Keynote Address for 'Natural Born Artists' Conference at Baboró Festival
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I am delighted to have been asked to give this keynote address. 2009 marks the 30th anniversary of the publication of the benchmark report The Place of the Arts in Irish Education which I want to use as a touchstone for this address. That report was the first survey and analysis of arts provision for Irish children and young people, in and out of school.

There is an additional personal resonance, for it was thirty years ago in 1979 that I began working in the arts. For some twenty of those thirty years I have been a practitioner, sometimes in the world of adult theatre but for the most part in the field of arts education and professional arts provision for young people. Those with whom I feel a primary sense of collegiality are those who animate the arts for children, or I might turn that phrase on its head and say those who animate children with the arts. In any event, for personal and professional reasons, 1979 has special significance for me and provides a platform for this address to look back, survey the present, and imagine the future.

Though the conference theme is specific to early years, the focus of my address is more general, though all of what I have to say applies to early years, even if not exclusively so. Because I have been involved in both practice and policy, and because of my current role in the Arts Council, one lens through which I am looking in this address is the lens of cultural policy. The second lens is that of the relationship between the arts and human development.

My given theme of 'the arts and young people' is a wider field than you might first imagine. It covers all art forms and practices and an increasingly wide range of media and technologies; it embraces a wide range of ages and developmental levels; it occurs in a wide range of settings: home, pre-school, formal education, informal education, youth services, and in the domain of public arts provision; it encompasses the young person as looker and listener as well as maker and doer and a wide range of modes of engagement and participation in between; it positions the adult in a variety of roles at any one point or several on a continuum from teacher (generalist and specialist), through facilitator / animateur, to artist / presenter. In short, the arts and young people is a complex tapestry and we need to acknowledge and respect the distinctive value of each thread in the fabric and to understand that they are, for the most part, complementary and indeed inter-dependent.

The vitality of Baboró and of the two shows I have seen already is a source of joy and inspiration. But this joy and the collegiality of this weekend should not delude us. We need to acknowledge the home truth that in Ireland within the world of the arts, children's arts is seen as a sub-set; in the arena of formal education, the arts are seen as a subset; and in the domain of wider provision of services, facilities and amenities for children, the arts are a subset. The effect of this triple sub-setting is a kind of subtraction. You know the phrase

that 'something is greater than the sum of its individual parts'? – well some entirely opposite mathematical principle is at work here which has a reducing or diminishing effect.

Isn't it the case that working for or with children you often get to feel that you are tolerated on the margins, but are not central to policy or practice? Certainly in the field of the arts and young people, you often end up feeling that you are constantly engaged in special pleading and self-justification. At such times, it is important to remember that there are about 60,000 citizens in every year band which means that if we take 'early years' as being 0-6 years, there are well over one third of a million 'early years citizens'; if we take primary school as our 'cut-off' point, then we are talking of nearly three quarters of a million people aged 12 or younger; and if we take the voting age of 18 as the cut off point, we are talking of over one million citizens of this country whose entitlement to the arts and culture is enshrined in policies, declarations and strategies that are national, European and United Nations in their provenance.

And it is not just about numbers; it is also about professional respect and understanding about the skills and attributes required to make good children's arts work. Many years ago, a leading theatre producer (ostensibly with my own good in mind) asked me why I was wasting my time and talent working for children. I was so shocked that I had no answer at the time, but I'm grateful for the nakedness of his prejudice, as it stung me into thinking of what I should have said. Let me share it with you now. If that theatre producer's child was sick back then, would he not have sought the advice and care of the best paediatrician – or would he have said: 'oh no, paediatricians are clearly people who scraped through the first few years of medical school and were told that their only future in medicine was to concentrate on child-patients, so I'll seek the advice of a 'real' doctor'?. Would a food scientist who concentrated on researching nutrients and food products for infants be viewed by fellow food scientists in this discriminatory fashion? Would an architecture firm, asked to tender for the design of a new primary school, put the project in the hands of the practice juniors? Would David Coleman be told that his end of psychology and his child psychologist colleagues are inherently less important than those who deal with adults? Such responses are patently nonsense and yet the arts profession practices a kind of professional apartheid which is part of the problem when we come to diagnose the position of the arts for young people in this country.

