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Early Years Quality Unit

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Draft Principles for the Facilitation of the Arts in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care – An Introduction

The Creative Ireland Programme is an ‘all of government initiative’, running from 2017 to 2022, which places creativity at the centre of public policy, with the underlying proposition that participation in cultural and creative activity promotes individual, community and national wellbeing. The Creative Ireland Programme is built around five Pillars including Creative Youth, which aims to enhance children and young people’s access to creative activities in early learning and care (ELC) services, in schools and in communities. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), as a key partner in the implementation of Creative Youth, is responsible for a number of actions contained within the Creative Youth Plan.

The DCEDIY has committed to the development of key principles underpinning young children’s quality engagement with the arts in ELC settings. In 2019 research was commissioned to develop a report that would include an overview of how creativity, play and the arts feature in ELC policy and provision; a glossary of key terms; and an articulation of key principles underpinning this area of practice. This work was to be informed by Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. Following a successful tender, Dr Triona Stokes of Maynooth University was selected to carry out this research. A sub group was established with representatives of the DCEDIY, the Department of Education, the Arts Council, the Creative Ireland Programme team in the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, to oversee the work.

In November 2019 a consultation event was held at the DCEDIY to share, explore and discuss draft principles with artists and ELC practitioners. Following this consultation, the principles were further developed and are published here in draft form. The intention is that this paper will remain a draft while artists and ELC practitioners use and explore the validity of the principles in practice. This will happen in two ways. Artists and ELC practitioners are invited to examine the principles and how they apply to their work throughout 2021. In addition, research will take place in early 2021 to examine the use of the principles in a small number of ELC settings. A second consultation event will take place in November 2021 to discuss the key principles and their use in ELC practice. The objective after November 2021 would be to finalise the key principles for the facilitation of the arts in promoting play and creativity in ELC. The principles would then be used to underpin CPD opportunities for artists and ELC practitioners.

The commitment to supporting quality engagement with the arts and creativity in ELC settings has also been underpinned by the award in 2019 of bursaries to four organisations working in arts and creativity (Children’s Books Ireland, Graffiti Theatre Company, The Ark, and ReCreate) who are working in collaboration with ELC services to share resources or services to a large number of groups in the sector.

Toby Wolfe

Preamble to the Draft Principles

This *Discussion Paper on Facilitating the Arts in Early Learning and Care: Towards Best Practice* incorporates *Draft Principles for Facilitating the Arts in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care*.

The discussion paper has been commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) in conjunction with Creative Ireland, to examine principles for facilitating the arts in early learning and care, placing particular focus on play and creativity. It sets out draft principles for facilitating the arts which espouse the trusting relationships and supportive environments necessary for young children to have positive experiences of the arts. The principles for facilitating the arts contained in this discussion document will inform the design of a subsequent programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the Early Years.

While the *Draft Principles for Facilitating the Arts in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care* can be referenced for use with older children, in this document, early learners refer to the period of birth to six years. These principles have been written with close reference to *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland* (2006) and *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curricular Framework* (NCCA, 2009) (See pages 1-8 for details).

Young children are viewed as contributing citizens with entitlements to opportunities and supports for their learning and development as set out in government policy (*National Children's Strategy*, 2000; *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families*, 2018). Thus, the vision for the child in this document is that of active and agentic creator within his or her individual learning communities of home, local community, and early learning and care setting. Under Article 29 (UNCRC, 1989), the aims of education include the development of the child's talents and abilities to his/her full potential. According to *Síolta* Standard 1 (2006:1):

Ensuring that each child's rights are met requires that she/he is enabled to exercise choice and to use initiative as an active participant and partner in her/his own development and learning.

The *Draft Principles for Facilitating the Arts in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care* are presented overleaf as individual statements with related aspects listed beneath. They are grouped in sequence, starting with the child, and extending to factors supporting arts facilitation practice. Following the presentation of *Draft Principles for Facilitating the Arts in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care*, and an overview of the policy context, a rationale for the inclusion of the principles is provided in the form of a literature review which describes play and creativity in the arts, and provides an evidence base for each of the four combined statements which constitute the principles overleaf.

Draft Principles for Facilitating the Arts in Promoting Play and Creativity in Early Learning and Care

Children are creative...

-with intrinsic human qualities, desires and capacities which enable creative and imaginative arts expression, given ample time and opportunity

-with an innate sense of curiosity and a propensity for fun and joy, which can be fostered and developed through access to different art forms and experiences

-with pathways to self-knowledge through individual artistic exploring and creating, which can foster a sense of agency and belonging

-with insights offered into their unique nature, dispositions and identities through artistic contributions, regardless of age, background or ability.

Facilitator's note: *The supporting adult notices the child's creative expression in his or her unique ways of communicating ideas through the arts. When encouraged to take the lead in artistic experimentation, the child can learn more about him/herself and the art form(s) and share this using his/her chosen means.*

Children's creative expression must be valued and nurtured...

-through the creation of a secure environment in which supporting adults recognise and honour children's artistic choices and expressions

-by building relationships of trust with playful, supporting adults, who tailor support for children to engage in, create and respond to art works individually, and as a community

-through regular access to provocations and stimulants including natural materials and outdoor play and aesthetically rich indoor environments

-through facilitating access to a variety of art works and forms in a variety of settings.

Facilitator's note: *By cultivating an atmosphere of trust in which the child can explore the arts and create alone, and with others, the adult offers support. Sometimes the child needs extra time or additional material to inspire him/her, develop ideas or progress art works or explorations.*

Children's creative capacities can be developed...

-with adequate time and frequency of opportunity to play and create in the arts

-with the provision of sensory, aesthetic and loose materials, encouraging multiple interpretations and symbolic use

-through playful engagement with others, including supporting adults affirming effort and encouraging perseverance in artistic pursuits

-through supporting adults observing and posing questions and challenges that invite flexible, critical and creative thinking and expression.

Facilitator's note: *When adult-supported opportunities are offered to children to play and create in the arts, their artistic efforts and contributions are affirmed. Children can be encouraged to try new and different approaches to their arts endeavours through the provision of access to a variety of environments and materials, and in conversation with a supporting adult.*

Facilitating the Arts is a play-based and creative process...

- with integrated experiences supporting the child's development and emotional growth
- which observes, documents and follows the child's lead, pace and interests
- which is felt in the body and mind and can be experienced as a state of flow
- with possibilities for elevated learning, where children are making connections and deepening their understanding
- from which products or works with and for children may emerge, but not in every instance
- which can be prompted or progressed by the facilitator in the provision of further support or additional materials.

Facilitator's note: *Supporting adults facilitating first-hand experience and deep engagement with the arts offers processes which allow children to learn for and about themselves, and about the art form(s). Sometimes this will involve making and sharing art works or responding to the art works of others.*

Discussion Paper on Facilitating the Arts in Early Learning and Care: Towards Best Practice Principles

Policy developments in the early childhood sector, as well as in the collaborating arts and education sectors are outlined to serve as context for the discussion paper. These reflect recent governmental policy publications, including the *Creative Ireland Strategy* (2017-2022), and *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* (2018-2028).

