

# Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?

Ciarán Benson



## Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?

A reflection on forty years of  
arts and education in Ireland

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with

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**Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland**

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Encountering the Arts Ireland (ETAI)  
and  
The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon

encountering  
the **Arts**  
Ireland

the **arts**  
Council  
an chomhairle  
ealaíon

## **Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?**

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Ciarán Benson's lecture 'Time, Vocabulary, & Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?' was delivered on February 28, 2019. The lecture marked the 40th anniversary of the publication in 1979 of 'The Place of the Arts in Irish Education' Report of the Working Party appointed by the Arts Council, which was authored by Ciarán Benson.

The anniversary lecture was organised by Encountering the Arts Ireland, in conjunction with the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon and Dublin City University. This resulting publication is published by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon in partnership with Encountering the Arts Ireland.

## **The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon**

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The Arts Council of Ireland is the Irish government agency for developing the arts. The Arts Council works in partnership with artists, arts organisations, public policymakers and others to build a central place for the arts in Irish life.

Is í an Chomhairle Ealaíon an ghníomhaireacht a cheap Rialtas na hÉireann chun na healaíona a fhorbairt. Oibrímid i gcomhpháirt le healaíontóirí, le heagraíochtaí ealaíon, le lucht déanta beartas poiblí agus le daoine eile chun áit lárnach a chruthú do na healaíona i saol na hÉireann.

## **Encountering the Arts Ireland**

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Encountering the Arts Ireland is an alliance of individuals and institutions working to develop, enhance and promote arts in education and arts education within and beyond schools.

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## Preface

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Forty years on from the publication by the Arts Council of 'The Place of the Arts in Irish Education', we were delighted to be invited to mark the anniversary of this seminal report with a lecture delivered by Ciarán Benson at Dublin City University, organised by Encountering the Arts Ireland. The event, which took place in February 2019, provided an opportunity to celebrate the advancements made over the past four decades, while also reminding us of all that remains to be achieved. We are delighted to partner with Encountering the Arts Ireland to publish the lecture, along with the reflections and responses of the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, and of Martin Drury, Professor Áine Hyland, Seóna Ní Bhriain and Jane O'Hanlon, which were shared throughout the evening. We are grateful to Mary Shine Thompson who has edited this publication on behalf of Encountering the Arts Ireland.

The Arts Council has for many years recognised the importance of ensuring children and young people have meaningful opportunities to experience and engage with the arts, and to develop their artistic skills, as an essential part of their education in Ireland. The value we have consistently placed on this area is reflected across the various contributions to this publication.

The anniversary lecture was delivered in memory of Professor John Coolahan, a much respected champion for the arts in education, who sadly passed away in 2018. Since then, in July 2020, we very sadly lost another champion, Colm Ó Briain, who commissioned 'The Place of the Arts in Irish Education' upon taking up the role of Director of the Arts Council. This was among his many enduring contributions to the arts in Ireland, and this publication is also dedicated to him, and to his inspiring legacy. We are pleased that among the many talented keepers of his flame is Colm's daughter, our colleague Seóna Ní Bhriain, who contributes to this publication. I would also like to acknowledge the fine work delivered in this area by my predecessor, Orlaith McBride.

The Arts Council will continue to work in partnership with government departments and agencies, and with all stakeholders, to continue to strengthen the place of the arts in Irish education over the years ahead. We will work to extend the impact and

reach of initiatives such as Creative Schools; to support quality arts experiences in early childhood education; and to play our part to ensure that the benefits of arts education, and arts experiences across other curricular areas, are fully embraced at primary and post-primary level, and in all education settings. Ciarán Benson's lecture and the reflections it has stimulated by way of introduction and response offer important insights as we continue to plan and provide for children and young people. We hope our colleagues and partners, researchers and students will find this to be a useful resource and a thought-provoking read.



**Maureen Kennelly,**  
*Director The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon*

## A Voice and A Vision

*Jane O'Hanlon*

1. Benson, C. (1979). *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education: Report of the Working Party appointed by the Arts Council*, Dublin, Arts Council.
2. Benson C. Ed. (1989). *Art and the Ordinary: the Report of the Arts Community Education Committee*, Dublin, the Arts Council

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264235966\\_Art\\_and\\_the\\_Ordinary?channel=doi&linkId=53d3cb-140cf220632f3ce759&showFulltext=true](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264235966_Art_and_the_Ordinary?channel=doi&linkId=53d3cb-140cf220632f3ce759&showFulltext=true); the Arts Council, and The Department of Education and Science (DES). (2006). *Artists-Schools Guidelines: towards Best Practice in Ireland. A collaborative initiative involving the Department of Education and Science and the Arts Council Developed by the Steering Committee and Core Group of Artists-Schools*. Dublin, Arts Council and DES; the Arts Council, (2006). *Points of Alignment: The Report of the Special Committee on the Arts and Education*. Dublin, the Arts Council; Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG), and The Department of Education and Skills (DES). (2012). *Arts in Education Charter*, Dublin, DAHG and DES; Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. (2016) *Culture 2025 - Éire Ildánach: A Framework Policy to 2025*, p. 1.

The members of Encountering the Arts Ireland (ETAI), an alliance of individuals and institutions working to develop, enhance and promote arts in education and arts education within and beyond schools, were delighted and honoured that Professor Ciarán Benson agreed to deliver a lecture in February 2019 entitled 'Time, Vocabulary, and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?'. Professor Benson's lecture celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the publication of his seminal report entitled *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* (popularly known as the Benson Report).<sup>1</sup> It also commemorated the succession of arts-related reports and policy documents that followed. Among these are *Art and the Ordinary* (1989), *Artist-Schools Guidelines* (2006), *Points of Alignment* (2008), *The Arts in Education Charter* (2013) and the national cultural policy framework, *Culture 2025 — Éire Ildánach: A Framework Policy to 2025* (2016).<sup>2</sup> *Culture 2025* is a notable milestone in that it asserts that 'everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of the nation'. From the acorn of the Benson Report is growing the might of rights and agency.

That the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, agreed to introduce Professor Benson's lecture underlines the symbolic importance of the occasion for the Irish arts and education communities. That the event was jointly hosted by Encountering the Arts Ireland, the Institute of Education at Dublin City University, and The Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon was a measure of the significance that the occasion was accorded.

'Time, Vocabulary, and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?' provides an overview of the ideas that energised forty years of arts education and arts in education<sup>3</sup> in Ireland. Those four decades are characterised by creative responses to the challenges of scarcity and lack. In his foreword to the Benson Report in 1978, Patrick Rock, then chairperson of the Arts Council, offers the example of the difficulty of even getting arts education initiatives off the ground — and, by implication, offers an indication of how much has been achieved since then. Rock notes that following the Richards Report in 1976,<sup>4</sup> the Arts Council recognised the need for 'a detailed investigation of

3. 'Arts education' relates to the teaching and learning of arts disciplines within and outside prescribed school curricula; 'arts in education' signifies the arts as a medium for expression and a vehicle for wider learning across the school community. Arts Council, DAHG and DES. (2012). *Arts in Education Charter*, p. 3.
4. Richards, J.M. (1976). *Provision for the Arts in the Republic of Ireland*, London, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
5. Rock, P. (1978). *Benson Report*, unpaginated.
6. President Higgins held the post of Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht from 1993 to 1997. He has served as Ireland's ninth President since 2011.
7. Arts Act (2003), section 2(1) states that: "Arts" means any creative or interpretive expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for those purposes.' Within this understanding, ETAI recognises the importance of heritage and craft within all these forms.

the arts in Irish education.' However, at that time public policy 'was firmly opposed to the expansion of employment in the public sector.' It took the intervention of a non-Irish body to provide seed funding: 'The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, recognising our difficulties, agreed to fund the post of Education Officer for the first two years'.<sup>5</sup>

In the opening address which precedes 'Time, Vocabulary, and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling', President Higgins states that: '[a] strong and inclusively crafted cultural policy is an important element of democratic citizenship.' As Ireland's first Minister for the Arts (appointed to that post in 1993)<sup>6</sup> and as President of Ireland, he has worked tirelessly to achieve democratic citizenship. Again and again themes of curiosity, creative intelligence, emotion and agency surface throughout not only his and Professor Benson's presentations, but also in the commentaries of their respondents, Seóna Ní Bhriain, Martin Drury and Professor Áine Hyland, also to be found in this publication. These themes are aligned to significant developments such as the work of local authority arts offices, the investment in physical infrastructure and the broadening and deepening of concepts of arts and culture.

In his lecture, 'Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?', Ciarán Benson declares that: 'ideas matter, ideas of the arts, ideas in the arts, and ideas of the arts in society'.<sup>7</sup> The understanding of the role of the arts and ideas of and about the arts, and their societal, public and participatory impact, have changed and developed beyond recognition. So too have ideas about learning, and specifically, learning for living in the twenty-first century. There is a growing recognition that the value and importance of engaging in arts learning lies in enhanced understanding, meaning-making, expression, experimentation, engagement and risk-taking, whilst releasing the learner from the fear of being 'wrong' and so creating space for introspection and the discovery of personal meaning. Valued are learning that reflects the need for agile habits of mind and dispositions that encourage creativity, that develop an ability to tolerate ambivalence, that build resilience and the willingness to take risks. The Council of National Cultural Institutions succinctly captures the value of the arts in the evolution of selfhood when it states 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

8. Submission of the Council of National Cultural Institutions to government in the context of the preparation of the National Development Plan (2007-2013). Cited in Arts Council. (2008). Points of Alignment, p. 17.

9. Eavan Boland's 'The Singers' was first read publicly on the occasion of the inauguration of President Mary Robinson. Boland, E. 'The Singers'. Journal of Women's History, vol. 7 no. 1, 1995, p. 9. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/jowh.2010.0369.

10. Eisner, E. W. (2002b). The Arts and the Creation of Mind. Kindle Edition. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press; Dewey, J. (1934). Art as Experience, USA, Penguin; Cromby, J. (2005). 'Theorising embodied subjectivity'. International Journal of Critical Psychology 15, 133-150.

<http://www.johncromby.webspace.virginmedia.com/THEORIZING%20EMBODIED%20SUBJECTIVITY%20published.pdf>; Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought, New York, Basic Books. Kindle Edition.