Earlier, I used the term 'citizens' in relation to children. Perhaps this does not seem strange to many of you. I think that is one of the real markers of progress since 1979: that the term 'citizens' does not land strangely on your ear. There is a welcome growth in the sense of citizenship in respect of the rights and entitlements of young people. Let me unpick one aspect of 'citizenship' that deserves more attention than it gets, in my view. This morning's newspapers carry birth notices: the arrival of some of this year's more than 70,000 new babies is announced publicly. Such an announcement in the paper is discretionary. But there are other pieces of paper around being born that are obligatory. The first intervention the State makes in our lives is to insist that our birth is registered. The birth certificate carries a harp on it to indicate that this is an official state document. From day one, literally, a process of claiming us as citizens begins. The birth cert is the first marker in a life-long relationship between the State and the private citizen, a relationship often characterised by a tension between rights and responsibilities.

The next significant formal intervention by the State is the shaping of each citizen's mind, his or her intellectual and wider personal formation, through compulsory education, *via* a

national curriculum. A transaction is proposed between the claims of the State and the rights of the individual. The proposition goes like this: for a dozen years or so the State insists that young citizens attend school and follow a prescribed course of learning. That is a weighty demand which, just because we have become accustomed to it, does not mean that we should underestimate it. There is a counterweight to compulsory schooling, at least in the contract offered. This is the complementary proposition, wherein the State acknowledges its responsibilities to educate the whole child, and declares its commitment to allow its young citizens develop the full range of their potential, to nurture the multiplicity of their intelligences.

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

On the socially determined nature of engagement in the arts and, more explicitly on the educationally determined nature of such access, I want to draw your attention to the findings of a report published last year. Called In the Frame or Out of the Picture: A Statistical Analysis of Public Involvement in the Arts, it was commissioned by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and undertaken by the ESRI (the Economic and Social Research Institute). The report was in effect a detailed analysis of the findings of the 2006 major study of public behaviour and attitudes to the arts called The Public and the Arts.

Again and again, like a tolling bell, the NESF report points to educational attainment as a key element within a wider set of socio-economic factors that determine public engagement in the arts. One of the ways in which, as a society, we attempt to 'level the playing pitch' of social inequality is through the education system. But, as we know (and especially as a child moves through the primary years) the arts become increasingly part of extra-curricular provision or provided for on an out-of-school basis. The effect (no doubt unintended) is that schools become mechanisms for perpetuating cultural exclusion rather than instruments of redress. And an already bad situation has been exacerbated recently by the withdrawal of the support of the Social Inclusion Unit of the DES for arts programmes and services provided by a wide range of arts organisation to schools serving disadvantaged areas.

It is important in this survey that I acknowledge initiatives that have been taken and milestones reached in the past thirty years. The ratification in 1992 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was key. Others include the establishment of Children's Rights Alliance in 1993; the appointment of the first Minister of State for Children in 1994, with a place at the Cabinet table in 2005. The National Children's Strategy was published in

2000, the same year as the National Children's Office was established, followed three years later by the office of the Ombudsman for Children. Of relevance to this conference were developments such as the 1998 National Forum on Early Childhood Education; the establishment of the Centre for Early Childhood Development Education in 2002; and the reports in 2005 on this topic by the NESF, the OECD, and by the Centre itself.

It needs also to be acknowledged that, on foot of the work of pilot curriculum development initiatives and then of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Primary Review Body, better curricular provision in the arts now exists. The curriculums now rest on some deep understandings of the nature of the arts and the kinds of learning and development they foster. To be accurate, I should make a distinction between 'syllabus' and 'curriculum'. A syllabus can be written down, but a curriculum can only be experienced. A syllabus is like a musical score or the script of a play. What ignites a syllabus and turns it into a lived curriculum, in the way that performance breathes life into a script or score, is pedagogy.

Pedagogy is critical and the pedagogy of the arts is complex and demanding and one which many (by no means all) Irish teachers find difficult because their own experience of the arts has been relatively limited and their dominant pedagogical 'comfort zones' are ill-at-ease with creative engagement. To change that would require a revolution in teacher education - both pre-service and in-service - and though there have been investments in recent years, the scale and nature of what needs to be done exceed the resources that have been invested. This remains an ongoing obstacle to major change in arts education.