Introducing the Early Childhood Care and Education Context

A number of significant developments within the early childhood sector inform the background to this discussion paper. Such developments include an increase in workforce qualifications and universal pre-school education, further to the establishment of quality and curriculum frameworks and the ongoing revision of the Irish Primary School Curriculum (PSC, 1999). Each of these developments informs the discussion paper and will be addressed as part of the *National Early Years Strategy* (2013), preceded by *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* (2018-2028).

Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2006), referred to as *Síolta*, and *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curricular Framework* (NCCA, 2009).

Síolta (CECDE, 2006) supports and assesses improvements in quality of practice in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) from birth to six years. It comprises Principles, Standards and Components of Quality which represent the multiplicity of factors that inform quality in education and care settings. Twelve principles set out the vision for the framework, which finds practical application in ECCE through sixteen standards. These stipulate the child's right to be actively engaged in his or her learning and development as an agentic partner, with seventy-five quality components of practice further supported by 'signposts for reflection'.

The twelve principles of *Síolta* (CECDE,2006) are listed in Table 1:

The Principles of <i>Síolta</i>: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Early childhood is a significant and distinct time in life that must be nurtured, respected, valued and supported in its own right. ➤ The child's individuality, strengths, rights, and needs are central in the provision of quality early childhood experiences. ➤ Parents are the primary educators of the child and have a pre-eminent role in promoting her/his well-being, learning and development. ➤ Responsive, sensitive, and reciprocal relationships, which are consistent over time, are essential to the wellbeing, learning and development of the young child. ➤ Equality is an essential characteristic of quality early childhood care and education. ➤ Quality early childhood settings acknowledge and respect diversity and ensure that all children and families have their individual, personal, cultural, and linguistic identity validated. ➤ The physical environment of the young child has a direct impact on her/his well-being, learning and development. ➤ The safety, welfare and well-being of all children must be protected and promoted in all early childhood environments. ➤ The role of the adult in providing quality early childhood experiences is fundamental. ➤ The provision of quality early childhood experiences requires cooperation, communication, and mutual respect. ➤ Pedagogy in early childhood is expressed by curricula or programmes of activities which take a holistic approach to the development and learning of the child and reflect the inseparable nature of care and education. ➤ Play is central to the well-being, development and learning of the young child. 	

Table 1: The Twelve Principles of *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006)

Aistear: The Early Childhood Curricular Framework (NCCA,2009)

'Much of children's early learning and development takes place through play and hands-on experiences. Through these, children explore social, physical, and imaginary worlds. These experiences help them to manage their feelings, develop as thinkers and language users, develop socially, be creative and imaginative, and lay the foundations for becoming effective communicators and learners' (Aistear, NCCA. 2009:11)

Aistear, meaning *journey*, is a curriculum framework which describes the types of learning that are important for young children, and offers ideas and suggestions with regards to how this learning might be nurtured and developed. In terms of children’s learning, dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding are considered. To preface the introduction of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curricular Framework (2009)*, four research papers were commissioned by the NCCA in 2007, which are summarised in Table 2:

Summary of <i>Early Childhood: How Aistear was Developed. Research Papers</i> (NCCA)	
‘The Relationship between Education and Care’ (Hayes, 2007)	emphasises the key role the adult plays in a nurturing pedagogy, through encouraging playful interactions and behaviours, and observing, interpreting, and reflecting upon children’s contributions in planning for future learning opportunities.
‘Early Learning and Development’ (French, 2007)	examines the nature of caring, trusting, and respectful relationships in learning with and from other learners, including adults. The importance of children using their senses and their imagination as means of learning is highlighted, in addition to the importance of activities which challenge the child both indoors and outdoors.
‘Play as a Context for Early Learning and Development’ (Kernan, 2007)	explores different types of play and conditions necessary for quality play such as time, space and rich learning environments. The role of the playful adult, in establishing and supporting play is emphasised, with reference to the parent and the professional.
‘Supporting Children’s Early Learning through Formative Assessment’ (Dunphy, 2008)	proposes a narrative approach to assessment, whereby a rich picture of a child’s learning can be attained through a variety of means, such as through stories, notes and photographs collated in everyday activity, which focus on developing dispositions, attitudes and values, skills, knowledge and understandings.

Table 2: Summary of *Early Childhood: How Aistear was Developed. Research Papers* (NCCA)

Throughout the research papers commissioned by the NCCA and summarised in Table 2, the child is viewed as competent and capable learner, supported by the caring adult who provides rich and stimulating environments and nurtures curiosity and wonder in learning. *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curricular Framework (2009)* (referred to hereafter as *Aistear*) depicts the child as an active, confident, and agentic learner. The active child learns through first-hand experiences, in exploration and experimentation with materials and in interaction with others, ‘whereby children learn by doing, using their senses to explore materials and objects around them with others’ (*Aistear*, 2009:10). The agentic child can exercise choice and control in relation to his or her creative play and move towards independence by making choices (Hayes, 1993; French, 2013). Agency is necessarily balanced with due regard for others and the parameters of an early learning and care environment.

Each of the twelve principles in *Aistear* constitute a short statement, accompanied by an interpretation of the principles from the perspective of the child. The adult’s role in supporting and developing learning is highlighted. *Aistear* is based on twelve principles of early learning and development which are presented in three groups in Table 3:

<i>Aistear</i>	<i>Principles of Early Learning and Development</i>
1	The first group concerns children and their lives in early childhood: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child’s uniqueness

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality and diversity • Children as citizens.
2	<p>The second group concerns children's connections with others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Parents, family and community • The adult's role
3	<p>The third group concerns how children learn and develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic learning and development • Active learning • Play and hands-on experiences • Relevant and meaningful experiences • Communication and language • The learning environment.

Table 3: Twelve Principles of Early Learning and Development

Aistear (2009) comprises four interconnected themes, *Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating,* and *Exploring and Thinking.* For the purposes of this document, the theme of *Identity and Belonging* will be introduced, followed by *Exploring and Thinking, Communicating* and *Well-being.*

Identity and Belonging concerns the child's positive sense of self as a citizen with a contribution of value to make, both as a family and community member. In partnership with the adult, the child is supported to express him or herself creatively and through a variety of types of play. Resourcing play stipulates the representation of diverse cultures and races, for example, through the provision of dolls with various skin tones, and the inclusion of a variety of eating utensils, from chopsticks to cutlery.

Exploring and Thinking involves children making sense of their world, questioning, and investigating through the formation, testing, and refinement of ideas through play. As part of 'Aim 3: Children will explore ways to represent ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects and actions through symbols', improvising, moving, playing, talking, writing, story-telling, music and art can be used by children to express feelings, thoughts and ideas. Under *Aim 2*, children, in partnership with the adult, 'use their creativity and imagination to think of new ways to solve problems.'