11. <http://artsineducation.ie/en/home/>

understand ourselves:<sup>8</sup> In that making and understanding of self is agency. As the late and much missed Eavan Boland observed:

*... only when the danger  
was plain in the music could you know  
their true measure of rejoicing in  
finding a voice where they found a vision.*<sup>9</sup>

Over forty years after the publication of the Benson Report we continue to interrogate the place of the arts in Irish education. As we live with and through the Covid-19 pandemic, we come to an enhanced realisation that the arts are integral to human survival. Grounded in human experience, they are the embodied expression of the human search for meaning in this ongoing and vital quest.<sup>10</sup> The task before us now is to find ever more convincing ways of showing just how vital they are.

The arts and education communities have reason to thank Professor John Coolahan (1941—2018) who chaired the Arts in Education Charter Implementation Group and to whom Professor Benson's lecture is dedicated. He focused firmly on promoting collaborative approaches at all levels. A number of recommendations listed in the Arts in Education Charter have already been implemented: for example, an Arts in Education Portal<sup>11</sup> now provides a comprehensive digital resource on arts and arts education in Ireland. The Creative Schools Initiative emphasises the need for increased access to arts for children and young people. Teachers and artists are undertaking important work notably through the Teacher Artist Partnership (TAP) continuing professional development programme. These school-focused arts initiatives are paralleled by forty years of arts-in-education practice in cultural institutions, museums, galleries, and resource organisations. The importance of evidence-based decision making has impelled arts organisations and third-level institutions to invest in refining research tools appropriate to the arts. 'Ideas of the arts, ideas in the arts, and ideas of the arts in society' matter to Irish education.

The membership of Encountering the Arts Ireland (ETAI) and its board members, Michelle Carew, Aidan Clifford, Lorraine Comer, Nigel Flegg, Phil Kingston, Arthur Lappin, Helen O'Donoghue, Máire O'Higgins and I, are pleased to have played our part in facilitating Ciarán Benson's rich, provocative conversation on the arts.

## **Introduction: Speech by President Michael D. Higgins at an Event to Mark the 40th Anniversary of the Launch of the Benson Report (1979)**

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Thursday, 28th February, 2019

### *President Michael D. Higgins*

*The Place of the Arts in Irish Education*, by Dr Ciarán Benson, more commonly referred to as the Benson Report, was a radical foundation document which examined the position of the arts in Irish education. It revealed what little sense of the role and function of arts and culture, within society or within education, existed and it made over one hundred recommendations as to what steps should be taken to give the arts a proper role in the education of the Irish people.

This foundation would be built on by pedagogic innovators such as Professor John Coolahan (1941—2018), who was an inspirational figure in the movement for the right of every child to have access to arts and culture as part of their formation.

The profound association between the name Ciarán Benson and the arts in Ireland in terms of theory, policy and performance, is both justified and so well deserved.

Ciarán has contributed to Ireland's cultural life in many ways, obviously as a policymaker, but also as a critic and a curator, and he put in the work in the heat of the day, for example, as the founding Chairman of both the Irish Film Institute and the City Arts Centre, two organisations which brought new perspectives to Ireland's cultural life.

Aware of the significance of his 1979 Report when I became Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, I had the great privilege of being able to appoint Ciarán as Chairman of the Arts Council, a post he filled with distinction from 1993 until 1998. With indefatigable energy and creativity, he proved himself to be an informed and determined advocate for Irish artists and cultural institutions. Amongst his achievements, and they were many, was his overseeing of the first national Arts Plan 1995—1997, published in February 1994, which resulted in significantly increasing Irish Governmental grant aid to the Arts Council.

Today Ciarán continues to play a central role in the ongoing development of Ireland's cultural life, including as a member of the International Association of Art Critics and as Chair of Poetry Ireland.

His contribution to the creative dimension of Irish society has been a significant one and there can be no doubt that his vision and his practice have made a deep and lasting impact on the cultural landscape of Ireland. The publication of the Benson Report, the first blueprint for the arts in Irish education, was, cultural practitioners will agree, a critical moment in Ireland's cultural history. It challenged any limited or exclusive conception of the arts as something set apart, peripheral, residual, as practices that belonged on the fringes.

The Benson Report defined creativity as social *créativité*, a mediated experience through others, rather than instinctual, personal inclination.

Getting acceptance for creativity being defined socially was not an easy task. Campaigns such as C.A.F.E.—Creative Activity for Everyone—in which Sandy Fitzgerald was so prominent, and in which I was involved, had an argument to make and win. 'Will excellence not suffer if we fund community arts?' was a refrain that had to be dealt with. The Report underlined too the need for Ireland, as a society, to nurture and support our cultural heritage, allowing artistic expression and the participation of all our residents.

There will always be a debate as to how State funding can best be used, on how it should be prioritised and on how we should categorise a hierarchy of needs. At the heart of the Benson Report was a true understanding of the importance of cultural expenditure as basic infrastructure expenditure, and of the rewards society will reap through nurturing this essential component for facilitating citizenship and participation in the public space and public world.

The Benson Report demonstrated how mainstreaming arts into Irish education would impact so positively on the structure of society, the health of society, and on the imaginative possibilities of the people for the future.

I regarded the Benson Report as a cornerstone of policy, and for many years it continued as a cornerstone for policy and

action by the arts. It was succeeded by a number of specific reports on music, dance, orchestras and, in the forty years since it was published, many of its recommendations have been implemented, including the building of a specialist educational arts service. The continued support of the Transition Year Programme in Secondary Schools and the development of degree-level qualifications for arts-based subjects which allowed students to progress onto teacher education programmes for post-primary schools are both evidence of this.

There can be no doubt that Ireland has come some distance in the provision of arts in education, but it is a journey that requires a continuous generation of ideas, revisions of practice, and openness to institutional flexibility and change.

When we work to protect the cultural space and to make the arts accessible to all, we are working to support real and sustainable democracy.

A strong and inclusively crafted cultural policy is an important element of democratic citizenship. The arts in all their forms are a social good, a medium for the articulation and vindication of rights, a channel for everyone to participate fully in society, and a critical instrument for citizen participation. As I say those words, I recognise how important philosophy, critical theory and aesthetics are, and how they must be given at least a parity of esteem with the accounting and business strategies that are needed. A programme of events can never serve as adequate alternative for a cultural debate, not to speak of a policy. Cultural policy-making is much wider than event management, which is but one component of what might be valuable, even authentic.

It is worth acknowledging that, where this deeper thinking has been allowed over the past generation, and partly through the role of the State in expanding educational opportunity and access to the arts, everybody benefits. The artistic professions celebrated by Aosdána, for example, have become more egalitarian and democratic in their liberation from barriers of class and privilege.

To have responsibility for arts and culture is one of the great, most challenging, but rewarding experiences for any Minister, and I wish the current Minister every success.

It is critical that we all continue to work together to build on the momentum whose roots lie in the publication of the pivotal document that was the Benson Report if we want to make Ireland a leader in the inclusion of arts in the Irish education system.

Following on from Professor Benson's seminal work, there are those both in the education and the artistic communities who are committed to ensuring a position of status and strength within formal education for arts and cultural structures. As a society, we owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have won that space for us all and for future generations, often in conditions of loneliness, under-provision and, too often, as a minority voice. We all owe that debt in a special way to Ciarán Benson, a man whose unique vision and unparalleled dedication has done so much, and will continue to do so much, to effect positive change with regard to the arts in Irish education and in our lives.

## Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?<sup>12</sup>

*In Memory of My Old Friend Johnny Coolahan*

*“There is a three-letter word which I cherish in the education process, but is rarely expressed, and that is ‘joy’. I consider that education is a joyous, fulfilling activity, and this dimension of joyous engagement should be more emphasised. At its heart, learning is a mode of exploration and should be cherished.”*

John Coolahan<sup>13</sup>

### Brief Background to the 1979 Report

The Arts Act of 1973 ushered in a new Arts Council with a dynamic new director, Colm O'Briain, who recruited a wonderfully lively and committed new team who set about energising arts policy. Crucial, and highly effective, financial support came from The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation which supported Sir James Richards' Report of 1976 on *Provision for the Arts*. They subsequently gave a grant of about £10,000 for a two-year project looking at the arts in education in Ireland. Later still, in the mid-1980s, the Gulbenkian Foundation made a further grant of £250,000 for the ACE (Arts, Community, Education) project which I chaired in the 1980s.<sup>14</sup>

I saw the ad for this project in 1977, applied and was offered a two-year contract. I started work in January 1978. On learning that the government was planning a White Paper on Educational Development (not published until December 1980) Colm Ó Briain and I decided to try and complete a report within just one year in order to try and influence the content of that White Paper. We also wanted to coincide with 1979 being the International Year of the Child. We assembled a very distinguished Working Party to which I presented working papers throughout the year for comment and discussion.<sup>15</sup> I completed *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* by November 1978. It was ready for printing in December 1978, and we launched it early in 1979.<sup>16</sup>

The government White Paper was not published until two years later, and we did influence it in that it had a whole

12. An expansion of the Encountering the Arts Ireland (ETAI) Lecture, Seamus Heaney Theatre, St Patrick's Campus, Dublin City University, February 28, 2019. I offer what follows as a contribution to Michael D. Higgins' 'Presidency of Ideas.'

13. Coolahan, J. (2017). *Towards a Memoir: Reflections on my youth and a Fifty-Eight-Year Career in Education and the Arts*, Private Publication, Roscrea, Parkmore Press, 2017, vii. Before he died, Johnny worked hard to successfully complete and publish his last major book: *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning: A History of Irish Education 1800-2016*, Dublin, IPA.

14. Later still, in the mid-1980s, the Gulbenkian Foundation made a further grant of £250,000 for the ACE (Arts, Community, Education) project which I chaired in the 1980s. See Benson, C. ed. (1989). *Art and The Ordinary*, Dublin, The Arts Council.

15. The members of the working party were Seán Ó Tuama (Chair), Brian Boydell, John Coolahan, Bridget Doolan, George Dawson, Joe Dowling, Alice Hanratty, Seamus Heaney, Peter Killian, Pádraig MacDiarmada, Diarmaid O'Donnabháin, Colm O'Briain and Cathal O'Neill.

16. Benson, C. (1979). *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education*, Dublin, The Arts Council.

17. For an informative account of current Irish arts education policy see Dowling Long, S. 'The Arts in and out of School: Educational Policy, Provision and Practice in Ireland Today', *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 2015, 8(2), 267-286.

chapter on the arts but effectively saying that there was no demand to do much more in that area!

