails, and using our narrow hands to best effect. Hopefully we will also reflect on how if we use our narrow hands together we will achieve the spreading wide which the 70,000 children born last year are entitled to expect of us as their psychological and political parents.

Select Bibliography:

Arts Council, The (Ireland) (2006) *The public and the arts*. Dublin: The Arts Council.

Arts Council, The (Ireland) (2008) *Points of alignment: the report of the special committee on the arts and education*. Dublin: The Arts Council.

Arts Council, The (Ireland) & Department of Education & Science, The. (2006) *Artist~Schools guidelines: towards best practice in Ireland*. Dublin: The Arts Council.

Benson, C. (1979) *The place of the arts in Irish education*. Dublin: The Arts Council.

Lunn, P. & Kelly, E. (2008) *In the frame or out of the picture: a statistical analysis of public involvement in the arts*. Dublin: National Economic & Social Forum (NESF).

Robinson, K. (2001) *Out of our minds: learning to be creative*. Oxford: Capstone.

Furthering Conversations – Voices from the Plenary

The *Creating Conversations* event came to a close with a lively plenary session, chaired by Dr Michael Finneran. This section of the report attempts to give a sense of the range of contributions and healthy disparity of opinion offered on the day. The structure created for the discussion continues the metaphor of conversation, dialogue and discourse.

To open the plenary, the Chair thanked the participants for their interest and lively participation in the proceedings of the weekend to that point. He hoped that the structure of the event had nourished and challenged them on both an intellectual and practical level. He thanked the keynote speakers Martin Drury and Sacha Abercorn, the masterclass leaders Prof. Jonothan Neelands and Leonora Davies, as well as all those who had made brief presentations the previous evening. In attempting to give some structure to the nature and parameters of the debate, the Chair described the questions facing the community as around the following issues:

Why do we need to talk?

It is incumbent upon us to be clear to ourselves and others about the reasons for greater dialogue and cooperation. The case can be made that the arts and education has managed to grow and diversify quite nicely over the past number of years, with general progress achieved in the provision for and access to the arts, and indeed, some notable successes. Why, therefore, are we arguing the case for this organic development to change? Why, exactly is there a need for greater collaboration and collectivity?

Who do we talk with?

This question begs the question of identity within what can be loosely framed as a community of the arts and education. Too often, what is ultimately a shared pursuit (or is it?) has been diluted and divided by questions of ownership, ideology and form. A plethora of groups and sub-groups comprise the community of arts and education, namely *Arts Education*, the *Arts in Education*, the broader *Arts field* and the *Education field*. Are these labels and categories useful? In what way do they interact? How can communication between the various groupings be improved?

What are we to talk about?

In this we are pressed to rank and categorise potential discourse in terms of greatest priority. What conversations are of greatest importance to those involved in the arts and education in Ireland at

this moment in time?; Do they pertain to advocacy, status & resources?; Structures & politics?; Or perhaps practice & policy?

How do we talk and when do we talk?

In a time where communication is often virtual and viral, some consideration should be given to manner in which dialogue and discourse in the community is organised. Is there a need for virtual networks, or indeed for 'real' regional or national ones? Should hubs be organised for particular art-forms or sectors? Or is the nature of the endeavour at hand such that gatherings should be organised on a sporadic basis, such as ones of this nature?

In terms of timing, is it not the case that we as a community need to be more proactive in pre-empting various government initiatives, as opposed to reacting all the time?

Who initiates/directs/continues the dialogue?

This question in this regard is as to whether formal structures/groups/committees are required to facilitate communication and co-operation in the arts and education, or is it sufficient that informal relationship and conversations continue to evolve in an arbitrary and organic manner?

Delegates at the final gathering spoke to the following issues:

- The plenary began with a brief revisiting of the *Points of Alignment* report and a warm welcome for its recommendations. This was tempered by the realisation that it was highly unlikely that the report would ever be implemented, as clearly evidenced by both the long period it took the three stakeholders to publish the report, and the overwhelming lack of interest and response generated by the report, particularly in the two government departments involved. This already gloomy situation is only exacerbated by the current economic recession where the broader fields of both education and the arts will have to fight extremely hard for the retention of resources.
- There was broad agreement that the conversations that had begun this weekend should continue, and should occur on an ongoing basis. There were expressions of support to facilitate that process, most especially from the Sacha Abercorn on behalf of the Puskin Trust, and Helen O'Donoghue on behalf of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) and a number of other parties.