And it needs to be said in mitigation that there is no fundamental, publicly-endorsed challenge to the dominant educational ethos; there is no sense of widespread social disagreement with the educational contract between the State and young citizens; what surfaces is only relatively minor disagreement around matters like pupil: teacher ratios, school transport, or provision for books. There is, in fact, remarkable, if largely tacit, consensus around the mission of education. Those who offer radical alternatives such as the Steiner movement or who draw inspiration from a philosophy and practice like that of Reggio Emilia seem to inhabit a parallel universe. It is worth noting that such movements, or models that are alternative to the mainstream, operate by pedagogic principles that are quite at odds with the orthodox ones. It is also worth remarking, and is surely more than coincidental, that they pay a great deal of attention to the arts, not in a partial or arts-driven fashion, but as a consequence of a wider commitment to notions of creativity and child development and to the good of the environment, the community and the wider world.

Let's celebrate the fact that hundreds of thousands of children go to school every day with anticipation. That wasn't always the case. But let us also acknowledge another truth which is that, as children progress through the schooling system, a disjunction can develop between their 'school selves' and their 'private selves'. The first hairline fracture might be that between the holistic nature of good nursery or pre-school education and the primary school, particularly as one moves up through the years of primary education. In time that hairline fracture can grow to be a crack, which in time for some can widen to be a crevice, and in time for some, a chasm. In school or out of school many other countries and systems seem better at providing bridges and links between the private / personal / social self of the young person and the school self. The arts are one of the ways in which this disjunction can be addressed, though we are much less good at such provision compared

with many other countries that we would regard as our European peers in many other ways.

One reason for better provision in other countries is the organisational links or shared strategies between departments or agencies charged with policy and provision in arts / culture and education / youth services. Here in Ireland the 'sub-set of a sub-set' phenomenon I mentioned earlier has an organisational equivalent. This has the effect of making children's arts disappear as an agenda, like an object that vanishes within a set of folding boxes. What is extraordinary, given the systemic flaws here, is how the sector has become skilful at negotiating the margins. I find myself in this review caught between lamenting the fact that this movement, if I can call it that, is not a kind of ubiquitous ground-cover, and on the other hand admiration for the fact that, like the plants of the Burren, it clings on and blossoms in the crevices, in spite of a seemingly inhospitable environment. But, we all know that it is tiresome being admired for your exotic nature when you wish to be normal. Clinging to the crevices in wind and rain while experts and enthusiastic amateurs take photographs of you, or write you up, or worse still evaluate you, is exhausting in the extreme.

The most recent attempt in Ireland to establish an institutional, strategic bridgehead between policy-makers and providers in the arts and education has run into the sand, at least for the present. The aptly named report Points of Alignment was designed precisely to provide a means of alignment, of joined-up thinking and action but it remains where it least deserves to be: on the shelf. This is in spite of the fact that its brief was deliberately focussed, its recommendations deliberately modest, and its findings influenced by good practice on joined up actions elsewhere. And it needs to be remembered that this was a report with a fair wind behind it, as it was initiated by the Minister for the Arts, and launched by both that Minister and the Minister for Education and Science.

So what do I see and say, as I survey this field with the perspective of 30 years? It is definitely more populated and there is a nascent tradition of work embedded in festivals like Baboró and in residencies; specialist companies; education services of arts institutions and organisations; and youth arts ensembles. Many of these are represented at this conference and they deserve our thanks and admiration on an occasion like this. It is clear that, as a country, Ireland allows for a wide range of activity in this area and there are examples of very good practice. In some cases work of international standing has occurred here and that is something of which we should be duly proud. However I am also forced to the conclusion that in Ireland things in this domain are allowed to happen, but they are not provided for to happen and this remains the great challenge for all of us: how to turn the permission into a provision.

As regards science education or numeracy or the teaching of Irish, this kind of 'allowance' would not be considered enough or acceptable, then why is it considered enough or acceptable in relation to the arts? Why, if we accept the arts are a birthright, does it remain the case that access to the arts is socially determined, with social, economic, and in addition geographic impediments for certain populations? In the past, the level and state of provision for the arts for young people in and out of school was explained away by the scarcity of resources, but that is not a sustainable argument really, for in the 30 years since the Arts Council report, we have known times of economic plenty and times of scarcity. It is less a question of the scarcity of resources than it is about the choices that are made with the available resources.