Communicating offers children access to multiple modes of expression for different purposes and uses. Forms of communication, including non-verbal communication, includes the use of the body, as well as the voice in creative and imaginative expression, for example, through creating art, dance, story, sculpture, and sign language. The role of the adult involves the support of children's creative expression from art and cookery, to scientific exploration and storytelling. The supportive adult fosters the child's growing confidence in trying new things, risk-taking and thinking creatively.

Well-being focuses both on the children's physical well-being and their psychological well-being, to express their thoughts and feelings, to play and work with others, and to deal with

challenges. *Aim 3* of the well-being strand is *Children will be creative and spiritual*. Some of the associated learning goals are of specific relevance and are, therefore, highlighted in Table 4:

Aistear Themes	Well-being
Aims	Learning Goals
<i>Aim 3: Children will be creative and spiritual</i>	<p><i>In partnership with the adult, children will:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Express themselves creatively and experience the arts 2. Express themselves through a variety of types of play 3. Develop and nurture their sense of wonder and awe 4. Become reflective and think flexibly 5. Care for the environment 6. Understand that others may have beliefs and values different to their own.

Table 4: Aim 3 of the Well-being strand of Aistear (2009), Children will be creative and spiritual

Further to the National Early Years Strategy (2013) recommendation for the creation of specific supports, the *Síolta* Quality Assurance Programme (2013) formulated a ten-step supported evaluative process for early childhood providers. The Quality Assurance Programme is currently under revision within the Department of Skills and Education (DES) under *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* (2018-2028), discussed on page 6 of the document.

Aistear/Síolta Practice Guidelines were published by the NCCA in 2015 to provide assistance with the planning, implementation and assessment *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006) as a unit, to enhance the curriculum for children. Curriculum and curriculum statements are developed under the six pillars of practice, comprising: *parent partnerships, learning environment, play, planning and assessing and transitions*.

The Revision of the Primary School Curriculum

Since its publication in 1999, Arts Education as a curricular area in the Irish Primary School Curriculum (PSC) has enabled children to creatively express ideas, feelings, and experiences, with such opportunities for creative expression supporting children’s well-being and cross-curricular learning. Active participation in Arts Education has been considered fundamental to the child’s acquisition of the knowledge, understanding, and skills associated with the Arts, including the subjects of Music, Visual Arts, and Drama.

The PSC is being revised and updated through a national consultative process with stakeholders since 2018. The proposed curriculum framework includes a focus on key competencies, including the competency of being creative. This competency recognises children’s innate creativity, nurturing and promoting children’s interests and opportunities for meaningful creative experiences through exploring, clarifying, and expressing ideas, feelings, and experiences. It involves:

- Participating in and enjoying creative and cultural experiences

- Being curious
- Being imaginative
- Being innovative
- Using creative processes
- Exploring alternative ways of communicating (NCCA, 2020).

In embedding the competency of creativity throughout the curriculum, the Primary Curriculum Review and Development (NCCA, 2020) aims to ensure children experience a broad and balanced Arts Education.

The redeveloped curriculum will be presented in five broad curriculum areas, one of which is Arts Education. It is envisaged that the broad learning outcomes of Arts Education would support learning in Visual Arts, Music and Drama, and other aspects of Arts Education such as Dance, Film and Digital Media. The framework also aims to enable schools to engage with local, national, and international initiatives and opportunities in the arts by offering more flexible time allocation options. The learning outcomes support integrated learning experiences in stages 1-2 (junior infants to second class), with children progressing towards subject-specific learning outcomes in stages 3-4 (third to sixth class). While disciplines within Arts Education have a common creative process and share transferable skills, each has its own knowledge, concepts, and skills.

The Primary Curriculum Review and Development (NCCA, 2020) acknowledges the importance of transitions and continuity and will build on earlier learning experiences from home and pre-school which have been supported by *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009). A resource being developed by the NCCA with preschools and primary schools to ease transitions and support continuity is the 'Mo Scéal' or 'my story' templates. Mo Scéal helps to tell the story of the child's learning and development, including their creative experiences. With parental consent, the information in Mo Scéal can be shared between the preschool and the primary school in the collaborative support of young children and their families.

ECCE Provision

The introduction of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme of universal subsidy in 2009 marked the introduction of a free daily pre-school provision for all children from three years of age. This was extended to a two-year pre-school provision in 2018, further to which an income-assessed subsidy was added through the National Childcare Scheme in 2019. Early learning and care settings which serve the free daily pre-school provision are subject to Department of Education inspections with associated reports published. To this end, *A Guide to Early Years Inspection* (DES, 2018) has been developed since the period of inspections began in 2016. The guide sets out the principles and model of inspection, its stages and content focus for early years. It also stipulates the need for the opportunities to engage in activities which build positive dispositions towards the arts, among other areas (DES, 2018). This includes opportunities for children to demonstrate creativity, to express their ideas, feelings, and thoughts creatively, and to respond creatively as they engage in learning (DES, 2018). Signposts to evaluate practice that are central to this thinking are:

- Evidence that children have opportunities to engage with activities that build early positive dispositions towards the arts
- Consideration of how effectively indoor and outdoor environments and resources are used to develop children's curiosity and imagination
- Play as means of enabling creative expression.

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2018-2028).

First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (DCYA, 2018) builds upon *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (2014-2020), extending from birth to twenty-four years. It responds to the Report on the Expert Advisory Group on the Early Years Strategy, *Right from the Start*. In *First 5* (DCYA, 2018), the government sets out goals pertaining to the five first big steps in the early years of life, including the reform of the early learning and care system.

To participate freely in arts and cultural activity is identified as a factor in enhancing the everyday lives of children (DCYA, 2018). It names those involved in providing the learning and care of young children as 'the key determinant of quality', identifying that for children to thrive, 'they must be equipped to foster the types of relationships and create environments that characterise positive experiences' (DCYA, 2018).

An increasingly qualified workforce in early childhood learning and care has been a trend of recent years. In 2017-2018, 94% of all staff working directly with children had attained a National Framework Qualification (NQF) of Level 5, while over 65% had a Level 6 or higher (DCYA, 2018). There has been a yearly percentage increase in Level 8 qualifications since 2015-2016 with the overall proportion of staff without formal childcare qualifications standing at just 6% in 2017-2018 (DCYA, 2018). These developments are in line with the stated governmental goal for early childhood of 'an appropriately qualified and valued workforce' (First 5, 2018:14).

Introducing the policy context of arts and cultural participation for young children

This discussion paper foregrounds the child's entitlements to arts participation and engagement as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), specifically to Articles 13 Freedom of Expression and Article 31 Leisure, Recreation and Cultural Activities. Article 31 and the fulfilment of each element therein is fundamental to the quality of childhood and necessary to protect the unique and evolving nature of childhood (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b). Irish government policy documents and strategy connecting to arts participation are outlined, further to a consideration of policy and research supported by the Arts Council, focusing specifically on aspects concerning the arts and cultural participation of young children.