- The suggestion was made that there was as clear need to map the extent of current provision in the arts and education, particularly those projects which are prominent and successful. It was noted that a unit that might provide for such a process of cataloguing was proposed in *Points of Alignment*.
- A caveat was issued that in proceeding with dialogue and meetings it was important to be focussed and clear about the issues to be discussed. There are different discourses pertaining to different sectors and pursuits within the broader community; e.g. the *Point of Alignment* committee was rigidly circumscribed in their mandate to only deal with artists working in education (i.e. the arts in education) and not arts education. The reality is that there is clear delineation in government agencies between different areas of concern, and that in order to prosper and militate for change, it is incumbent upon us to understand these distinctions. As a result, there may well be a need to talk to different agencies in different ways using different language. We here may have a sense of a shared mission, but others do not see that same unity of purpose in their approach to the arts and education, and a broad collective approach could be self-defeating in some respects. On the other hand, it needs to be acknowledged there is an intimate relationship between the arts in education and arts education, and that both are merely an extension in form of the other. A unified approach to the discourse pertaining to both aspects may serve both well. Regardless of the approach employed, there needs to be clarity of language and purpose of use.
- It was noted that regardless of what *form* the work may take, good practice in the arts and education is always ultimately about good pedagogy. It was further agreed that the teacher must be central to good practice, whether leading the process themselves, or in bringing artists in to the schools to facilitate the work.
- Some discussion took place regarding the *National Campaign for the Arts* currently underway. It was speculated that advocacy for the arts and education could take place under this banner, or indeed a similar campaign could be instigated for such a purpose. The question was raised, however as to who would lead and resource such a campaign.
- Harking back to a previous point, some further debate took place as to the nature of the relationship of the arts in education to arts education. Is it a marriage of convenience to begin to bring both together, given that one area is driven by artists and one by teachers, and that both sets of professionals have individual sets of concerns? Is it indeed the case that the involvement of one with the other may potentially confuse matters?
- It was noted that the under-resourcing of all aspects of the arts and education ultimately comes back to the importance, or lack thereof, that Irish society places upon these pursuits.

In order for progress to be made in the arts and education, those of us interested in bringing about such a change need to ask and answer questions around what role the arts and education play in the sort of society we desire? What function can the arts play in the education of the citizens of 21st century Ireland?

- A contribution was made describing the INTO Consultative Conference on Education held in November 2009, and which focussed on arts education. Several hundred teachers attended this two-day event in Gorey, Co. Wexford , and the level of interest and discourse was greatly heartening as being indicative of the continued high status of the arts in Irish primary schools. It was noted that schools have greatly moved away from the mentality of having drama, music, etc. as a treat on a Friday afternoon, but on the flip-side schools are particularly increasingly busy and crowded places where frequently the arts are squeezed out. Some discussion took place regarding the fact that many teachers still feel fearful about teaching the arts. This was echoed by those working in Colleges of Education, and it was remarked that the necessary duality of the teacher as artist/artist as teacher remains a problematic one, particularly for newly qualified teachers.
- Towards the end of the debate, there was some agreement that making progress in this debate will always comes back to our collective ability to espouse what are the values of the arts as education. Heretofore, we have regularly failed to make this case effectively, and as a result, the status of the arts and education has at best remained static. There is a need for targeted advocacy which relies upon clear and accessible arguments, which impact not only upon artists and young people, but also upon economists and policy-makers. Ideally, this would culminate in a dedicated campaign for the arts and young people which strategically targets achievable change.

Furthering Conversations – Actions for the future

From the early planning stages of *Creating Conversations*, it was recognised that the very nature of such a one-off event militated against the identification of definite outcomes and actions for the gathering as a whole.

However, in the months subsequent to January 2010, some consideration has been given by the staff of the Department of Arts Education & Physical Education at Mary Immaculate College to the issue of what concrete and realisable actions could be put in place by the organising team, to continue the conversations begun at *Creating Conversations* and to honour our commitment to the arts and education.

