

Report on National Music Education Conference

Ailbhe Kenny

On 26 September, Voicing 2012, a conference on music education in Ireland took place at Trinity College, Dublin. The conference addressed issues influencing the inclusion and participation of Ireland's children and young people in music. Our thanks to Ailbhe Kenny for this report.

The aim of the conference was to understand how inclusion in music education can be increased so that all children and young people benefit from this type of personal development, engagement with communities and participation in society. Organised by a coalition of partners — Music Generation; St Patrick's College, Drumcondra; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Trinity College, Dublin; and Irish Music Education — the conference brought together a range of expertise from a variety of backgrounds, including practitioners, researchers, performers, education managers and policy makers working across all types of music. Speakers included Dr Stephanie Pitts of the University of Sheffield; Dr Emer Smyth of the ESRI; the composer Brian Irvine; Ailbhe Kenny, a lecturer in music education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Shaun Purcell, CEO of Sligo VEC; Tara O'Brien, a music student at DIT and former student of the Ballymun Music Project; and Prof. Kathleen Lynch of UCD.

Music education plays an important role in enhancing and promoting learning opportunities for young people — a fact reinforced in the recently published ESRI report *Growing Up In Ireland*. Co-author of this report Dr Emer Smyth, speaking at the conference, commented, 'Research has shown that access to cultural activities, including music, within and outside of

school enhances children's development. Participation in the cultural life of their community is every child's right. However, children's access to cultural activities often depends on their socio-economic background and on where they live. It is vital to enhance children's access to these activities so that they have the opportunity to flourish.'

Keynote speaker Dr Stephanie Pitts (University of Sheffield) related new research on musical life histories, highlighting the multiple experiences and influences that impact on musical participation into adulthood. She claimed, 'Opportunities to experience music in school and at home are vital to immediate engagement and long-term interest in music.' Ailbhe Kenny from Mary Immaculate College in speaking of how to foster music within communities stated, 'Success in music education is not about who goes onto third level and becomes a professional musician. It is about fostering a musical society, one where people of all ages engage and participate in a wide range of musical activities at varying levels.'

Professor Kathleen Lynch of UCD called on the music education sector to look at how they are addressing inequalities in music education in Ireland. She referenced the Leaving Certificate as being particularly class-biased in that students who can afford private music lessons outside of school are at an advantage. She called for the need to 'recognise our own insider status in education, and our role in excluding others'. Tara O'Brien, a first year undergraduate music student at DIT, spoke of her struggle in music education coming from Ballymun. She attributed parental support and local publically funded initiatives as essential to her pathway in learning music.

There were also live performances by former punk musician turned classical guitarist Redmond O'Toole and Mark Redmond from Na Píobairí Uilleann, who related their musical stories between playing.