The broad yet distinctive contribution of the arts is clearly stated in the Arts in Education Charter (2012:12) in the inclusion of the submission of National Cultural Institutions to the National Development Plan (2007-2013) which stated that:

'Art, broadly defined, is a fundamental human enterprise: the making of meaning, individual and collective, through representation. In making art we make ourselves. In understanding art, we understand ourselves.'

The Arts in Education Charter (2012) identifies the significant opportunity pre-school provision presents in enabling young children to experience a wide variety of art forms, with specific reference made to music, painting, dance, and drama. The Charter (2012) recognises the role of *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curricular Framework* (2009) in addressing shared learning goals of the adult and child, accessed through activities such as building, printing, sculpting and sewing. In terms of music, examples of listening and responding to a wide variety of music types and the creation of musical instruments are offered. Story, song, poetry and drama are each identified, in addition to references to literacy learning potential and the use of language in both creating imagined experience, and in recreating lived experience (2012).

The role of early childhood arts in providing rich content for creative experiences in the support of children's language development is also emphasised in 'Early Childhood Arts – Three Perspectives', published by the Arts Council in 2013. The three commissioned research papers serve to present the context for the policy and provision of early learning and care in Ireland, the place of the arts in early learning and development and an international view of supporting the growth of early childhood arts practice in Ireland. 'The Place of the Arts in Early Childhood Learning and Development' (French, 2013), as Perspective Two, underlines the necessity of a close and nurturing relationship between the adult and child to facilitate the child in making sense of the world through shared creative arts experiences. Children grow and develop within their own particular family and socio-cultural context. In experiencing shared early arts experiences as part of a community, the child learns to value and celebrate the arts socially.

The Arts Council/ESRI (2016) study of arts and cultural participation among children and young people draws on the longitudinal study, *Growing up in Ireland* (Smyth, 2016). It examines arts and cultural participation of children at the ages of 3,5,9 and 13, and the associated benefits of children's participation therein and takes account of the frequency of young children's involvement in creative play through activities such as painting, drawing and playing make-believe games, in addition to reading and attending cultural events. The study notes that little is known about the use of arts and cultural activities in pre-school settings (Smyth, 2016:14). In addition to the need for staff professional development in this area, the research alludes to the potential role of early learning and care settings in challenging gender stereotypes from an early age.

Government Strategy for Arts Participation of Young Children

Government strategy has adopted an interdepartmental approach to developing the arts for children with the more recent policy documentation termed 'whole-of-government' in nature. Beginning with an overview of the Creative Ireland Programme, and the Creative Youth Plan in particular, government-led strategy supporting arts participation is referenced from other domains also, such as the *Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2018*.

The Creative Ireland Programme (2017-2022) represents a five-year programme designed to promote individual, community and national well-being through artistic and cultural participation, through which well-being can be developed. The *Creative Youth Plan (2018)* is the implementation plan to realise the programme goals for children and young people in their development as creative citizens.

The role of creativity and the arts in education are noted by the Creative Youth Plan (2018:9) for their importance, not simply for developing individual creative capacities and skill, but also 'for encouraging social responsibility and personal qualities such as resilience, empathy and a capacity for friendship.' With respect to younger age-groups, The Creative Youth Plan commits to the provision of an Early Years Bursary for creative projects and to the development of an Early Years CPD programme. The aim of the programme is to enable teachers to support children in understanding their creative skills and capacities through the mastery of associated skill sets and in the application of specific techniques.

The *Creative Ireland Strategy (2017-2022)* answers the call for a co-ordinated national plan across arts and education as set out in the report of the Special Committee in Arts and Education, *Points of Alignment* (2008) under the Arts Act 2003. The strategy stipulates the requirement for greater collaboration between teachers and artists and between art forms 'in the development of a creative ecosystem' (2017:9). Creative Youth (2018) holds as its stated long-term objectives:

- collaboration between formal and non-formal approaches to creativity in education
- extending the range of creative activities offered children and young people
- embedding creative processes through programme development that helps in the application of creative skills and capacities
- continuing professional development for teachers working from Early Years to Post-Primary.

The *Healthy Ireland Framework (2019-2025)* continues the work of the *Healthy Ireland Framework 2013-2018* in the promotion of physical, emotional and mental health for all Irish citizens. The strategy attends to the holistic development of the child and his or her individual needs through the development of skills, aptitudes, and abilities in the early establishment of healthy lifestyle habits. These include the recognition of the importance of access to a broad range of arts experiences.

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA, 2016) commits to equal access for children of all abilities to indoor and outdoor play-based educational activities. It emphasises an inclusive experience of the arts for children and families in order that they recognise their own cultural identity reflected in the various aspects of the arts curriculum encountered.

Facilitating the Arts in Early Learning and Care: A Review of Literature

A review of literature is presented describing arts facilitation in the early learning and care settings with reference to the Irish context. The concepts of play and creativity are broadly introduced, followed by an overview of play and creativity and their connection to the arts. Conditions necessary for facilitating the creative arts in early years are then presented with respect to the Irish policy context, representing, in part, the draft principle statement, 'Children's creative capacities can be developed'. Thereafter, the remaining three overriding statements of the draft principles are connected to an accompanying literature repository, which focuses on the role of the facilitator in arts education. A glossary of terms has been provided on page 31 which serves to clarify the meaning of key terms and phrases used throughout.

Play and Early Learning and Care

Play has long been recognised as a complex activity intrinsic to human development (Bandura, 1986; Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010). Educationalists from Froebel (1826) to Vygotsky (1978), Tagore (1929) to Gupta (2010), have emphasised the role of play across cultures in providing contexts and processes for children's learning and development (Stokes, 2016). Beginning with Plato, Courtney (1989) identifies play and aesthetic experience as the foundation of education. Exemplifying an understanding of play as having value and power in early childhood beyond education, Froebel (1826) claimed play as the highest phase of child

development. Vygotsky (1978:102) also termed play 'the highest possible level of pre-school development', with the origins of creative imagining stem from young children's symbolic play.

'Free play' has been distinguished from structured play in terms of the materials which govern it, and the extent to which children have choice and control over it (Moyles, 1989; Hayes, 1993). Tovey (2013:17) defines free-flow play as that which 'emphasises the freedom essential to play for children to choose to take control, explore, create, imagine and go beyond the here and now.' Free-flow play has been associated with creativity as through their instigation of similar processes in the brain we are enabled 'to reach our highest moments of learning and understanding' (Bruce, 2004:8).

Creativity and Early Learning and Care

Traditionally, creativity was viewed as the establishment of an original contribution or product through meaningful ideas, forms or methods which transcend traditional rules, patterns of relationships (Thomson, 2011). Lubart (2016:7) defines creativity as 'the ability to generate new, original ideas, meaningful and valuable in their context'. In his writing on creativity, Lubart (2000) underlines the importance of both process and product in the sequencing of thoughts and actions leading to novel, adaptive production.