Over the intervening years I have had the pleasure of working with wonderful colleagues on various reports and projects. Always there have been stimulating discussions and ideas, as well as plans and strategies. It is about such ideas that I mainly want to talk tonight. As the late Garrett Fitzgerald was reported to have once said in cabinet, apocryphally I am sure, 'That's all very well in practice, but will it work in theory?' In this lecture I will leave issues of practice to my colleagues, and instead talk some 'theory'.<sup>17</sup>

### Updating the Vocabulary Underpinning Art and Education

Ideas matter, ideas *of* the arts, ideas *in* the arts, and ideas *of* the arts *in* society. It is about a few of these ideas that I want to talk tonight. We make sense of the world, and of ourselves, by forming ideas about the world, and about ourselves in and of that world. Ideas are located in our brains, individual brains, but more especially in 'networked' brains. As importantly, ideas exist in those shared social spaces that we call cultures. Different ideas, and differently valued ideas, *mean* different cultures and different moralities.

If we are to understand 'The Arts', and arts education, then we must reflect on certain ideas, their genealogy and powers to change the world, and ourselves as part of the world. The 1979 report on *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* was, amongst other things, an attempt to shape the ways in which ideas might infiltrate Irish policy, influence social action and thereby add richness to the personal and social lives of Irish citizens.

What follows are some of my own general conclusions about art, education and society expressed as simply, and as jargon-free as I can manage without giving the arguments, and extensive evidence, that support them. Take them as simplified conclusions about a far from simple set of biological, social-psychological, political and cultural phenomena. Wherever I can, I will use selected quotations to point you in helpful directions, should the ideas interest you. As Henri Matisse memorably said, 'a thimbleful of red is redder than a bucketful'!

18. Ferriter, D. (2013). *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s*, London, Profile Books.

19. Brown, T. (1981). *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-79*, London, Fontana.

20. Bradshaw, C.J., Ehrlich, P.R., et al. 'Underestimating the Challenges of Avoiding a Ghastly Future', *Front. Conserv. Sci.*, 13 January 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcsc.2020.615419>

21. Gray, J. (2007). *Black Mass*, New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Diarmaid Ferriter caught the spirit of the 1970s in his sweeping 2013 history of that decade *Ambiguous Republic*,<sup>18</sup> as did Terence Brown in his pioneering 1981 study, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922–79*.<sup>19</sup> One of the features of that time, as I remember it, was the conviction amongst many of us that changes in educational policy and practice were key to achieving the freer and more open society that we aspired to. I want to take the historical context of the decade which produced *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* for granted and, instead, I would like to offer some reflections on what has changed in our *general* understanding of some key concepts over the last four decades.

In particular, I will briefly look at what has happened in the last forty years to *ideas* related to arts education. Since 1978 we have made enormous strides in our understanding of evolution, including cultural evolution.

Extraordinary advances have been made in genetics, neuroscience and the technologies of scanning. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies have revolutionised social life and enabled the arrival of virtual worlds and radically new kinds of immersion experiences in such worlds. Philosophers have risen to the challenge of engaging with the sciences and have been working hard to refine the implications of emerging ideas about the nature of human, and other, beings.

Climate science and the looming catastrophe of climate change and environmental despoliation are now to the forefront of intelligent concern, as are the consequences of human population growth and globalisation, coupled with the catastrophic decline of non-human populations and the extinction of many.<sup>20</sup> In tandem with all these developments have come changes in the nature and understanding of 'Art' coupled with a challenge to and decline of confidence in the idea that 'progress', as currently understood, is inevitable and unstoppable.<sup>21</sup> All of this has developed over the last forty years.

Speaking of one of my own disciplines, psychology, the Noble Laureate Daniel Kahneman in his 2011 bestseller, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, observed that much of what we now know would have sounded like science fiction thirty or forty

22. Mahon, D. (2018). 'Howe Strand', *Against the Clock*, Lough Crew, The Gallery Press, 45-46.

23. Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking Fast and Slow*, New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux.

24. Williams, R. (1976). *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London, Fontana, 9.

years ago. I can confirm that from personal experience. Most of what I want to speak of this evening concerns the need to *update the vocabulary underpinning arts education* in the most general sense but in the spirit of Matisse's '*thimbleful of red*'. A little about a lot!

Let me start with a verse from Derek Mahon's poem 'Howe Strand' from his 2018 collection, *Against the Clock*. In it, it seems to me, Mahon asks a central interesting question:

*It's a thin, vibrant voice we're listening to,  
Words indistinct in the still wintry air.  
Tell me, philosopher, when she sings do you  
See her as a creative force anterior  
To systematic thought? I know I do.*<sup>22</sup>

There are creative forces anterior to, or 'before', systematic thought, as Derek Mahon suggests. But how are we to think about those anterior forces and their relationship to systematic thought? Psychologists like Daniel Kahneman have explored in detail the connections between what he calls 'System 1' thinking (some of those blind, and automatic, anterior forces) and 'System 2' thinking (systematic thought).<sup>23</sup> I want to approach this more generally, by paying attention to the material threads of systematic thought itself since, if we have asked the question, we are already embedded and bedecked in such thinking.

The 'fabric' I have in mind is composed of words. *What* words come to mind when we ask these questions about 'creative forces'; and *where* have they come from? In other words, what is the vocabulary that comes to mind and, in coming to mind, thereby shapes it?

In 1976 Raymond Williams published a book that I still admire greatly: *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. After returning to Cambridge in 1945, following years in the army, he found himself talking to a friend with similar experience about how strange their new post-war world, and its academic natives, felt to each of them. Both said, simultaneously: 'the fact is, they just don't speak the same language'.<sup>24</sup> The importance of words, especially the word 'culture', came to be a central preoccupation of his, sharpened as it was by his disagreement with T.S. Eliot's 1948 *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.

25. Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 21.

Williams' *Keywords* explored one hundred and ten words central to understanding culture and society as he saw it. He examined their uses and transformations of meaning over time. They included such words as 'aesthetic', 'art', 'community', 'creative', 'culture', 'democracy', 'educated', 'equality', 'mediation', and 'science'. For me, Raymond Williams was an example of what I came to understand a cultural democrat to be.

In the spirit of Williams, let me foreground certain keywords that seem to me to underpin current discourse about arts policy in general, and arts education in particular. Then, very briefly, I will indicate how the intervening forty years or so have advanced our understanding of them. I like evidence and argument, and I have tailored my comments to the kinds of findings that have emerged from empirical work and persuasive argument. *Why* are vocabularies important? It is partly because, as the philosopher Richard Rorty, said:

*Since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence on vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths.*<sup>25</sup>

There is more to 'truths', I believe, than this, and that 'more' has to do with 'how we feel' which has to do with the basic fact that we are embodied. But the case for the importance of our vocabulary both in shaping, and in directing, our thinking is clear. Here is my own small lexicon of just ten words/phrases, relevant to the arts in education that, I think, can be helpfully updated and reconnected:

- Culture
- Feelings
- Meaning
- Imagination & Memory
- 'Self', Boundaries & Time
- Creative Intelligence/Creativity
- Pretending/'Counterfactuals'
- Maker, Materials, Media & Meaning
- Perspective-Sharing
- Cultural Democracy

26. Williams, *ibid.*, 76.

27. Shore, B. (1996). *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning*, New York, Oxford University Press, 44 and 46.

28. Donald, M. (2002). *A Mind so Rare: The Evolution of Human Consciousness*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company.

29. Shore, *ibid.*

30. Damasio, A. (1999). *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York, Harcourt Brace and Company.

Let me take each of them in sequence, before combining them to form propositions in the form of full sentences.

Williams claimed that 'culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'.<sup>26</sup> He goes on to explain *why*, by extensively reviewing its historical uses. Since 1976, in my view, the best elaborations of its meanings, have been anthropological, such as in the work of Bradd Shore,<sup>27</sup> and psychological, such as we find in the work of Merlin Donald.<sup>28</sup> Here is Bradd Shore's 1996 definition of 'culture':

*an extensive and heterogeneous collection of 'models', models that exist both as public artifacts 'in the world' and as cognitive constructs 'in the mind' of members of a community.*

&

*Human beings are opportunistic and creative model builders and model readers of great virtuosity.*<sup>29</sup>

This idea of humans as 'map-makers extraordinaire' is the one to note here. Neuroscientists like Antonio Damasio have shown how our brains map our bodies moment-by-moment, how they map the world around us millisecond by millisecond, how they map our bodies' reactions to that world, and how they map the world symbolically using many different languages and kinds of symbol system.<sup>30</sup> Those similarities and differences between groups of human beings that we call cultural differences have to do with differences in the ways in which the maps and the models are made.

What functions do these models serve? In the broadest sense they serve two functions. One is 'formative': They present models of what a 'good' member of the culture should be. The other is 'normative': The models specify what is acceptable or unacceptable, desirable or undesirable behaviour for that culture. 'Cultures' are impersonal shapers of human beings, for good and for ill. In this sense a culture is one element that is 'anterior to systematic thought' as it applies to the formation of young, or of new, members of

31. Dennett, D. (2016). *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds*, London, Penguin, 24.

32. Vygotsky, L.S. (1962). *Thought and Language*, Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 36 and 218.

33. James, W. (1908). *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-02, London, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Company, 456-457.

that culture. Here is a recent conclusion of one of the most scientifically informed philosophers of the current time, Daniel Dennett:

*Human culture itself is a more fecund generator of brilliant innovations than any troupe of geniuses ... This it achieves by a process of cultural evolution that is as much 'the author' of our finest achievements as any individual thinker is.*<sup>31</sup>

Cultural-historical psychologists like the great Russian psychologist of the 1930s, Lev Vygotsky, understood that our capacity for thinking largely happens, especially in the early stages, from *the outside in*:

*The true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual.*

&

*Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them.*<sup>32</sup>

In other words, some of the key anterior sources of creative thinking are social in origin before becoming personal in practice. Here, then, is the subsequent challenge for words and other symbols: they can be like someone with a butterfly net trying to catch a millions-strong swarm of locusts, challenged! The worlds confronting human consciousness, whether personal or social, are vastly greater in kind and density than can be objectified in a word. Which brings us to the question of 'feelings' as being as multifarious and as multitudinous as those locusts. There is a vast pre-verbal hinterland in which words roam. The great psychologist/philosopher William James knew this well:

*Philosophy lives in words, but truth and fact well up into our lives in ways that exceed verbal formulation. There is in the living act of perception always something that glimmers and twinkles and will not be caught, and for which reflection comes too late.*<sup>33</sup>

Does 'feeling' regulate 'thinking'? Here is that other great American pragmatist philosopher, John Dewey, on how feeling regulates aesthetic experience, and our thinking about it:

34. Dewey, J. (1934/1958). *Art as Experience*, New York, Capricorn Books, 150. I think, by the way, that the Pragmatists are unduly overlooked and misunderstood on this side of the Atlantic.