As a result of that process, we undertake to do the following:

1. To strive to continue to develop Mary Immaculate College as a centre for excellence in the arts and education, through teaching and learning, advocacy, research and the development of resources.
2. To develop and launch a new graduate level programme in the arts and education aimed at both teachers and artists who work in educational setting.
3. To develop a dedicated website that provides a forum for the continued expansion of the discourse and the exploration of policy and practice in the arts and education in Ireland.
4. To develop and offer summer school programmes in the arts aimed at primary school teachers and practicing artists.
5. To provide support for any follow-up meetings/events that will build upon the conversations that were initiated at the *Creating Conversations* event.

Creating Conversations – List of Delegates & Invited Guests

Sacha	Abercorn	Pushkin Trust
Louise	Allen	Crafts Council of Ireland
Julie	Brazil	Mary Immaculate College
John	Breen	TEAM Theatre Co.
Stephen	Brennan	Ballet Ireland
Gina	Brocker	Northside Learning Hub
Linda	Butler	Mary Immaculate College
Gemma	Byrnes	Mary Immaculate College
Caoimhin	Corrigan	Leitrim Co. Council
Máire	Davey	Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Co. Council
Leonora	Davies	Music Education Council, UK
Sheila	Deegan	Limerick City Council
Sinead	Dinneen	Mary Immaculate College
Martin	Drury	Arts Council of Ireland
Michael	Finneran	Mary Immaculate College
Emelie	Fitzgibbon	Graffiti Theatre Co.
Michael	Flannery	Marino Institute of Education
Patricia	Flynn	St. Patrick's College
Jayne	Foley	Fresh Film Festival
Jessica	Foley	Mary Immaculate College
Karen	Franklin	Mary Immaculate College
Anna	Galligan	Barnstorm Theatre Co.
Gary	Granville	National College of Art & Design
Theresa	Guschlbauer	Clonmel Junction Festival
Richie	Hayes	Mary Immaculate College
Helen	Hallisey	Cork Arts Circle
Colm	Hefferon	St. Patrick's College
Yvonne	Higgins	Marino Institute of Education
Mary	Howard	Association for Drama in Education in Ireland/UCD
Deoborah	Kelleher	Royal Irish Academy of Music
Orla	Kennedy	Imaginosity - Dublin's Children's Museum
Orla	Kenny	www.practice.ie
Ailbhe	Kenny	Mary Immaculate College
Marc	Mac Lochlainn	Branar Téatar do pháistí
Mary	Manley	Primary Professional Development Service
Una	Mc Cabe	St. Patrick's College
Kate	Mc Carthy	Waterford Institute of Technology
Alicia	Mc Givern	Irish Film Institute
Eina	Mc Hugh	The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
Michael	Mc Loughlin	DLR Youth Arts Programme

Julie	Meighan	Cork Institute of Technology
Eamonn	Mitchell	Mary Immaculate College
Gwen	Moore	Mary Immaculate College
Jennifer	Moroney Ward	Northside Learning Hub
Anne Marie	Morrin	Mary Immaculate College
Lali	Morris	Baboró International Arts Festival for Children
Dorothy	Morrissey	Mary Immaculate College
Siobhan	Mulcahy	Clare Co. Council
Helen	Murphy	Crafts Council of Ireland
Paula	Murphy	St. Patrick's College
Sharon	Murphy	
Elaine	Murtagh	Mary Immaculate College
Jonathan	Neelands	University of Warwick
Deirdre	Ní Chroinín	Mary Immaculate College
Mary	Nunan	University of Limerick
Mark	O'Brien	Axis, Ballymun
Kevin	O'Connor	Mary Immaculate College
Alice	O'Connell	INTO
Helen	O'Donoghue	The Irish Museum of Modern Art
Anne	O'Gorman	National Youth Council
Jane	O'Hanlon	Poetry Ireland
Margaret	O'Keefe	Mary Immaculate College
Irene	O'Meara	Mary Immaculate College
Michael	O'Reilly	
Suzanne	O'Shea	Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
Karen	Power	Mary Immaculate College
Tanya	de Paor	Mary Immaculate College
Fiona	Quill	Mary Immaculate College
Aisling	Roche	Music Network
Orla	Scannell	South Dublin Co. Council
Nora	Stillman	TEAM Theatre Co.
Triona	Stokes	Froebel College of Education
Gaye	Tanham	Arts Council of Ireland
Jean	Tormey	Butler Gallery, Kilkenny
Derek	West	NAPD
Katie	Wink	National Concert Hall
Martin	Yelverton	

Images from the Colloquium







