

Arts in education within Irish cultural policy: the “ins” and “outs”

Ailbhe Kenny

Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland.

“Arts in education” is an interesting domain. In Ireland, it is broadly defined as arts interventions in formal education contexts and school engagement with the arts in the public sphere (Arts Council Ireland [ACI], 2008). The very term “arts in education” as opposed to “arts education” (referring to general, mainstream or curriculum arts in schools) draws one into a potential binary between the arts and education worlds. One is “in” the space of the “other”. Issues relating to power, control, responsibility and role invariably surface. Like any meeting point, however, it also opens up significant opportunities for dialogue, creativity, imagining and, of course, tension. Thus, the “in” between space of the two worlds becomes a rich site for discussion, debate and possibility.

Since the 1960s, arts in education has become a regular feature of arts and educational discourse as well as a distinct policy choice, with many cultural institutions adopting “outreach” and “educational” programming initiatives. Heavily influenced by an explosion of child-centred education perspectives, arts in education fits well within this ethos of educating “the whole child”, where artists or arts organisations engage with educational contexts. These artistic “interventions” can range from school theatre productions, to book writing, to live performance, to school murals, to song writing, to gallery visits, to everything in between. Significant benefits for children, young people, schools, teachers, communities, as well as the artists themselves have been well documented internationally and nationally (see e.g. Bamford, 2012; Colley, Eidsaa, Kenny, & Leung, 2012; Flynn & Johnston, 2016; Kenny,

2009, 2010, 2011; Kenny & Morrissey, 2016; Kind, de Cosson, Irwin, & Grauer, 2007; Minett, 2014).

There is exemplary work in the field of Irish arts in education to be found through such organisations as The Ark, Fighting Words, the Association of Teachers'/Education Centres in Ireland, Poetry Ireland, The Design and Crafts Council of Ireland, The National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals and Music Generation, to name but a few. Yet, continually arts in education work is largely fragmented, short-term, under-resourced, sporadic, poorly funded and lacking in rigorous research documentation. There have been increased efforts to address these issues in recent years, however. The Arts in education charter (2013) laid down a significant marker for change in being a joint venture of the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG)¹ and the Department of Education and Skills. This need for joined-up thinking, communication and collaboration between the two departments had been called for as far back as the Benson report (Benson & Ó Tuama, 1979), with the Artists ~Schools Guidelines (ACI, 2006) and Points of alignment (ACI, 2008) further making the case through the years. The Charter outlines a range of commitments with arts in education partnerships being a particular area of focus. Since its publication, momentum has been building to implement its laudable aims through inter-agency collaboration between the arts, education, business, philanthropic and government sectors.

Despite a startling lack of funding, there have been numerous responses to the Charter aided through a designated Implementation Group. This has included, for example, an online portal which acts as a national digital resource of arts and education practice around the country (artsineducation.ie), increased artist residencies within Higher Education Institutions, the establishment of an umbrella body for the arts, education, and cultural institutions – Encountering the Arts Ireland, a review of the Artists ~Schools Guidelines, as well as a major

continuing professional development (CPD) and research initiative, Exploring teacher–artist partnership as a model of CPD for supporting and enhancing arts education in Ireland.

This latter initiative was developed across three phases of teacher–artist partnerships between 2014 and 2016 with a research dimension embedded in each phase, culminating in an extensive report (Kenny & Morrissey, 2016). Evidence-based recommendations highlight the importance of supporting arts in education partnerships through shared CPD for both artists and teachers to create high-quality arts experiences in schools. The findings continually point to the complementary knowledge and skills that both teachers and artists bring to arts in education work,

The partners journeyed together in their learning, respected each other’s varied inputs, shared experiences, valued differing strengths and invested in relationship-building. Their experiences were ones of both professional and personal growth where a high degree of autonomy was afforded them. (Kenny & Morrissey, 2016, p. 86)

It was found that this occurred most successfully when (1) both parties were meaningfully invested in a partnership approach, (2) partnership extended over a sustained period of time and (3) partnership was supported by school principals, education agencies and arts organisations at local level.