35. Goodman, N. (1976). *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 248.

36. Damasio, A. (2018). *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feelings, and the Making of Cultures*, New York, Pantheon Books, 5. At the heart of Damasio's treatment of the role of 'feeling' over the evolutionary timescale is the concept of 'homeostasis'. A classic earlier treatment of feeling and art can be found in Langer, S. (1977). *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*, New York, Scribner Book Company.

37. Damasio (2018), 13.

*The total overwhelming impression comes first, perhaps in a seizure by a sudden glory of the landscape, or by the effect upon us of entrance into a cathedral when dim light, incense, stained glass and majestic proportions fuse in one indistinguishable whole. We say with truth that a painting strikes us. There is an impact that precedes all definite recognition of what it is about.*<sup>34</sup>

James and Dewey are talking about how the richness of the world, and of how we feel those riches, exceed and precede our capacity to adequately speak or write of it. For each and every one of us there is a vast, fast-flowing Amazon river of pre-verbal, pre-reflective experience that challenges our attempts to capture it symbolically. This is what we mean by ineffability. It is what we cannot capture well enough with our tools of thinking, and for that reason we run the risk of underestimating the centrality of feeling in our thinking generally, as behavioural economists are exploring, and in our understanding of what it is that 'The Arts' do. In aesthetic experience, as the philosopher Nelson Goodman reminded us in 1976, 'the emotions function cognitively'.<sup>35</sup>

But here we must now distinguish 'feelings' from 'emotions' as Damasio has persuasively argued in his recent book, *The Strange Order of Things: Life, Feelings, and the Making of Cultures*, published in 2018.<sup>36</sup> He argues that

*... cultural activity began and remains deeply embedded in feeling. The favorable and unfavorable interplay of feeling and reason must be acknowledged if we are to understand the conflicts and contradictions of the human condition.*

'Emotions' like anger or sadness or fear are quite specific and biologically organised. They come with a repertoire of appropriate actions like fight or flight. 'Feelings', on the other hand, are much more general and vastly older in evolutionary terms moving, for instance, between impulses to approach or avoid. Bacteria can do this. The idea that Damasio explores at length is that

*... feelings of pain and feelings of pleasure, from degrees of well-being to malaise and sickness, would have been the catalysts for the processes of questioning, understanding and problem solving that most profoundly distinguish human minds from the minds of other living creatures.*<sup>37</sup>

38. Higgins, M.D. (2011). 'Of utopias', *New and Selected Poems*, Dublin, Liberties Press, p. 180.

39. Zeidman, P. and Maguire, E.A. (2016). 'Anterior hippocampus: the anatomy of perception, imagination and episodic memory', *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 17(3), 173-182.

Remember this connection of 'feeling' and questioning because I want to return to it shortly. Remember also that an education in the arts, formal or informal, may start with what is often termed 'self-expression' but, for those who master the forms and skills of a particular art, it moves towards crafting the conditions for deliberately shaping *what other people might feel*. As the late Leonard Cohen said to his son just before he died, music is less about a feeling the maker *has*, and more about the feelings it will enable a listener *to have*.

When listening to, say, Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue*, or Schubert's D960, I have feelings that are unique to *Kind of Blue* or to the D960, feelings that I could never otherwise have because they are made and structured only by those specific pieces of music, those unique patterns of sound. And so it goes across the vast spectrum of all high quality arts.

But now, let's approach the idea of 'time', not from the implicitly evolutionary or historical stance we have adopted so far, but from the role of 'time' in the psychological and personal life of individuals. As conscious creatures we are time-travellers, and the words we use to encapsulate this are 'memory' and 'imagination', two words curiously omitted by Raymond Williams in 1976. As Michael D. Higgins has written in his 2011 poem, 'Of utopias':

*Born of possibility  
out of ancestor traces  
memory gives birth  
to imagination.*<sup>38</sup>

As it happens, we now know that the neural machinery underpinning both memory and imagination are very closely connected and, as it happens, the research showing this has been conducted by one of the most distinguished psychology graduates of University College Dublin, Eleanor Maguire:

*The brain creates a model of the world around us.  
We can use this representation to perceive and  
comprehend what we see at any given moment, but  
also to vividly re-experience scenes from our past and  
imagine future (or even fanciful) scenarios. Recent work  
has shown that these cognitive functions — perception,  
imagination and recall of scenes and events — all engage  
the anterior hippocampus.*<sup>39</sup>

40. Dr Seuss. (1974/2018). *There's a Wocket in my Pocket: Dr. Seuss's Book of Ridiculous Rhymes*, Random House.

41. Benson, C. (2001). *The Cultural Psychology of Self: Place, Morality and Art in Human Worlds*, London, Routledge, 2001.

42. Rovelli, C. (2018). *The Order of Time*, London, Allen Lane, iv and 204.

43. Buonomano, D. (2018). *Your Brain is a Time Machine: The Neuroscience and Physics of Time*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company.

Once again, note that idea of 'model'. As for the word 'meaning', remember that it is far more than mere definition, as in the 'meaning of a word'. Meaning depends on use and consequences. What is meaningful to us depends on all sorts of things, not least on what 'us' means. And this brings us to the word 'self'. The eminent Dr. Seuss<sup>40</sup> has this to say:

*And that ZELF  
up on that SHELF!  
I have  
talked to him myself.*

If you think that 'self' refers to some 'thing' then I am afraid you are mistaken.<sup>41</sup> If you think that neuroscience will in time pinpoint some part of the brain in which 'self' resides then you are again mistaken. Why? Because 'self' is better thought of as a verb rather than a noun, as a process rather than a product, as a composite rather than as some kind of pure essence.

The word 'self' refers to a much more interesting phenomenon, way beyond the time available tonight to elaborate. What we can say is that 'self' and 'time', in the form of 'memory' and 'imagination', are mutually constitutive. The theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli, in his 2018 book on time, says this:

*Time, then, is the form in which we beings  
whose brains are made up essentially of  
memory and foresight interact with the  
world; it is the source of our identity.*

&

*To a large extent, the brain is a mechanism  
for collecting memories of the past in order  
to use them continually to predict the future.  
... This being between past and future events is  
central to our mental structure. This, for us,  
is the 'flow' of time.*<sup>42</sup>

In a nutshell, as Dean Buonomano put it in 2018, 'Your brain is a time machine'.<sup>43</sup>

44. Damasio (2002), referring to Avishai Margalit (2009). *The Ethics of Memory*, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press.

45. Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking Fast and Slow*, New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux, chapter 4, 52.

While we share feelings and emotions with other animals, it is still clearly the case that human feelings are exceptional:

*The scope of human suffering and joys is uniquely human, thanks to the resonance of feelings in memories of the past and in the memories they have constructed of the anticipated future.*<sup>44</sup>

Staying with the idea of 'self', if you think that whatever 'self' is ends at the boundary of your skin and the world, then once again I think you are mistaken. Why? Because we will all agree, for example, that those we love and those we hate, those we fear and those whose well-being *matters* to us, are all parts of who and what 'we' are. And here again we see the central role played by feeling and emotion, memory and imagination in our lives. It is feelings in general that mark out what *matters* to us, what we should care about, what we are interested in, what we value.

In other words, far from 'our selves' ending at the boundaries of our bodies, our 'selves' are extended into, and distributed around, our worlds. People will die for, and will kill, if that *into which they are extended*—someone they love? an ideal?—is threatened or diminished. 'I' can be in many 'places' at the same time! Or so it seems to me.

Again, what *matters* to us, in this vital sense, can come from events in our personal lives or can emerge from stored and imagined events in our culture. This is what the Orkney's poet Edwin Muir meant when, at age 60, he spoke of his chronological age being 60, but his cultural age being 500! Our lived, and our bequeathed pasts, live in our associative memory, and this *primes* us—another important concept from cognitive psychology—to notice and value some things and not others. Our ideas, as Daniel Kahneman reminds us, are

*nodes in a vast network, called associative memory, in which each idea is linked to many others. ... a great deal happens at once. An idea that has been activated does not merely evoke one other idea. It activates many ideas, which in turn activate others. Furthermore, only a few of the activated ideas will register in consciousness; most of the work of associative thinking is silent, hidden from our conscious selves.*<sup>45</sup>

46. Dennett (2016), 331.

47. James, W. (1897). *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, New York, Longmans Green and Company, 76.

From the dawn of time, this has been for *Homo sapiens* (and probably also for *Homo neanderthalensis*, as recent research suggests), a seedbed of enormous richness for what we call 'The Arts'. Once, for whatever felt reason, humans began to externalise memory and meaning, cultural evolution exploded in complexity. Here is Daniel Dennett again:

*One of the most valuable innovations was the practice of putting marks in the environment to take a load off personal memory, one of the first forays of 'the extended mind' ... Marks then evolved into number systems and written languages, which enhanced the power of discursive teaching, and within a few millennia we have Socrates and Plato and Aristotle talking about talking, thinking about thinking, imagining republics, theorizing about tragedy and comedy. The age of intelligent design is in full swing.*<sup>46</sup>

Here we encounter the '4Ms': making, material, medium and meaning. The externalisation of memory and imagination in gesture and signal, mark and surface, speech and meaning, required humans to take a *material* and, by acts of *making*, turn that material into a *medium* which in turn became *meaningful*, which in turn could be *shared*, and which, in being shared, could fabricate *bonds of common feeling* about what mattered to the group.

In other words, such acts of making, as we see in amazing prehistoric cave and rock paintings across the world, assisted the construction of group identities. This is where the powerful and fertile sources of Art's power to favour empathy and prompt sympathy—or, let it also be said, cruelty—has its roots. Perspective-sharing is one of the great powers of the arts, with consequent benefits for empathy and sympathy, but also, in malign cases, for demeaning and diminishing others. As William James memorably said of that connection of material to medium:

*A Beethoven string-quartet is truly, as someone has said, a scraping of horses' tails on cats' bowels, and may be exhaustively described in such terms; but the application of this description in no way precludes the simultaneous applicability of an entirely different description.*<sup>47</sup>

48. Gardner, H. (2006). *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice*, New York, Basic Books.

49. Prinz, J. 'How Wonder Works'. <https://aeon.co/essays/why-wonder-is-the-most-human-of-all-emotions>

Libraries have been written on each of these '4Ms'! All I want to do here is to stress their interconnections, and the seemingly infinite artistic and aesthetic possibilities that then become possible. To the '4Ms' must be added one further connection and that is the idea of context. In 1917 Marcel Duchamp took a porcelain urinal, signed it R. Mutt, and placed it in an exhibition space, marking a landmark moment in the changing concept of 'Art'. More recently Maurizio Cattelan changed the material of his toilet from porcelain to gold but kept its *context* when he installed it as a fully functioning utility in the lavatory of Blenheim Palace (from which it was stolen in September 2019).