There are of course circumstantial reasons why things are the way they are. I have touched on some of these. There are external forces such as the economy and its downward pressure on the education system; there are ideological reasons to do with our sense of what the nature and purpose of education are. But apart from such forces that conspire to act inimically towards the arts and towards a more reflective, sensitive, child-oriented, working definition and practice of education, there is also what to my mind is the greatest and most unpalatable truth and it resides not in formal education but in the world of public arts provision at local and national level. And this is profoundly political (and I mean 'political' in the sense of the control of resources and of power). The unpalatable truth is that the greatest obstacles to the development of the arts for children are adults. Look around you and see what has been undertaken in the arts in the past decade; recall - if you have the reference points - what it was like 20 years ago; and those of you who share my capacity to call up a sense of the cultural landscape 30 years ago can remember something a lot bleaker. But the truth is that, with a few remarkable exceptions, the adults have created theatres, arts centres, galleries, companies, organisations, publishing houses, festivals, and arts resources of one kind or another that are almost exclusively, and certainly largely, for themselves.

Adults are the key decision-makers in the arts and with few exceptions, they have exploited the political impotence and muteness of children to create a cultural landscape that is not, in the profoundest sense of the term, child-friendly. I am not ascribing deliberate intention, but I am drawing attention to a cultural reality that has profound implications for the arts. I do not hold at all with the notion that children and young people are the audiences of the future, for that is to diminish the presentness of childhood and the immediacy of democratic entitlement, but, it cannot go unremarked in the logic of this address, that cultural policy-makers, arts providers and indeed practitioners should not be entirely surprised if the arts remain politically marginalised when generations of politicians and senior civil and public servants at local and national level have had so little experience of high-quality arts provision, on a sustained basis and as an embedded part of their formation as children and young people. Contrast that with the same people's (dare I say men's) experience of sport.

And here's another thing: the reality of our adult-oriented arts provision sits uncomfortably with the expressed wishes of the general population. Asked a few years ago in the national survey of behaviour and attitudes to the arts, to nominate their preferences for public spending on the arts, from nine different options offered, the clear first preference was '*Arts programmes and facilities dedicated to working for and with children and young people*'. 54% of people chose this as either their first or second priority for public spending on the arts, significantly ahead of any of the other seven options offered. Compared with the previous such study in 1994, this represents a significant increase on a figure that was already high. While it might be argued that 'children and young people' will always attract an automatic weighting of public preference, it is worth underlining, that this 54% preference was realised without asking those who would be most likely to benefit from such an orientation in public expenditure on the arts, as noone under the age of 15 was included within the population sample surveyed.

I want now to shift my focus to my second lens and to spend some time describing the significance of the arts for the development of children and young people. To do this I need to unpack some stuff about the nature of art. What I have to say about art is true for all

people, whatever their age 3 or 30, 5 or 50, 7 or 70, but its significance is particular and urgent for those of the species who are young and who are engaged in the critical process of forming themselves and establishing their relationships with themselves, with their fellow human beings, and with the world.

The arts are, as I said earlier, *forms of knowing.* They are unique symbol systems through which human beings make meaning. Of course, word and number are the legitimised forms of knowing the world and are key symbol systems of human culture. That is why literacy and numeracy are such fundamental concerns of the formal education system – and rightly so. But the arts are another such system by which we make meaning. Good art is not the expression in artistic forms of pre-existing meanings; rather art is a primary form of meaning-making. So despite the dominance of the pedagogical and critical paradigm that insistently enquires: *what is the poem about? what was the play about?,* art is not about anything: a poem is a poem; a dance is a dance; a painting is a painting. Painters have ideas in paint, poets have ideas in poetry. The meaning of a dance is in the dance.