This national report resonates with a growing body of international research which advocates for increased partnership and meaningful collaboration between education and the arts (Christophersen, 2013; Christophersen & Kenny, in press; Hall & Thomson, 2007; Hanley, 2003; Holdhus & Espeland, 2013; Kenny, 2010; Upitis, 2005). Arts in education initiatives are often presented as a “magic bullet” for arts education in schools. Existing cultures, expertise and knowledge within schools can often be ignored in a rush to serve wider political agendas, attract increased funding, satisfy multiple stakeholders and provide employment opportunities. Research into the oft-praised, government-supported Norwegian “Cultural

Rucksack” programme, for instance, has revealed a persistent “goodness discourse” about the programme amongst teachers and artists. This was found to result in teachers taking on peripheral (or even marginalised) roles in arts projects (Christophersen, 2013; Christophersen, Breivik, Homme, & Rykkja, 2015). On investigating past “Creative Partnerships” in the UK, Griffiths and Woolf (2009) similarly discovered a myriad of tensions due to conflicting artist/teacher expectations and identities. Thus, important questions around ideological origins, aims and approaches specifically regarding visiting artists in educational contexts arise.

Such tensions are not helped by tendencies to dichotomise the roles of artist and teacher. There exists a prevailing perception that the “liberal” artist lends “authenticity” and specialist expertise to arts experiences while the “conservative” teacher merely facilitates these experiences, or worse still, takes on the role of “guard” to manage behaviour (Christophersen, 2013). Such dichotomies are of course unhelpful and inaccurate. Thus, caution is required within arts in education initiatives, “to ensure that artists involved with schools are not seen as a replacement for the teacher but rather an additional support and resource” (Kenny, 2010, p. 163). Effective artist–teacher partnerships have been shown to require open communication, extensive co-planning, flexibility, on-going support and reciprocal cooperation (Abeles, 2004; Christophersen & Kenny, in press; Colley et al., 2012; Kenny & Morrissey, 2016; Snook & Buck, 2014). Within meaningful partnerships, “Artists responded positively to the teachers’ insights and expertise and in return teachers became excited about the possibilities the arts and the artists had to offer students” (Kind et al., 2007, p. 844). Without respectful, reciprocal partnership then, arts in education initiatives are in danger of becoming an act of misguided goodness where opportunities for deep engagement and learning can be missed. This is true not just for the children and young people for whom the

initiatives claim to serve, but indeed for the teachers, artists, schools and organisations also involved.

This brings us to the most recent Irish cultural policy initiative, Creative Ireland. This governmental legacy programme (stemming from the 1916 centenary celebrations) is a five year plan which aims to facilitate “an ecosystem of creativity” for “individual wellbeing, social cohesion and economic success” (Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs [DAHRRGA], 2017, p. 5). In relation to the arts in education, pillar one, “enabling the creative potential of every child” is most relevant as will be the forthcoming “Creative Children” plan (DAHRRGA, 2017, pp. 22–23). A key objective is that by 2022 every child in Ireland will have access to tuition and participation in art, music, drama and coding.

While investment and designated funding to implement the Arts in education charter is most welcome (and long overdue), there are numerous issues with these underlying ideologies and focus expressed in this document. For instance, there is no mention of artist–teacher partnerships and how these might be developed and sustained within an arts in education agenda. Who is “in” and who is “out” within these plans is currently unclear. The emphasis on creativity and not the arts is also problematic. Time and time again, the arts have lost out within creativity policies to more “profitable” areas such as science, engineering and information technology. The explicit mention of coding, as well as the very narrow focus on certain art forms (where is dance, literature and film for example?), is somewhat worrying within this first pillar. Furthermore, there is a danger with such aims set out that the arts may be vulnerable to “policy attachment” (Gray, 2002), seen for their instrumental and economic value as opposed to their inherent worth.

Despite these shortcomings, Creative Ireland holds enormous potential for the country and one hopes that it will raise Ireland up the European Union league tables in terms of spending on arts and culture (where we currently linger around the bottom). How the complexity of arts in education work will be supported and resourced requires thoughtful and critical planning to maximise its impact to indeed “enable the creative potential of every child” (DAHRRGA, 2017, pp. 22–23). Short term, under resourced, quick fix and unilateral approaches are no longer acceptable in this area. Continued efforts to engage across governmental departments, arts and cultural agencies, educational institutions as well as with the teachers and artists on the ground are of paramount importance to ensure an “all-in” shaping of the future pathways for arts in education. This is an opportunity not to be missed.