And now we come to that much-used word, 'creativity'. In reading official Irish documents on arts and education policy, I would say that 'imagination' and 'creativity' are, verbally, the headline acts, coupled in educational fora with Howard Gardner's idea of 'multiple intelligences'.<sup>48</sup> Most frequently, 'creativity' is lauded as a goal because of its association with 'problem-solving', and the word 'creative' is strongly associated with 'The Arts'.

Once more, a philosophical caution: there is no such *thing* as 'creativity' just as there is no such *thing* as 'self'. Nouns mislead. Verbs are better friends here, as are adjectives. I prefer the word 'creative', which must then be attached to an act or, cautiously perhaps, to nouns like 'intelligence' or 'understanding'. The concept of 'creativity' has a long history, which includes its special association with 'the arts'. I cannot go into this now other than to note its crossover, in the 18th century, from the religious domain to the secular. The philosopher Jesse Prinz, a specialist in the philosophy of feeling and emotion, observes that

*When art officially parted company from religion in the 18th century, ... Artists began to be described as 'creative' individuals, whereas the power of creation had formerly been reserved for God alone. With the rise of the signature artists could obtain cultlike status.*<sup>49</sup>

Significant as these uses of the words 'creativity' and 'creative' may be, my own view is that their denotations are incomplete.

50. Linder, T. (2008). *Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment*, Baltimore, Brooks Publishing Company.

51. Wittgenstein, L. (1998). *Culture and Value*, John Wiley and Sons, 42.

52. Bruner, J. (1997). *The Culture of Education*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 93.

Recall that earlier I asked you to remember the association of 'feeling' and 'questioning' in cultural evolution? What I now want to suggest is that creativity could be more productively understood as *question-asking* and *problem-posing*, motivated and informed by an *appropriately stocked memory* facing an *imaginative challenge*. Consider the origins of the ability to ask questions in English amongst typically developing children. Here is an averaged sequence of emergence of the ability to ask questions in the English language:

- 'what?'/ 'Dat?' (21–24 months)
- 'where?' (26–32 months)
- 'who?' (36–40 months),
- 'is?' and 'do?' (37–42 months),
- 'when?', 'why?' and 'how?' questions (42–49 months).<sup>50</sup>

Mastering *the act of questioning*, it seems to me, is the key to fuelling and advancing creative understanding. Ludwig Wittgenstein (who lived for periods in Ireland), warned that

*A man will be imprisoned in a room with a door that's unlocked and opens inwards; as long as it does not occur to him to pull rather than push it.*<sup>51</sup>

Or, as another great psychologist whom I had the privilege of knowing (and who also stayed regularly in his house in West Cork), Jerome Bruner wrote:

*The essence of creativity is figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you already think.*<sup>52</sup>

Intelligently creative work of the kind that utterly distinguishes humans from all other animals is enabled by our possession of language in the first place and, in historical time — itself created by externalised symbol systems like writing and numerals — by the cascading effect of asking ever-better questions. This questioning ability, informed by mastering bodies of knowledge, both practical and theoretical, is what enables us in the first place to *pose problems* in such a way that we increase the likelihood of solving them.

53. Damasio, A. (2018), 189.

54. Dennett, D. (2016), 24.

55. Byrne, R.M.J. (2005). *The Rational Imagination: How People Create Alternatives to Reality*, Cambridge Mass, MIT Press.

56. Gopnik, A. (2009). *The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us about Truth, Love and the Meaning of Life*, London, the Bodley Head, 21, 27 and 30.

*Question-asking and problem-posing* are, in my view, precursors of problem-solving, and of what we call 'creative' or 'imaginative' solutions. If you ask the question 'Why do we ask questions in the first place?', then the answer from Damasio is because of the evolution in *Homo sapiens* of 'feelings' which provide 'motive' for expanded cognitive and language abilities. To his own question of what it is that 'feeling' moves in mind, Damasio answers that it is

*Recalled reality, a reality that can be altered by our imagination, processed in chains of remembered images of every sensory stripe — sight, sound, touch, smell, taste — images that can be cut in pieces and moved about, playfully recombined to form arrangements and address specific goals: the construction of a tool, a practice, an explanation.*<sup>53</sup>

Here again we have the integration of memory and imagination, question-asking and problem-posing in intelligently creative making, ideally following a fairly lengthy period of immersion in the field of knowledge or practice. How does this unfold in practice? Well, *by acts of talking to yourself* — 'I wonder why?' 'What if ...?' 'Could it be that ...?' 'Surely that can't be the case?' 'What does that remind me of' or 'What if this, rather than that, happened ...?' Here is Dennett again:

*Talking to yourself, asking yourself questions, or even just the inner rehearsal of relevant words ('key words'), is an efficient way of probing the networks of association attached to each word, reminding you of overlooked possibilities that are likely to be relevant to your current perplexity.*<sup>54</sup>

Take that last question to oneself that I just mentioned: 'What if this, rather than that, happened?' Here is another key element of childhood and of adult creativity. We now know that the capacity to pretend develops very early in normal children. This capacity enables questions to be asked about other, possible worlds. In more formal terms, this is the capacity to entertain 'counterfactuals', the capacity to wonder about what might happen in the future, but has not yet been realised, or that could have happened in the past, but didn't. It is this capacity that enables feelings of hope and of regret.<sup>55</sup> It develops very early in life and is central to the creative arts. As Alison Gopnik tells us in her fine 2009 book *The Philosophical Baby*:<sup>56</sup>

57. Donald, M. (2002).

*Children's brains create causal theories of the world, maps of how the world works. And these theories allow children to envisage new possibilities, and to imagine and pretend that the world is different.*

&

*Babies start to pretend when they are as young as eighteen months or even younger*

&

*... even two- and three-year-olds are extremely good at distinguishing imagination and pretense from reality.*

Pretence is a key part of what we call 'play'.

You can now see the connections between our earlier definition of culture as model-construction and the ways in which the enculturation of a child at home, and at school, nourishes children's capacities for modelling the world, and supplies them with particular models that their culture presents as especially important. If you marry that capacity for pretence, play and counterfactual thinking to a growing skill in questioning, encouraged — or not, as the case may be — by the local culture, then, it seems to me, you have a potent formula for the cultivation of creative intelligence. Questions, explicit or implicit, shape imagination just as they do when — a capacity unique to humans?<sup>57</sup> — we actively search our memories under the guidance of a question.

These are some of the creative forces 'anterior to systematic thought' that we have come to better understand in the last forty years. To ignore or neglect them in our systematic thinking *about education* across the lifespan would, it seems to me, be like editing out those genes from seeds that are responsible for flowers!

This brings us now to a societal question, one that was a specific concern of the 1979 Report. *Which* citizens should have the opportunities to have these creative forces nourished and developed? Some privileged few, or all citizens of a republic? That question returns us to socio-political perspectives on the arts in general, and on arts education particularly.

58. Haas, B. 'China bans Winnie the Pooh film after comparisons to President Xi'. *The Guardian*. 7 Aug. 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/.../china-bans-winnie-the-pooh-film-to-stop-comparisons-t...>

'Another comparison between Xi and Winnie during a military parade in 2015 became that year's most censored image, according to Global Risk Insights. The firm said the Chinese government viewed the meme as "a serious effort to undermine the dignity of the presidential office and Xi himself"'.

For a contextual understanding of such images see Benson, C. (2011) 'Images in Acts? Some Ideas to be Explored' in eds Elkins, J. and Naef, M. *What is an Image?* Pennsylvania State University Press, 179-181. Also see Benson, C. (2013) 'Acts not Tracts! Why a Complete Psychology of Art and Identity Must Be Neuro-Cultural' in eds Roald, T. and Lang, J. *Art and Identity: Essays on the Aesthetic Creation of Mind*, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 39-65.

59. Judt, T., with T. Snyder (2012). *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, London, William Heinemann, 165.

60. Benson, C. (1992). 'Towards a Cultural Democracy', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 81, 321, Spring, 23-33.

Every culture, as we saw earlier, is normative, with its own distinctive prohibitions and permissions. Recent cartoons of the two most powerful men in the world today illustrate this point. In 2018 Chinese authorities blocked all access to images of Xi Jinping that, light-heartedly, mocked him as resembling Winnie the Pooh!<sup>58</sup> The other is a contemporary cartoon of President Trump sitting beside President Putin. Trump's thought-bubble says 'He "gets" me' while Putin thinks 'I've got him'! I give them as just two of the more recent examples of fundamental differences between political systems and the freedom to ask questions.

Some cultures liberate and defend questioning, even of those in control, while others control and hinder such questioning. There are cultures that *invite* and *reward* questioning, playful or otherwise, in contrast to cultures that *suppress* and *restrict* questioning. So, if these two pictures are worth two thousand words, what do they tell us? From a cultural democratic point of view, they illustrate one case where a negative attitude to questioning authority needs to be challenged and, in contrast, another where a positive attitude to such questioning needs to be defended. As the late historian Tony Judt said: 'In music, in painting, in literature, theater and dance, communists and fascists were extraordinarily wary of innovation or imagination.'<sup>59</sup>

In such regimes it is often forgotten that the first internal enemies to be dealt with were social and liberal democrats. For this very reason, John Maynard Keynes and others in post-1945 Britain successfully argued that the 'arms-length principle' apply to the newly instituted Arts Council of Great Britain to ensure its freedom from political control. In Ireland in 1951 the same principle was in place at the founding of An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

The seeds of cultural democracy were there in the early 1950s, but they took decades to begin to sprout.<sup>60</sup> Here is an interesting question for you: how many women were on the first Arts Council in 1952? The answer is one, Muriel Gahan of the Irish Countrywomen's Association. She resigned in 1961. Question: How many women were on the Arts Council from 1961 to 1973? Answer: none. Máire de Paor was appointed in 1973.