If you accept the proposition that the arts are a primary means by which humans make meaning, the next question to be addressed might be around the significance of those meanings. I hold, as I am sure you do, that not only do the arts make meaning, but they make distinctive and important meanings – indeed fundamental meanings. We tend to understand and accept this retrospectively better than we do in contemporary terms. So, when we wish to know the nature of a people in another time or place, and to understand the meaning of their lives, we go to their buildings, icons, artefacts, rituals, stories, music. Archaeology and anthropology are among the sciences by which we excavate the meanings that are embedded in the arts and culture of previous times and other peoples.

There is a further sense in which the meanings embedded in the arts are fundamental. This has to do more with individual human experience. To know the meaning of elation, or love, or death, or ambition, or despair, whether on an epic / mythological scale, on the public / community scale, on the domestic / family scale, or on the intimate / private scale, we often go to music, drama, art, film, and literature. And this behaviour is evidence of another key concept which I have only the time to assert this morning and that is that when we make art, we make ourselves and that in understanding art we understand ourselves.

In the context of this conference I'd like to set beside one another two key ideas. One is the idea of children 'making their selves' which is almost their sole purpose, in the early years especially; and the other idea is the distinctive ways in which the arts allow for that making to occur. In practice (and you have all seen this) these two ideas coalesce in activities involving engagement or participation. Call up in your mind's eye a young child engaged in play or in dancing freely or in listening to music or handling clay. Attend to the state of 'absorption'. I offer a definition of 'absorption' as the state of connection between the self and the activity or the materials of the activity such as that it is hard to differentiate where the child begins and the activity ends. We are accustomed to observing this, though it is not easy to measure or describe. Poets have tried to capture this quality of absorption and this strange half-land between self and activity. Walt Whitman writes:

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

or for many years or stretching cycles of years. ('There was a child went forth').

This is really a proto-aesthetic experience, or a pre-figuring of a more formal aesthetic experience, but we can recognise the truthfulness of the poet's observation and the particular intensity of experience. What I would like to draw your attention to is the overlap between (i) the object of absorption; (ii) the experience of absorption; and (iii) the self that is absorbed. See how this connects with T. S. Eliot's famous lines from Four Quartets where he writes of:

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

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

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

And if we - as parents or teachers or artists, or simply as citizens – if in our heads and hearts we recognise the truth of this and the significance of it, then doesn't it follow as something approaching our responsibility to ensure that all young children have sustained, rich and age-appropriate aesthetic experiences? Would you agree furthermore that the very formation and richness and texture of those experiences mirror and indeed engender some equivalent enrichment and texturing of self which again is important, perhaps even crucial, to self-knowledge and to self-development?

This cluster of ideas about the arts making meaning, and offering the means to make ourselves and understand ourselves, has very particular significance when it joins up with what I might call parallel agendas in the fields of child formation, development, and education. Of the many things that could be said in this shared space between 'the arts' and 'child development', one is around the 'presentness' of childhood and the need to provide (and not merely to allow) for all two-year olds, three-year olds, four-year olds, and five-year olds to make and tell the stories of being 2, 3, 4, and 5; and for them to sing the songs, dance the dances, create and enact the dramas, and make the images of the concerns, hopes, fears, dilemmas, dreams, fantasies of being 2, 3, 4, and 5.

As I have often said on occasions like this, a 5-year old is not a third of a 15-year old, or a quarter of a 20-year old, or a seventh of a 35-year old. Being five is not a fractional experience, but is a very complete state and you only get 365 days to be 5, so it is really urgent that it is as rich and as comprehensive an experience as possible. The arts are fundamental to that richness and completeness. As a unique and fundamental set of human symbol systems, engagement in high-quality and age-appropriate arts experiences in a sustained, sequenced and cumulative way, is critical to child development and is not something that is arbitrary or discretionary or that can be postponed until adolescence or adulthood. And superficial engagement is also to be avoided, by which I mean uncreative arts activity - which is widespread; or occasional outbursts of arts activity with no sequence or developmental sensitivity; or poorly resourced arts activity in terms of space, equipment or materials. If the arts are unique and complex languages, universal to humanity and with

dialects particular to being, in our case, Irish, then low-quality provision is a bit like insisting that children only use one and two-syllable words when communicating. Imagine the linguistic deficit and the consequent cognitive, emotional and social dysfunction that would arise if that were official policy. It would be the world according to Barney.