For a product or its associated activity to be considered creative, Weisberg (1986; 1993) separated its novelty for the creator from its novelty for the world. Csikszentmihalyi's (1998) systems view of creativity added the condition of 'recognition' to its definition, in that to be creative the contribution must hold value in its domain or within its own field. The term 'big 'C' Creativity' can be applied to world-renowned creative thinkers and innovators for whom universal novelty was a factor of their inventions or contributions (Craft, 2000). This can be used to distinguished day-to-day creative acts by all mankind as constituting 'little 'c' Creativity' (Craft, 2000). Daily creative acts could include adapting a recipe to suit the ingredients available or interpreting an object or material in a new way to serve an alternate purpose, such as the lollipop stick used in play as a gate or lever.

In addition to 'novelty' and 'recognition', 'quality' is a further factor in the identification of creativity (Saracho, 2002). Based on a study of three to five-year olds, Saracho (1992: 432) defines creativity as a process, product, or qualities in the individual person's interpersonal and intrapersonal process where the products have originality, high quality and intrinsic importance. When children work to build or create something for the first time, it is considered creative for them (Isbell and Yoshizawa, 2016). Thus, the novelty for the person applies, as the built material is novel to the participant children. In terms of domain value, it can be argued

that the original and spontaneous contributions of children are valued by the child's parents and teachers (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

Wallas (1926) recognised four steps in the creative process of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. The preparation or lead-up to creative thinking or doing can include the introduction of a stimulus. The incubation process allows for rumination on an idea or approach, which can then be illuminated or represented in the fourth step, verification. Verification of the creative endeavour by an outside audience concludes the process. Runco (2014) identified recursion as a fifth step, which is akin to refinement through repetition or improvisation. Through music appreciation, for example, the elements children identify as constituting familiar songs, can be rearranged to make many more.

Conditions for Children's Creative Development through Facilitating the Arts in the Early Years

Time, space, opportunity, resources, guidance informed by observation, and freedom to experiment with different artistic processes simultaneously represent conditions for the development of children's creative capacities in the facilitation of Early Childhood Care and Education. Each of these aspects are now examined in more detail.

Time and Space for Artistic Exploration

Young children should have daily opportunities for creative expression (Cople and Bredekamp, 2009). In the Steiner (1922) approach, priority is afforded self-initiated play by allowing children time and space to engage in it. Sólta (2006) Standard 6, Play requires that each child has:

'ample time to engage in freely available and accessible, developmentally-appropriate and well-resourced opportunities for exploration, creativity and 'meaning-making' in the company of other children, participating and supportive adults, and alone, where appropriate.'

Time and space are required for complete absorption and intensity of involvement in free-flow play similar to other creative enterprises (Broadhead, 2009). Providing children with the time, space, opportunities, materials, freedom and encouragement to engage with the creative arts

deeply and freely, in both mind and body, has been described as the best gift you can give children (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b). Young children need opportunities to follow their interests and make choices and decisions as they find meaning in creative experiences for themselves, and in collaboration with others (Isbell and Yoshizawa, 2016).

Children must revisit materials and get opportunities to practise burgeoning skills in order to become confident players, experimenters and creators (Aistear, 2009). Children who play with materials over time conceive more novel responses to them (Dansky and Silverman, 1973). Offering a wide variety of materials allows children to represent ideas in different ways, creating their own symbolic language (Parker, 2018).

Providing Spaces and Materials for Creative Experiment

Children can discover that different material property combinations produce different results and that changes in material form can result, by adding water to sand, for example. It is argued that this type of play exemplifies the importance of process over an ultimate product, offering avenues for self-expression, in the freedom afforded by the absence of a desired outcome or 'correct' way of working (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019a). Discovery learning of this nature illustrates that multiple approaches can be taken to inventing, and solving an emergent problem, such as joining two aspects of a junk art creation together. Deepening awareness of the body as a force in space and motor skill development can emerge through such processes.

A range of open-ended, naturally occurring, loose and malleable materials support playful and creative arts exploration. An array of such materials and textures, from twigs, to mud and recycled materials, provides children with a multitude of colour, texture, and properties with which to play and experiment. Play with malleable materials such as clay, water, sand, and playdough support the child to create and recreate in the realisation of imaginative ideas and plans (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019a).

By giving children open-ended materials to explore, opportunity is provided to establish creative uses for these materials and explore art elements of line, colour and shape, for example. By offering materials that are not pre-formed children can apply their own creative ideas, 'as the play become less tangible, so there is a greater advance in creative expression' (Froebel in Lilley, 1967:113).

Provocations or invitations to explore an idea or concept relating to children's interests and questions or concepts under investigation, are prerequisite (Isbell and Yoshizawa, 2016:11). Learning environments must allow free access to a rich range of materials that promote open-ended opportunities for play, representation and creativity (Froebel, 1886:6). All environments should be intellectually challenging and stimulating, inviting curiosity, creativity, friendship and a sense of adventure (Tovey, 2013).

Montessori (1949) maintained that a favourable environment provided both real materials and a natural environment (Bradley et al, 2001:71). Síolta (2006) stipulates the requirement for a range of developmentally appropriate, challenging, diverse, creative and enriching experiences for children in both indoor and outdoor environments. All play environments warrant careful consideration in the support of play and relationships as key contexts for learning (NCCA, 2004). Opportunities to explore found and open-ended materials 'especially outdoors, can inspire children to create and recreate ideas in different forms' (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b:14). This can be seen through children's use or reframing of natural and junk materials in place of blocks and Lego, for instance. A rich outdoor area offers infinite possibilities for challenge and adventure, and the chance to discover or create 'new worlds' (Froebel in Lilley, 1967:126). Thus, the interesting spaces and open-ended materials the outdoors offers, can invite children to create their own imaginary world using natural and added play resources to fashion artistic narratives (Tovey, 2013).

Facilitating the Arts for Early Learning and Care promoting Play and Creativity

The statements constituting the themes of the draft principles for arts facilitation are now presented, with their associated evidence base in literature. The opening section, 'Children are creative' encompasses 'Children's creative expression can be developed'. This is followed by a theoretical exploration of the statement, 'Children's creative expression must be valued and nurtured' through a consideration of the conditions for creative expression. The review of literature concludes with a discussion of 'Facilitation is a playful and creative process.'

Children are creative

Winnicott (1979:79) declared that creativity 'belongs to being alive'. Kudryavtsev (2011) purports that as personifications of divine creativity, children offer much to learn from in terms being creative. Child-like qualities are a strong characteristic of creative people (Wright, 2001). In fact, children's unselfconscious ability to flick from one mode of representation to the next in play is a capacity many artists spend their lives trying to recapture (Anning and Ring, 2004).

Innate creativity notwithstanding, the role of others in the development of children's individual creativity is crucial (Perkins, 1981; Wright, 2010).