If I asked you the same question about social class representation over those decades, or youthful representation, the answer would be much the same. And if I asked whether the Irish Arts Council in its early decades had policies

61. For another treatment of some of these ideas, especially as they reply to the views of Elliot Eisner on art education, see my 2015 blogs: <https://www.youtharts.ie/documents/ten-lessons-the-arts-teach/>.

favouring film, or traditional music, or jazz or performance art or contemporary dance or education? Yet again, the answer would be in the negative. Governing ideas of 'high' culture or 'fine' arts was the orthodoxy, and the art forms I named fell into the basket of 'popular' art forms. And remember, given our interest in kinds of question acceptable/unacceptable to the dominant or ruling culture, that it was only in 1967 that the undoing of the Censorship of Publications was begun.

The point of these questions is to indicate what it is that the idea of 'cultural democracy' aspires to — fair and equal rights for all citizens to public goods such as health, education and *all* those enhancing dimensions of culture that we call the arts, whether 'popular' or 'high'! Cultural democratic ideals underpinned the 1979 report.

Now let's put this vocabulary to work in full sentences!<sup>61</sup> Having reviewed and updated these keywords for arts education, here are some assertions in sentence form that seem to me to have some relevance for arts educational policy, and for arts policy generally:

- Thinking and feeling *together* constitute 'creative intelligence'. Feelings *motivate and direct* thinking.
- Feelings are foundational, so don't forget the whole body when thinking about the brain! You think *with your body*, and not just with your brain.
- The arts are primary technologies for the objectification, instigation, constitution, propagation, sharing, and social consolidation of '*feeling-informed-thinking*'. The arts are '*thoughtful uses of feeling*'.
- From the earliest days of life, we humans can share and imitate. Imitation is a powerful mode of answering 'How' questions. How do we account for the Upper Palaeolithic spread of extraordinary cave paintings if not by processes of imitation, sharing and memory. How did Monet paint his pond? Try copying it to find out!
- Creative intelligence, artistic and scientific, advances by *question-asking* and *problem-posing*, as well as by *problem-solving*. How you *pose* or *frame* or *construe* a problem is, it seems to me, anterior to how you *solve* a problem.

62. Goodman, N. (1978). *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company.

63. Barzun, J. (1975). *The Use and Abuse of Art*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

64. Gombrich, E. (1995). *The Story of Art*, London, Phaidon Press.

- The meaning and desirability of the arts depends on the uses to which the arts are put. 'When is art?' is a key question to ask because time and timing are central to both art-making and art-engagement.<sup>62</sup>
- A creative *maker* can transform almost *any material* into a *medium* for the purposes of *making meaning*.
- Transformations of material, or of context, are intimately involved in transformations of artistic meaning.
- Arts and science education are complementary, in that the arts deal with meanings *of* the world whereas science deals in meanings *about* the world.<sup>63</sup> But, most importantly, the more we know about the world the more the meaning of the world can be transformed. The arts and sciences are symbiotic. That an A in STEM turns a stalk into a source of energy, STEAM, tells us something! Art puts Science's causal models of the world to work in creating cultural models and meanings.
- In the coming time, predictable and routine tasks and jobs are most likely to fall prey to the voracious algorithm, whereas creative person-focused tasks will have the greatest protection.
- There is no such *thing* as 'self'. Why? Because 'self' is not an entity but a process unfolding in time. To 'express' oneself is to unfold oneself in time.
- Art-making is self-extension *into* the world, thus enabling sharing, and that self-extension is a means of self-creation.
- An *informed and well-stocked* memory is the seedbed of a lively and versatile imagination.
- For good and ill, art and politics are deeply connected, and cultural democracy is a champion of citizens' equality of access to the arts and art-making *as public goods*, especially in education.
- Just as there is no art, only *artists*, to quote Ernst Gombrich, so it is less that there is 'arts education' and more that there are '*arts educators*'.<sup>64</sup> Remember Johnny Coolahan's call for joy in the educational process!

65. Dennett (2016), 380.

- How we pass the time of our lives is a primary existential challenge for all of us, and the arts are amongst the most fertile enablers of lives richly lived.

#### To summarise:

*At the heart of creative acts lie acts of informed questioning.*

*At the heart of dynamically adaptive cultures lie largely collective acts of creative intelligence.*

*At the heart of acts of creative intelligence lie motivating feelings.*

*A quality education in the arts both presupposes and enables the above.!*

#### Concluding Comments

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If part of education's task is to prepare students for the future, then how should we think about that? The best preparation for the future, indeed the only way of preparing for what does not yet exist, is to ensure the best possible qualities of educational experience *in the present*. What that is, and how it might relate to a specifically imagined future, is an intellectual and political challenge for all of us. Daniel Dennett's (2016) take on where we have come from and where we are now heading is worth remembering here:

*We are the intelligent designers living in a world intelligently designed for intelligent designers by our ancestors. And now, after centuries of dreaming about this prospect, we have begun designing and producing artifacts that can design and produce artifacts (that can design and produce artifacts).<sup>65</sup>*

In most of this lecture I have concentrated on a *general* understanding of some of the ideas supporting the value of the arts in education. But, for myself (unsurprising for a psychologist), and I know well for Johnny Coolahan, the most compelling reasons have to do with how the arts enrich individual personal lives.

66. Oliver, M. (1992). 'The Summer Day', *New and Selected Poems*, Boston, Beacon Press, 94. Originally in (1990). *House of Light*, Boston, Beacon Press.

67. The philosopher Jesse Prinz has written well on the workings of wonder <https://aeon.co/essays/why-wonder-is-the-most-human-of-all-emotions>.

See also Prinz, J.J. (2012). *Beyond Human Nature: How Culture and Experience Shape the Human Mind*, New York, W.W. Norton.

68. Oliver, M. (2008). 'Sometimes', *Red Bird*, Boston, Beacon Press, 37.

69. Pink Floyd. 'Time', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzURpTF5c8>.

An old teacher of mine in UCD, Mike Nolan, once said to me that the real problem in life is that there are 24 hours in a day! The Covid-19 pandemic has forcefully highlighted the simple truth of this for all of us who have been restricted to home. How to pass the time of our lives is one of the greatest existential challenges facing all of us. The late, Pulitzer American poet, Mary Oliver (who died in January 2019), asked of the grasshopper in her 1992 poem 'The Summer Day':

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
With your one wild and precious life?*<sup>66</sup>

In an ideal world, part of that plan would be to hold on to a childlike sense of 'wonder', and its twin sister, Johnny's 'joy'.<sup>67</sup> In just seven words Mary Oliver's 'Instructions for Living a Life' says all that I have spent an hour saying:

*Pay attention.  
Be astonished.  
Tell about it.*<sup>68</sup>

That, in a nutshell, is the recipe for any quality educational experience, especially one involving what, in our time, we still call 'The Arts'!

Let me finish with a final comment on how you can, actually, judge a book by its cover! The cover of the 1979 Report, which I suggested to its designer, Jarlath Hayes, embodied its own little codes known only to me at that time in 1979.

Its colours were those of the Christian Brothers school I went to, and where the word 'art' was rarely, if ever, mentioned in all my formative years there. It partly referred to Newton's Prism and the scientific idea that the composition of things, light in this case, could be empirically broken into parts. But most of all, it referenced the iconic cover of Pink Floyd's great album of 1973 *The Dark Side of the Moon*, and the idea that that might have been the place where the arts in Irish education had been hiding and waiting to emerge into the light! 'Time', some of you might just remember, was the memorable third track on *The Dark Side of the Moon*!<sup>69</sup>

Since then, I think time for the arts in Irish life, and in Irish education, has changed significantly for the better. Equally, though, now is the time to grasp the extraordinary opportunities currently presenting themselves.

## Five Reasons the Glass is Half-Full: Remarks Following Ciarán Benson's Lecture

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### *Martin Drury*

Especially on an occasion like this, it's fair to say the glass is half-full rather than half-empty. Much has been achieved when viewed from the perspective of what obtained in 1979. And much remains to be done, if the breadth and depth of the agenda set out in *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education*, known as the Benson Report, are to be realised.

The task I have been given is to reflect on the progress made in the past four decades. In the ten minutes I have been allocated it's obviously not possible to be comprehensive, so I have chosen to identify five key factors which I believe account for our being in a better place now than we were in 1979.

The first such factor is *human agency*: the work of key individuals who didn't wait around for structures or reports or working groups, but initiated practice out of personal conviction. You know, or know of, many of these people. Indeed, lots of you ARE these people! They might be classified in a range of ways. If considered *geographically*, that would allow us look westwards and acknowledge people like Leo Hallissey in Letterfrack; or Brendan Flynn in Clifden; or Patricia Forde in Galway City; or Helen Bygrove in Galway/Mayo. Or the classification might be by *artform*, so that, for example, in drama and theatre my own list would include Emelie Fitzgibbon and her life's work in Graffiti; or John McArdle — teacher and playwright who also in 1979 was the first Irish writer to make a child the central character of a play; or Paddy O'Dwyer as founder of Dublin Youth Theatre and thereafter the National Association of Youth Drama, now Youth Theatre Ireland. The list is long enough to warrant being organised *alphabetically*, in which case the above-named Paddy O'Dwyer would be joined by, among others, Helen O'Donoghue whose leadership of education and community programmes (currently termed 'Engage and Learn') at the Irish Museum of Modern Art has not simply enriched IMMA's work for nearly three decades but has helped to define that work and to shape the traditions of a still-young national cultural institution. And staying with the letter 'O', but from the space where the arts overlap with youth work and

community development, there would be Niall O'Baoill of Wet Paint Arts and, more recently, Fatima Mansions.

But there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet and O is only one of them! My naming of particular people is intended neither to embarrass nor exclude. I wish only to exemplify my point about how critical the work of individual teachers, principals, artists, activists, programmers has been to the development of the field of work we are focused on tonight. I also want to salute the pioneers who created structures, traditions and expectations that today we regard as normal. So *human agency* is my first force for change and development in this field.

A second such factor has been the *engagement of Local Authorities in the cultural field* and specifically, the work of local arts services and officers. A number of years prior to the Benson Report, there was an equally significant study and report known as the Richards report, officially entitled *Provision for the Arts*. The terms applied to the Benson Report, such as 'seminal', 'line-in-the-sand', 'benchmark' and 'agenda-setting', apply also to the Richards report in regard to the local and regional development of the arts. The landscape of arts provision we now have in Ireland may be traced back to that report. The old model of metropolitan arts practice which was then selectively and occasionally distributed regionally has given way to indigenous local policy and practice, through companies, festivals, arts centres and local arts services. In many instances (though not all) the local arts centre and office have been critical forces in addressing the needs of children and young people in and out of school. The development over 40 years of arts-in-education, youth arts and the arts for children and young people has run in parallel with the development of regional (initially) and, latterly, local art. Those two seams of development have intersected fruitfully in several ways and many local authorities and in particular local authority arts officers deserve credit for that.