Note

1. The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) was subsequently renamed as Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA).

References

- Abeles, H. (2004). The effect of three orchestra/school partnerships on students' interest in instrumental music instruction. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 52, 248–263.
- Arts Council Ireland (ACI). (2006). *Artists ~Schools Guidelines: Towards best practice in Ireland*. Dublin: Author.
- ACI. (2008). *Points of alignment: The report of the special committee on the arts and education*. Dublin: Author.
- Bamford, A. (2012). *Arts and cultural education in Norway*. Bodo: The Norwegian Centre for Arts and Cultural Education (KKS).
- Benson, C., & Ó Tuama, S. (1979). *The place of the arts in Irish education*. Dublin: The Arts Council.
- Christophersen, C. (2013). Helper, guard or mediator? Teachers' space for action in the cultural rucksack, a Norwegian national program for arts and culture in schools. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 14(1.11). Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v14si1/>
- Christophersen, C., Breivik, J., Homme, A. D., & Rykkja, L. H. (2015). *The cultural rucksack: A national programme for arts and culture in Norwegian schools*. Oslo: Arts Council of Norway.
- Christophersen, C., & Kenny, A. (Eds.). (in press). *Musician-teacher collaborations: Altering the chord*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Colley, B., Eidsaa, R. M., Kenny, A., & Leung, B. W. (2012). Creativity in partnership practices. In G. McPherson & G. Welch (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of music education* (Vol 2, pp. 408–426). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DAHRRGA). (2017). *Creative Ireland programme 2017-2022*. Dublin: Author. Retrieved from <http://creative.ireland.ie/>
- Department of Education and Skills & Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. (2013). *Arts in education charter*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Flynn, P., & Johnston, T. (2016). *Possible selves in music: The transformative potential for children and young people of performance music education based on principles of diversity*. Dublin: Music Generation.
- Gray, C. (2002). Local government and the arts. *Local Government Studies*, 28(1), 77–90.
- Griffiths, M., & Woolf, F. (2009). The Nottingham apprenticeship model: Schools in partnership with artists and creative practitioners. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(4), 557–574.
- Hall, C., & Thomson, P. (2007). Creative partnerships? Cultural policy and inclusive arts practice in one primary school. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(3), 315–329.
- Hanley, B. (2003). The good, the bad and the ugly – arts partnerships in Canadian elementary schools. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 104(5), 11–20.
- Holdhus, K., & Espeland, M. (2013). The visiting artist in schools: Arts based or school based practices? *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 14(1.10). Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v14si1/>
- Kenny, A. (2009). *Knowing the score: Local authorities and music*. Dublin: St. Patricks College, Wexford Co. Council, Sligo County Council.
- Kenny, A. (2010). Too cool for school? Musicians as partners in education. *Irish Educational Studies*, 29 (2), 153–166.
- Kenny, A. (2011). Mapping the context: Insights and issues from local government development of music communities. *British Journal of Music Education*, 28(2), 213–226.

Kenny, A., & Morrissey, D. (2016). Exploring teacher-artist partnership as a model of CPD for supporting and enhancing arts education in Ireland. Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Kind, S., de Cosson, A., Irwin, R., & Grauer, K. (2007). Artist-teacher partnerships in learning: The in/ between spaces of artist-teacher professional development. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30 (3), 839–864.

Minett, P. (2014). CRAFTed: Learning skills for life, primary schools programme evaluation 2014. Kilkenny: Design & Crafts Council Ireland.

Snook, B., & Buck, R. (2014). Artists in schools: “kick starting” or “kicking out” dance from New Zealand classrooms. *Journal of Dance Education*, 14(1), 18–26.

Upitis, R. (2005). Experiences of artists and artist-teachers involved in teacher professional development programs. *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 6(8). Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v6n8/v6n8.pdf>