Children's desire to create

Bruce (2004) identifies creativity, expression, and imagination as intrinsic human qualities, which can be developed with a sense of identity and culture through early childhood arts. Children have their own ideas and thoughts, their own desire to create, and 'the creative soul' is predisposed to learn in an active and enquiring manner applying similar skill sets across various art forms and experiences (Tutchell, 2014:5). Thus, collaborations which encompass the perspective of artists, early childhood professionals, children and parents can result in a much deeper understanding of, and attention to, a child's needs and interests, leading to fulfilment both immediately and later in life (Delors Report, 1996). The importance of creating as part of a community, actively creating with and for its members, finds support in Irish arts policy (*The Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022*).

Eisner (1994, 2002) and Greene (1995) note the importance of the arts for experiencing the joy of creating, developing attention to detail, and learning ways to express thoughts, knowledge, and feelings beyond words. For young children, experiencing the arts should be active as well as 'pleasurable, joyful, spontaneous and creative' (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019a:1). This places the onus on the supportive adult for facilitating such arts experiences. The responsibility for those working in early learning and care is to build upon children's current skills and understandings and expand these through the provision of new opportunities to develop their attitudes, skills and knowledge across a broad range of experiences (Duffy, 2003, in Devereux and Miller, 2003).

The creative ability of children is most likely to be developed in an environment in which the teacher or facilitator's creative abilities are fully engaged (NACCCE, 1999). Craft (2005) emphasises the importance of teachers' ability to act as creative practitioners and co-creators with children. This could be achieved through facilitators employing strategies such as such as 'creative thinking aloud', modelling possible approaches and demonstrating troubleshooting to children. To support teachers and facilitators in this regard requires the provision of professional opportunities to explore, follow and develop their own artistic capacities and skills.

With reference to creative writing, Cremin (2006) advocates for extended opportunities for teachers to engage artistically with creative writing themselves to best support children's creative development therein. Risk-taking, as a critical component of both creativity and artmaking represents an essential aspect of the argument put forward (Cremin, 2006). Moreover, the shared experience of creating 'emotional discomfort' for the adult and child

engaged in artmaking is critical to enhancing the child's agency in the creative process. It follows that within an early childhood care and education programme for professional development, dedicated time be afforded to facilitators' process-based experiential arts learning as part of training and education.

Critical and creative thinking and doing

The arts provide young children with multiple ways to practise creative and critical thinking, collaborating with others and communicating about their abilities. Vincent-Lancrin et al. (2019:25) list the sub-skills as commonalities of critical and creative thinking as, 'imagining, inquiring, doing and reflecting'. However, critical thinking is distinguished from creative thinking as focusing on 'inquiring', while creative thinking emphasises 'imagining':

'Critical thinking is mainly inquisitive, a detective way of thinking; creative thinking is imaginative, the artist way of thinking' (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019:25).

Creative and critical thinking, collaborating and communicating are sometimes referred to as 'the Four Cs', the most revered interrelated four skills in children up to aged twelve, according to The US Partnership for 21st Century Skills (NEA, 2011). Through drama, for example, children are collaborating with others in making drama, communicating meaning through the body. This form of communication requires creative and symbolic thinking in manipulating the basic theatre elements of time, space, and presence into a narrative structure, which may or may not be shared with an outside audience (Neelands and Goode, 1998).

Engagement in the creative process and the provision of good arts opportunities develops children's intrinsic motivation, fostering a disposition for learning and hard work (Graham, 2016). The unique qualities of the arts also build problem-setting and solving skills and open-ended processes along with collaboration and social interaction (Wright, 2001). This is evidenced in child-led socio-dramatic play where children are 'the problem-setters, problem-solvers and decision makers' (Hendy and Toon, 2001: 61).

Vincent-Lancrin et al. (2019) identify both creative and critical thinking as domain-specific in practice. It is not implied, therefore, that the creative or critical skill and thinking practised in one domain transfers to another. Thus, emphasis is laid on:

'the nurturing of creative and critical thinking as part of the learning of specific disciplinary content knowledge, rather than as a generic activity, that is, classes of creativity or critical thinking' (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019:25).

This creates an argument for the necessity of creative exploration and skills practice across the relevant art forms, in the case of early childhood education in Ireland includes, music, painting, dance and drama.

Arts for learning

When introduced into early childhood training and workforce development, the arts can have an indirect but important effect on children's engagement in learning (Delors Report, 1996; Jayatilaka, 2010). Language development, literacy, numeracy, personal, social, emotional, physical and spiritual development, as well as increased understanding of other people and cultures, have all been attributed to inclusion of the arts at pre-school (Rogers and French, 2013). When cultivated, creativity contributes in deep and far reaching ways to learning (Bruce, 2008). Rather than being viewed as optional extras or peripheral, Tovey (2013:125) cites creativity and imagination as being of central importance to children's learning in enabling connections between their inner world of feelings and ideas, and their outer world of things and experiences.

According to Whitehead and Jameson (2010), play enables confident, persevering, and creative learners. Socially and emotionally, children can be observed growing in confidence in themselves as learners and creators as they express their artistic ideas in different forms (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). By developing skills of perseverance and resilience through creative play, children's intrinsic motivation and emotional self-regulation can increase. Whitebread (2014) links play behaviours directly with the amelioration of meta-cognitive abilities of children and their 'learning-to-learn' behaviours, awareness, and control over individual mental processes. As a component of meta-cognition, students can judge when to be original and when to conform, with skills which allow investment in their creativity through tactics for creative action (Runco, 2014).

Children's creative expression must be valued and nurtured

Good arts practice fosters creative thinking where enquiry, experiment and discovery are at the heart (Teacher-Artist Guidelines, 2009). Young children communicate in multiple ways, drawing on the socially constructed sign systems and the cultures into which they are born. Communication forms incorporate facial expression, body language and gesture, speech but also include pretend play, song, dance, mark-making, and drawing (Anning and Ring, 2004). By donning the clothes or costumes of another, children explore the experience of another through role and 'live through' their circumstance.

Rogoff (2003) supports approaches to learning that enhance innate human and creative aptitudes, through observation of children's interests (Rogers and French, 2013). In play and activity children exhibit their innermost character (Bruce, 2008). Hence, skilled and informed observation of the child at play reveals to the observer the child's faculties as well as interests which can be documented for future planning.

The content expressed in children's words, drawings and play offers further insight into their thinking and ideas, on which facilitators can build (Rogers and French, 2013). Moreover, an arts curriculum built upon children's interests broadens and develops their creative capacities (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b). Parker (2018) argues that the skill of the practitioner lies in knowing when to observe and when to support and guide. In artistic exploration of clay, for example, the adult may support through comment, playing alongside, introducing, or developing new skills and techniques (Parker, 2018). An open-ended questioning style can support the child in exploring the properties and characteristics of the materials under exploration in their formation and re-invention.

In conjunction with Aistear (2009), brief notes, photographs, videos, audio records are different forms documentation can take. Stories are also a rich assessment tool for documenting children's creative contributions to a particular task, activity or event. Children's work samples and associated photographs can enrich the stories by assisting in capturing the essence of the individual artistic contribution of the child. The samples can be nominated by the child as well as the adult, which aims to chart children's creative development.