A third driver of growth in this field is the commitment to *research and advocacy*. If the Benson Report is the parent report, it has by now many productive offspring. Let me illustrate this point by reference to music. Any analysis of where we are now in regard to the provision of music for young people will take account of the 1985 report *Deaf Ears?* commissioned by European Music Year and which offered a

fairly sobering description and analysis of the poverty of music provision for our young people. Then there was the long-standing campaign for a school of music for the West of Ireland which positioned that as a cultural and even civic right. There was the PIANO Report (Provision and Institutional Arrangements Now for Orchestras and Ensembles) a decade later. Into the next decade there was the ongoing Music Education National Debate (known as MEND) with its series of conferences and reports. A little later there was the bringing together of arts and education authorities under the auspices of Music Network to produce the Feasibility Study and report called *A National System of Local Music Education Services* which, ignited by philanthropy of an unprecedented scale and underpinned by government commitment, has resulted in Music Generation, Ireland's National Music Education Programme. As we speak, there are young people all over Ireland who are engaging collectively in performance music education as a result of *research and advocacy*, the force I am drawing your attention to. This was patient, dogged, unglamorous work, but critical to the changed landscape we are marking this evening.

Looking for factors and forces to explain the changes since 1979 leads inevitably to the commitment and persistence of *The Arts Council* in this arena. It adopted a two-pronged approach: creating initiatives and supporting organisations that fell within its own immediate remit and secondly, trying to engage with the policy-makers and providers in the wider education field. In respect of the latter, the first fourteen years after the Benson Report were difficult, often as a result of the Arts Council being an 'agency' as distinct from a 'government department'. When matters became difficult or tense, or when political advice was being sought, the Arts Council's place in the pecking order counted against its arguments. A new phase began in 1993 with the advent of the Department of the Arts. The whole field then became triangulated and, ultimately, productively so. Inter-departmental dialogue was possible, and the Arts Council had its own 'parent department'. Of course there were multiple issues on the agenda of all parties, but a bridge was being constructed that emerged eventually (another fourteen years later) as a Special Committee on the Arts and Education, whose report you will know as *Points of Alignment*. Many aspects of that report have been folded into the Charter between the Departments of Arts and of Education and thereby into the work of Creative Ireland under its Pillar One programme. Through all of this the Arts Council sought to use its

influence, to advocate, to partner, to maintain momentum. Many people in the field will recognise the Arts Council as funder and supporter of a wide range of organisations and programmes that benefit young people, but I want to point to this less visible but critical aspect of its work as *adviser* (as per its remit in the Arts Act). *The Arts Council* is therefore and for this specific reason my fourth force for change in this field.

My fifth and final such factor is the *wider context of public and official attitudes in respect of children and young people*. The deftest way of capturing this is to say that the past 40 years have seen the establishment and application of the principle that children and young people are citizens. Autonomy and agency are bound up with this idea of 'citizenship' which has significant implications for cultural policy, provision and programming. Politically the lens has widened to include not just the Department of Education and the then Department of Arts but now also the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The models of arts education or of arts provision for young people that were in place at the time of the Benson Report or that were signalled as the outcomes of its many recommendations are of a different order to what exists nowadays. I am not referring to aesthetic developments since then or to the enormous impact of what we still rather quaintly call 'the new technologies', though both of those are considerable additional liberating factors, but I am referring really to the primacy of the voice of the young person. The 'youth arts' and 'young ensembles' movements, among other developments, exemplify and enact this principle of creative agency.

It is appropriate then that I finish with a young person's voice, that of sixteen-year-old Sarah Carr quoted in the Creative Youth document. She says:

*I would like my school to embrace creativity and the arts in the same way it does sport. Both are fundamental elements of life and play important roles in the life of the average modern teenager. However I feel that there is an unbalanced scale.*

That she gets to say this and to be quoted in a government publication is a measure of how far we have come. That she feels what she feels and that she registers and records an imbalance in policy and provision to the detriment of the arts is a measure of how far we have yet to go.

## Better Questions and Collective Acts of Creative Intelligence. A reflection on Ciarán Benson's lecture, 'Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?'

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### Seóna Ní Bhriain

In his lecture, 'Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?', Ciarán Benson summarises aspects of his position on arts educational policy and arts policy in general as follows:

*At the heart of creative acts lie acts of informed questioning.*

*At the heart of dynamically adaptive cultures lie largely collective acts of creative intelligence.*

*At the heart of acts of creative intelligence lie motivating feelings.*

*A quality education in the arts both presupposes and enables the above.<sup>70</sup>*

I want to respond in particular to the first two of these statements. I will begin by addressing his second contention, that 'at the heart of dynamically adaptive cultures lie largely collective acts of creative intelligence', and then respond to his pronouncement that 'at the heart of creative acts lie acts of informed questioning'.

Nineteen seventy-nine was the year I started primary school. I did not know it back then, but at that particular time, which for me was the remarkable time of being four, my brilliant and visionary father, Colm Ó Briain, was the Director of the Arts Council. In that same time-space continuum in which I knew him to be an inspiring reader of stories at bedtime, he was a member of the working party supporting Ciarán Benson as he wrote his seminal report published in 1979 entitled *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education*.

I imagine the animated discussions around the Working Party table and the excellent prompts from Ciarán, sparking further

70. Benson, C. 'Time, Vocabulary and Art's Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?' pages 14-35

71. Kennelly, B., *Sophocles' Antigone: A New Version*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Bloodaxe. 1986. First performed at the Peacock Theatre, the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on 28 April 1986.

72. A programme of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals.

insights and thinking that fed into the report. It strikes me that the process in which the Working Party engaged was in itself a collective act of creative intelligence. These women and men (mostly men) were not collaborating on a work of art, but they brought the habits of mind they had developed through their experience and engagement with the arts to the task.

When I was ten, I got to witness my Dad directing Sophocles' tragedy, *Antigone*, in a new version by Brendan Kennelly.<sup>71</sup> I played 'boy': a silent role, which involved leading the blind and observing the madness. But the making of this play was not madness: rather, it was a collective act of creative intelligence. In rehearsals, I observed an ensemble exploring the world of their play with a director who brought out the best in them—prompted by a thoughtful, contemporary writer with an ancient tale to tell. I think of this when I picture my father and his colleagues in the Arts Council as they posed problems and shaped policy. Their work—in this case an analysis of the place of the arts in Irish education—was approached with imagination, depth of thinking and shared enquiry similar to that of a group of artists staging a play.

The people who have championed and advocated for the arts in education in Ireland over the past four decades have all participated in collective acts of creative intelligence along the way. The teachers who have opened a world of the arts to their students, sparking lively and inspired discussion and critical thinking in their classrooms; the principals who have championed the arts across whole schools—and prompted others to do the same through initiatives like Creative Engagement;<sup>72</sup> the local arts officers who have developed artists-in-schools programmes in their areas: all of these advocates have engaged in acts of collective creative intelligence, and have created the landscape in which we find ourselves today.

Gradually, more diverse voices are informing these collective acts, including the voices of young people. This greater diversity of voices improves our collective capacity to act with creative intelligence—leading to more resonant and relevant thinking, whether these are collective artistic enquiries, or collective planning for creativity in schools, or other problem-posing to which new solutions then need to be found across different policy areas.

73. Growing Up in Ireland is the national longitudinal study of children and young people in Ireland. It is funded by the Government of Ireland and managed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in association with the Central Statistics Office. <https://www.growingup.ie/>

74. Smyth, E. (2016). Arts and cultural participation among children – insights from the Growing up in Ireland Study, Dublin, ESRI/Arts Council.

<http://www.artscouncil.ie/Publications/All/Arts-and-cultural-participation-among-children-and-young-people-%E2%80%93-Insights-from-the-Growing-Up-in-Ireland-study/>

75. The Arts Council. (2015). Making Great Art Work. Leading the Development of the Arts in Ireland, Arts Council Strategy (2016-2025); Objective 8, (p. 26)

76. A 'High Level Implementation Group' (HLIG) had been set up to oversee the implementation of the Arts in Education Charter, chaired by Professor John Coolahan. Dr Michael Finneran was a member of that Group; he had been appointed by the Minister for Education (having been preceded by Dr Mary Nunan, who was the first academic appointee). The Director of the Arts Council, Orlaith McBride, was also a member of the HLIG, along with officials from both the Department

Points of Alignment, the Report of the Special Committee on the Arts and Education, published by the Arts Council in 2008, was an important milestone. The Committee included expert professionals in the arts and education who articulated areas of common interest across these two spheres of public policy. The report set out a number of recommendations, including the structures and resourcing that would be required to enable greater coordination in policy and provision for the arts in education. A National Arts in Education Development Unit was proposed at a projected cost of €1m per annum, which would oversee a number of specific actions. These recommendations were not implemented, and in fact the years of austerity that followed the report's publication saw reductions in investment and serious challenges across all areas of public policy. However, the values and principles articulated in the report, and some of its recommendations (such as Local Arts Education Partnerships, and an Arts in Education online portal) informed the content of the Arts in Education Charter, which was published in 2012 jointly by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills. *Points of Alignment* provided the framework and energised a movement that brought the Charter into being. Encountering the Arts Ireland (ETAI), an organisation made up of representatives from organisations and institutions across the arts and education, was a clear expression of that movement. The Charter that was launched in 2012-2013 allowed the conversation about the arts in education to continue at higher levels than had been the case before.

In the years after the Charter was launched, both my own daughters started primary school, marking a full generation since the publication of the Benson Report in 1979. I would like to share some stories from this time. In particular, I would like to describe the collective, creative process that led to the development of Creative Schools, during my first few years as Head of Young People, Children and Education at the Arts Council.

In 2016, the Arts Council commissioned Dr Emer Smyth in the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) to analyse the data from the Growing Up in Ireland national longitudinal study,<sup>73</sup> to see what it could tell us about arts and cultural participation among children and young people.<sup>74</sup> We wanted to get a better understanding of children's participation in the arts in order to 'plan and provide for children and young people' over the coming years, a key objective in the Arts Council's strategy.<sup>75</sup> We knew the data contained information

of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG), and The Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2012) Arts in Education Charter. Dublin, DAHG and DES, page 5.