The power of the arts (I might even say that this is why humans 'invented' the arts) is that they allow us make sense of our lives. Underneath the image-making, the story-telling, the dancing, the singing, and the ritualising are deep structures and paradigms where we find our place within the human condition and within our interior self, our wider tribe and our collective species. Much of human DNA is held in the arts. Not the chromosomes that distinguish us as a species and define us as individuals, but much of the other stuff that allows us escape our bodies and our daily, ordinary, physical selves - stuff that has to do with imagination, spirit, wonder, curiosity, playfulness, and being 'other'.

Depriving, delaying or otherwise diminishing children's access to cultural DNA is highly questionable. Conspiring to support a system which differentiates between children's access to the arts on the basis of their social background is an affront to social justice. And to link this with the particular focus on 'Early Years' that marks this conference, may I quote from another NESF report, this time from 2005 and on Early Childhood Care and Education. It declares that: *when viewed from the economic, social, educational, cultural, and social justice policy perspectives, it is clear that it is now time for Ireland to put in place an effective and coordinated system of ECCE, now regarded as essential for its national well-being, and to bring Ireland in line with its international obligations and best practice*.

How would that sound, if I replaced the reference to Early Childhood Care and Education by a reference to children's arts? Let me give it a whirl: *when viewed from the economic, social, educational, cultural, and social justice policy perspectives, it is clear that it is now time for Ireland to put in place an effective and coordinated system of arts provision for children, now regarded as essential for its national well-being, and to bring Ireland in line with its international obligations and best practice*.

The implication is clear. As I conclude and bring the two lenses of this address together, laying that of cultural policy over that of the arts and human development, I look ahead to what needs to happen in the next decade. You who work in the field of children's arts; or in the area of early years provision and education; or in the area of the training and development of artists, teachers and workers in these fields; you – I might respectfully suggest - need to do two things. You need to continue whatever your programme or project or service is, making it as thoughtful, and as full of integrity, and as high in quality (measured appropriately) as it can be.

In tandem it will be increasingly important to share your learning and experience so as to nurture, mentor, or otherwise inspire and encourage someone else who has an interest, but not necessarily experience, in your area of work. All of the above amounts to what I call high quality 'market-gardening'. This is your allotment: make it as fertile and productive as you can and share the produce, without burning out the resources (yourself included).

Parallel to this acting locally, you might think globally, by which I mean in this context that you make common cause with those who have the well-being and welfare of children as their main mission. If the points of alignment cannot be created and held in place by top-down leadership, then perhaps they can be grown more slowly but securely from the

ground up. We had thought that after 30 years of piloting and action research and case studies and exemplary practice, we might be ready for strategic, systemic provision. And while we are in a better place than 30 years ago – largely due to you the activists and practitioners - the big idea, the over-arching, governing support structure remains elusive.

But that does not rule out communication, information-sharing, exchanges, work-experiences, joint actions from the ground up with those who, defined deliberately widely, are your allies in their allegiance to the quality of childhood we seek to make for this and future generations. Obviously international exchange as practiced in this very conference and, for example, in participation in networks and joint initiatives such as TYA / ASSITEJ, EU NET ART, or the Small Size – Big Citizen project, is especially important for a small island nation like Ireland.

Because of some dreadful history in terms of official Ireland's relationship with children, many of our child-focussed agencies and bodies are spending enormous amounts of time and energy dealing with the consequences of that. It is also and sadly the case that there are contemporary versions of those realities which mean that many official bodies concerned with children are dealing with crisis issues and extreme agendas and are scarcely able to attend to what I call the constructive or positive agenda of childhood. But what if part of the redress of the injustice of our grim history might be not simply to compensate the victims, and ensure that such abuse never happens again, but to dig deeper into the causes which have in part to do with assumptions about children and childhood that are akin to those which sustained slavery? Then we might realise that the challenge facing us all is to see if, reaching beyond soundbites and slogans, we could make this the best country to be a child in.

What might that mean in terms of arts provision, and what actions and advocacy and research would be required to advance that aspiration? Well, this might be the common cause, <u>your</u> common cause, <u>our</u> common cause, strengthened by the public mandate of various surveys and reports, but most of all by the mandate of the million or so citizens who rely on us to speak and act on their behalf.

Thank you.