The integrated nature of learning in the arts

The authentic experiences in meaning-making offered by the arts engage mind, heart, and body. In fact, Kress (1997) argues that for young children who communicate multi-modally, there is no separation between body and mind. Turning action into representation offers children a unique language through which to communicate (Wright, 2001). As the mind thinks, the body creates and as the body thinks, the mind creates. Observing children's deep engagement in artistic play highlights examples of creative flow where multiple modes of expression are combined as the process changes over time. For example, two and three-dimensional art resources created for specific play purposes are renewed in children's narratives and re-created as storytelling props.

Unlike adults who often separate creative and imaginative experiences into different forms of representation, children do not tend to divide or perceive the experiences offered in this way. For them, experiences are not compartmentalised, and attitudes, knowledge and skills do not

develop in isolation from each other (Duffy, 2003:162). Syncretism is a union, in this case, of multiple arts expressions. Linquist (2001) builds on Vygotsky's (1997) case for children's syncretistic creativity, in which the arts are not separated by the child using two or more modes of art expressions simultaneously. Examples include music-making or singing while dancing or being engaged in multiple creations such as making dances or art works.

Learning through the body in the arts

Connie Bergstein Dow (2006) described how kinaesthetic learning strengthens the mind-body connection, preparing the brain to capture new information. For example, through dance young children respond kinaesthetically using their bodies as the creative instrument, expressing their emotions through movement (Thomson, 2011). Somatics as the study of 'soma' or the perceived experience of the body from within, fosters self-awareness in movement (Hanna, 1995). In educational dance, for example, there has been an increasing incorporation of somatic movement principles and practices, 'used to encourage pupils to attune to their unique felt sense of movement' (Nunan, 2016:5). Somatic practice emphasises aesthetics, or how the movement feels in the body, as well as how it looks. The processes of thought, perception and feeling associated with the arts connect with ways of knowing about ourselves and our world, with arts participation presenting opportunities for the integration of thought, emotion, and action for children (Wright, 2001).

Cultivating a Creative Environment

Bruce (2001; 2004:59) claims that 'being creative is an attitude of mind' which can be developed early, largely through engagement in play, which encourages imagination and creativity, and helps children to become symbol-users. In the context of play, creativity is more of a process than a product, where the richer the creative process, or the trying out of the imagination, the richer the product (Bruce, 2001:4). Further, the facilitator's perception of creativity is shaped by the belief that process is more important than product, which can evolve and change through the creative process, as evidenced in observation, response and support of young children creating (NAEYC, 2016).

Children grow and develop in loving and nurturing relationships with adults and children, 'with the quality of the associated interactions impacting upon their development' (Bruce, 2004: 8-9). By recognising their creative ways of seeing the world and valuing their potential, early childhood educators have a unique opportunity to nurture young children's creative abilities, to inspire their thinking, and to design and adapt an environment which, in turn, supports children's growing capabilities, 'helping them adapt and succeed in the world' (Isbell and

Yoshizawa, 2016:14). Thus, Hart (2005:205) promotes the creation of 'an environment of trust and recognition within a spirit of enquiry'. French (2019) contends that all learning happens in the context of relationships and is thus, relational. Play thrives in an atmosphere where creativity and imagination are valued and relationships with adults are warm and responsive, open to risk and adventure (Tovey, 2013).

Risk-taking in artistic endeavour

Robinson (2006) describes the integral role of risk-taking to all creative endeavour and the nature of trial and error in experiences of failure as well as success. Courageous learners can be supported where children are 'able to take risks, dare to make mistakes and have a go, try alternatives, rearrange what they know or try out new ways of working' (Bruce, 2004:7). Hanna (2016) stresses the importance of taking risks in a comfortable or familiar environment, constituting a 'low stakes environment' where analysis through reflection and questioning is encouraged. Thus, the benefits far exceed those pertaining to the arts encounter, extending to increased concentration and focus, as well as the enhancement of self-esteem. There are positive life-long implications for learning through the cultivation of a risk-taking disposition, in addition to resilience and creativity (NCCA, 2004). A supporting adult can add an element of risk to increase challenge in children's creative play and discovery, or by facilitating children's response to a performance intended to be provocative. In terms of developing arts appreciation, children can be supported to receive and interpret performance meaning by being guided to think about what they may have noticed or felt. Through the supportive adult's cultivation of a safe environment for sharing responses to a viewed performance, children can be encouraged to respond to the experience, nurturing their own impetus or capacity to create.

The playful adult

Creative activity grows out of the relationships between the individual and the related discipline(s), and with those who judge the quality of the activity (Wright, 2011). In pretend play, along with sensitivity and flexibility, playful engagement is one of four teacher sensibilities identified as essential to children's agency in pretend play (Stokes, 2016). The role of the adult as co-player and supportive confidant is critical to the child's growth in confidence as a creator. Active scaffolding of imaginative play by facilitators is needed to access the mature dramatic play that contributes significantly to self-regulation, deriving cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional benefits (NAEYC, 2015).

Bruce (2004:22) asserts that 'sensitive companionship cultivates creativity'. Therefore, the emergent creative potential of every child can be developed, or conversely, be extinguished.

Thus, the beginnings of creativity in children must be observed, recognised, and valued (Bruce, 2004). Early childhood educators are not required to be an expert in any area of the arts or to purchase specialist skill or equipment (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b). Rather, an open disposition to the arts and a curiosity about their potential, along with access to a range of resources, is sufficient. In terms of community-based engagement and resources, local artists and arts centres or services can be accessed free of charge, in addition to subsidised exhibits or performance events. Additional education and training may serve to build both the confidence and understanding of early childhood educators in offering a comprehensive arts curriculum (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b).

Oreck (2004) found that teachers' self-efficacy and self-image in terms of creativity and artistry influenced the facilitation of arts in schools more than any other characteristic. In this study, teachers expressed a lack of confidence in their arts facilitation skills, as well as a dearth of space, materials, and support from, and the absence of collaboration with experienced colleagues, teaching artists and arts specialists. Where teachers perceive a lack of capability in their own artistry, for example, in visual art, research has shown that this 'has the power to influence, hinder and subsequently alter the art experiences' offered young children (Tutchell, 2014:5). This can result in fewer opportunities to experiment, resulting in a tendency to replace adult-directed, template-driven activity with children's raw, creative talents.

Egan (2019) noted a reticence among students of early childhood to work with materials other than those where the process and the product are pre-determined, due to a lack of confidence in their own creative ability. Self-efficacy has been identified as an influential factor in the kinds of creative experiences educators feel comfortable offering young children (Lindsey, 2016). In cases where teachers' concepts of creativity differ from existing creative behaviours, or the assessment of creative accomplishments, 'teachers may fail to determine, much less nurture, creative aptitude' (Saracho, 2002:433). This highlights the importance of teachers and researchers endorsing similar creative characteristics. It has also been shown that the expertise and enthusiasm of the teacher is one of the major determinants of quality in arts education (Bamford, 2012). Quality is examined through process and product and has been defined as of high value and worth in relation to the resulting skills, attitudes, and performativity of arts education provisions (Bamford, 2012). Ultimately, the facilitation environment can either promote or stifle children's creative thinking capacities and their potential for creativity within the arts.

Relationships in Arts Education

Facilitating the arts and play and creative exploration ought to be child-led and determined by the needs, interests, and environment of the child. Children's creative capacities can be broadened through a programme of arts learning that is planned around children's interests (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b). Learning through 'a reciprocal relationship' where sometimes the child leads the learning, and sometimes the adult leads, helps to foster a respectful understanding of the uniqueness of the child (Aistear, 2009). This model can assist in the establishment of a secure relationship between the adult and the child propelling his/her extensive exploration of their environments in the pursuit of that which interests him/her. Ultimately, Tovey (2013) claims that children play for longer play cycles, and in a richer, more fulfilling way, when they have control of it. Graham (2016) asserts that if the arts activity is child-led, rather than adult-led, the child will engage with it much more deeply. This does not detract, however, from the role of the adult in stimulating, probing, developing, or extending opportunities arising from the child's interest to progress their artistic learning.

The supportive adult can inspire or refresh learning, encouraging innovation and experimentation, potentially adding new elements for the child engaged in artistic exploration and play. Equally, the supportive adult can facilitate an arts education workshop, devise, or host a performance or co-plan an arts residency. Each of these arts aspects represents a point on a continuum, extending from the children's regular facilitator's individual workshop practice, to extensive collaboration with outside arts organisations. Each of the four models of arts education intervention outlined in the Teacher-Artist Partnership Guidelines (2009) can be investigated for its application to early childhood settings. These are:

1. Arts experiences available to the public.
2. Arts experiences publicly supported by complementary services and resources.
3. Arts experiences designed specifically for schools.
4. Arts experiences characterised by collaboration between schools and artists or arts organisations, leading to projects or programmes of work distinguished by intensive engagement between the partners.

The models of intervention listed above show increasing investment of time for planning, intervention, and evaluation. The highest level of collaboration, outlined in the fourth model above, has potential to proportionately return the most significant and far-reaching benefits (Teacher-Artist Guidelines, 2009). Where partnerships between artists and those engaged in early childcare and education are cultivated, Kenny and Morrissey's (2016:93) research report can offer useful insight in its recommendations for Teacher-Artist partnerships vis-a-vis the Irish context:

- ‘Long-term teacher-artist partnerships are preferable to short-term partnerships in order to maximise benefits and for sustainability.
- Experimentation and personal arts experiences should be supported within teacher-artist partnerships in order to promote creativity and best classroom arts practice.
- Clear selection criteria for both teachers and artists to form partnerships need to be drawn up to ensure transparency and quality control.
- Collaboration, mutual respect and acknowledgment of existing skills should be at the heart of all teacher-artist partnerships.’

All relationships take time and space take to develop. The need for the formation of long-term, sustained working relationships between teachers and artists working in partnership has been well established (Bamford, 2012; Kenny, 2010; Kenny and Morrissey, 2016). Space and time must be set aside within pedagogical timetables to build such relationships, much of which is devoted to the planning, resourcing, development, and facilitation of the arts content.

In terms of the quality of arts programmes, Bamford (2012) has identified common characteristics in quality arts programmes. These in are presented in Table 5 below:

Quality Indicators are:

1. Active partnerships between schools and arts organisations, and between teachers, artists, and the community.
2. Shared responsibility for planning, implementation, and assessment and evaluation.
3. Opportunities for public performance, exhibition, and/or presentation.
4. A combination of development within the specific art forms (education in the arts) with artistic and creative approaches to learning (education through the arts).
5. Provision for critical reflection, problem-solving, and risk-taking.
6. Emphasis on collaboration.
7. Flexible school structures and permeable boundaries between schools and the community.
8. Accessibility to all children.
9. Detailed strategies for assessing and reporting on children’s learning, experiences, and development.
10. Ongoing professional learning for teachers, artists, and the community.

Table 5: Bamford’s(2012) Arts Programme Quality Indictors

The question of equity of access to live performance as part of programmes or encounters for experiencing the arts must be addressed at national level, so that children living further from artistic hubs are not disadvantaged. This represents a budgetary consideration within the regional planning of arts education programmes, including those concerned with early learning and care.

Conclusion

Bruce (2004) argues that play is 'an integrating mechanism' which assists children in coordinating their feelings and ideas and in making sense of their relationships with family, friends, and culture (in Tovey, 2013:18). Creativity enables seeing the world from different perspectives, making new connections between that which is known and that which is felt. In free-flow play a creative idea is developed but it is in a state of flow, with the potential to become an act of creation at that time or in the future (Bruce, 2004). Children can access many types of arts experiences through their play which support their imagination and creativity as they express ideas and share their delight in their discoveries with others (Barnardos and National Children Network, 2019a).

Creative thought processes and their development are ultimately the most important aspects of the arts experiences, rather than the expectation of resultant 'products'. A child's greatest chance of fulfilling his/her creative potential depends on both a challenging and supportive home life and outside educational experience (Runco, 2014). This requires viewing the child's potential access to the arts through play and creativity across all aspects of his or her daily experiences and the environments encountered as part thereof. A partnership approach between each supporting adult in the child's life can, therefore, best support his or her burgeoning play and creativity through the lived experience of the arts.

The role of awareness-raising of the value and benefit playful arts experiences offer in enhancing children's lives is central to ensuring equality of access to the arts for all children (Barnardos and National Childhood Network, 2019b). This discussion paper has served to highlight the general value and specific benefits of arts facilitation promoting play and creativity. The importance of the playful nature of the facilitated arts experiences has been emphasised and its role in building intrinsic motivation, confidence and persistence in young learners in the pursuit of their creative ideas and interests through play, self-expression and collaborative arts explorations.

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Glossary of Terms

The Arts

The arts are an expression of human imagination in both creating and enjoying the creations and creativity of others. The arts can take many forms from storytelling and literature to film, dance, opera, drama and theatre, poetry and prose, drawing, painting, photography and sculpture, acrobatics, and circus arts.

Creative Expression

Creative expression is the individual's emergent response of the mind and body to an instinct or stimulus, which can often be observed.

Playful engagement

Support for young children's play and creativity through the arts requires certain dispositions in the supportive adult, such as openness and sensitivity to the child's creative ideas and contributions. When the adult engages in arts experiences with a sense of play and fun with the child, it increases its relational nature and opens possibilities for its development.

Provocations

Provocations are stimulants which invite curiosity and exploration and constitute authentic resourcing to support play and learning experiences for young children. They can be afforded by the natural outdoor environment or presented as part of a rich indoor environment.

Secure Environment

Creating a secure environment for arts exploration involves cultivating an atmosphere of experimentation, where everyone feels safe to have a go and try things out, where taking a risk or a different approach is encouraged.

Supporting adult

A supporting adult in the home, community or early learning and care setting acts as the facilitator of an arts exploration or experience for the young child, tailoring the support offered based on the child's needs and responses