77. The Arts Council, and The Department of Education and Science (DES) (2006) Artists-Schools Guidelines: Towards Best Practice in Ireland. A collaborative initiative involving the Department of Education and Science and the Arts Council Developed by the Steering Committee and Core Group of Artists-Schools. Dublin, Arts Council and DES.

78. The members of the ARIS Working Group were Bernie Bourke, St Mary's Secondary School, Glasnevin; Rebecca Dempsey, Irish Second Level Students' Union; Dr Michael Finneran, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (Chairperson); Orla Henihan, Linenhall Arts Centre, Castlebar; Kevin McCarthy, Department of Education and Skills; Ben Murray, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment; Mark O'Brien, Axis Arts Centre, Ballymun; Karol Sadleir, Junior Cycle for Teachers. The working group was supported by Seóna Ní Bhriain, Head of Young People, Children and Education (YPCE) at the Arts Council; and Mags Walsh, YPCE Adviser. Additional guests invited to attend a meeting were Rosaleen Molloy, Music Generation; Victoria Durrer, Queen's University Belfast; and Dr Emer Smyth, ESRI.

about children's school experience and home lives, and could provide insight into which groups of children were participating in the arts, and how this experience was related to other child outcomes. We wondered in particular how this information could assist us in the task of developing an implementation plan for what is now Creative Schools.

Dr Michael Finneran was the chair of the Working Group we had established that year to draft an implementation plan for the Arts Rich Schools initiative (ARIS — which we pronounced 'Aris' — adding the 'I' and the 'fada' to turn the acronym into the Irish word for 'Encore!'). This was an action identified in the Arts in Education Charter, which stated that the Arts Council would promote, in cooperation with the then Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Education and Skills, a national scheme to incentivise and recognise those schools, which make the arts a key part of school life.<sup>76</sup> Michael Finneran had suggested the Growing Up in Ireland data was a good place from which to gain a picture of the current nature and level of participation in the arts in school, and had helped to make the case for incorporating this research into the work at hand.

The ARIS Working Group met between March and June 2016. Dr Smyth's research took place during this same time frame, and she presented her key findings to the Group as these emerged. The final research was published in October, in the same month that a draft implementation plan was brought to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy unit in the Department of Education and Skills, following an earlier presentation to the Arts in Education Charter Implementation Group that summer.

Like others before them — see, among other examples, the contributors to *Artists-Schools Guidelines* (2006)<sup>77</sup> — the ARIS Working Group was a dynamic group of individuals from across the arts and education.<sup>78</sup> Several members had worked together piloting the Arts in Junior Cycle in 2014.<sup>79</sup> The complementary range of expertise, the informed questioning and experience each individual brought to the table, and the shared commitment to achieving improved outcomes for young people in schools and better opportunities for them to engage with the arts, made for dynamic and focused discussion. The group sought to develop an exciting national programme that would build on some of the great practice that had developed in schools through various initiatives across the country, but which had

79. Arts in Junior Cycle was designed and piloted by the Arts Council with the Department of Education and Skills' Junior Cycle for Teachers in 2014. It combined the expertise of arts organisations and facilitators with that of teachers to support teacher professional development in implementing the new Framework for Junior Cycle. The initial focus was on teaching theatre and film as part of the subject specification for English. Arts in Junior Cycle is funded through the Creative Ireland programme 2017-22. [www.artsinjuniorcycle.ie](http://www.artsinjuniorcycle.ie)

80. Additional consultation events informing the Group's work included a meeting with the Children's Council of the Ark, a purpose-built arts and culture centre for children in Dublin; a workshop with teachers and artists at the Arts in Education National Day 2016; and a focus group of other relevant parties at the Arts Council.

to date been largely ad hoc, and unrecognised. The combined intelligence of these creative and critical thinkers led to what was a visionary plan for the first phase of Arts Rich Schools. In addition to drawing on Dr Smyth's research, their thinking was further supported by a range of consultation events.<sup>80</sup>

The plan the Group developed aimed to understand, develop and celebrate the arts in schools. The first phase was designed to involve a diverse range of school types, each steering its own journey, and emphasis was to be placed on children and young people's voice. This partnership initiative was to be jointly delivered by professionals with backgrounds in education and in the arts, and would maximise the opportunities presented by the current and emerging curriculum, with its increasing emphasis on the development of key skills like communicating, working together and being creative, and the need to support young people's wellbeing in school. It would build on the strengths of individual schools and tap into the resources in their communities, enabling schools to develop from diverse starting points — whether they already had a track record of placing emphasis on the arts, or had not yet given much attention to this area.

Arts Rich Schools would incentivise schools through offering relevant supports, and it would recognise them through public celebration. The plan also identified the need for a new name. Several members of the Working Group felt that 'creative' might be a more accessible term than 'arts rich', but the name was left undetermined at this stage.

It was anticipated that the learning journey of each school would in turn inform our national understanding of the arts in schools, and assist in developing coherent policies and practices at national level. A number of locations in which to base the initiative in its pilot phase were proposed, including the Arts Council. In this scenario, the team would include seconded teachers (primary and post-primary) from the Department of Education and Skills, and a team of Creative Associates made up of practicing artists and teachers.

Despite the fact that Arts Rich Schools was already a stated commitment in the Arts in Education Charter, the resources to deliver a national initiative of any scale were not in place. While it was proposed that the implementation plan for the pilot or first phase would be jointly funded by the two lead Departments, these resources had not been allocated. The crucial stage of

81. Arts and cultural participation among children – insights from the Growing up in Ireland Study; Smyth, E. (ESRI/Arts Council, 2016) <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Publications/All/Arts-and-cultural-participation-among-children-and-young-people-%E2%80%93-Insights-from-the-Growing-Up-in-Ireland-study/>

82. According to the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022: 'Over the course of the programme the Charter for Arts in Education will be embraced, fast-tracked, and resourced as a core element of the Creative Ireland agenda.' P. 22

83. This definition, included in the submission by the Council of National Cultural Institutions to government in the context of the preparation of the National Development Plan (2007-2013), is referenced in The Arts Council (2008). Points of Alignment, Dublin, Arts Council, 16, and in the Arts in Education Charter (2012), 11.

securing the budget was aided in part by the clear evidence which had emerged from the Arts Council/ESRI research regarding arts and cultural participation, which demonstrated a range of positive outcomes for young people participating in the arts (in terms of cognitive development, attitudes to school, and socio-emotional wellbeing), and the important role that schools play in facilitating this participation.<sup>81</sup>

Most significantly, toward the end of 2016, Creative Ireland was announced as a legacy initiative of the centenary celebrations that had taken place that year, and its first pillar focused firmly on 'Enabling the creative potential of every child'. The plan included a stated commitment to implement the Arts in Education Charter.<sup>82</sup> It was in this context that the resourcing of the implementation plan, and the active co-operation across different Departments that it required, became possible. A first phase for Arts Rich Schools, re-named Creative Schools to reflect its positioning within the context of the new Creative Ireland plan, became a reality.

Creative Schools is in its pilot phase and is following the blueprint developed by the Arts Rich Schools Working Group. More than 450 schools have participated in the initiative — which include primary and post-primary schools from all regions of the country. They are supported by a team of Creative Associates, and they receive some seed funding to assist them with developing and delivering their own plans for the arts and creativity. The long-term development of the initiative (including how it will be scaled to impact on all schools over time) is being explored over the course of the pilot phase. This was part of the brief of the UK based organisation Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE), which was the successful tenderer to manage the project. This phase is still in process.

Nuanced shifts in the discourse have occurred over the pilot phase to date. The term 'creativity' is sometimes used alongside, and sometimes instead of 'the arts'. While creativity is integral to the arts, the terms are not synonymous.

Points of Alignment and the Arts in Education Charter refer to the following definition in describing the arts:

*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.*<sup>83</sup>

84. Points of Alignment (2008). 18; Arts in Education Charter (2012). 7.

85. Section 2(1) of the Arts Act (2003) provides the following definition: “arts” means any creative or interpretative expression (whether traditional or contemporary) in whatever form, and includes, in particular, visual arts, theatre, literature, music, dance, opera, film, circus and architecture, and includes any medium when used for those purposes’.

Both Points of Alignment and the Charter go on to say that ‘While the arts have no monopoly on creativity, they do foster it especially well’,<sup>84</sup> before describing the particular role of the arts in fostering the range of intelligences and creative capacities that education should foster.

Creative Schools embraces this wider applicability of the skills that are developed through the arts, and takes a cross-curricular approach. It is broad and inclusive, and yet its rationale is rooted in the arts, and in the wide and ever-evolving range of creative expression that the arts include.<sup>85</sup>

Across all areas of public life, we need more collective acts of creative intelligence and fewer collective acts of gross negligence. We would risk the latter if we were to consider that meaningful engagement with the arts is anything less than essential to an education that inspires creative minds.

*‘Are we there yet?’*

I picture myself as a child in the back of our Toyota Corolla in the early ‘80s, when journeys were longer and all major roads went through small towns. ‘Don’t ask the question if you already know the answer!’ would come my parents’ response. ‘Informed questioning’, the kind which lies at the heart of creative acts, was encouraged from an early age: ‘don’t ask the question if you already know the answer!’ The same principle applies to good facilitation and consultation. When we ask questions that are informed by what we know, but to which we do not know the answer, imaginative leaps and new discoveries are possible.

Even so, each generation asks questions that have been asked before, and makes discoveries that were discovered before in other times by other people. Sometimes we look for ‘innovation’ in the arts — and in education. We might recognise formal innovation, which might be facilitated by the application of new technologies in new ways. Or we might find innovation in people’s voices, telling what might be an age-old tale, in a way that is informed by their distinctive experiences and perspectives of a particular time and place. In policy-making too, the re-discovery of forgotten or lesser-heard wisdoms, the adoption of ideas that were marginal and radical to those that are more mainstream, form part of today’s bold new ideas.

86. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 13, 29, 31.

Informed questioning suggests learning from the past, while also taking stock of the present, and what we know. But what are the experiences that have informed us, and whose perspectives have informed our thinking? And based on these experiences and perspectives, what questions are we motivated to ask? In my view, our experiences must include opportunities for meaningful engagement with the world through the arts, across a range of forms and shaped by a diversity of voices.

Children’s right to participate in cultural life and the arts is articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its adoption by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and its ratification by Ireland in 1992 were collective acts of creative intelligence. The Convention sets out a wide range of fundamental rights, including children’s right to an education that enables them to develop to their fullest potential, and children’s right to freedom of expression. This includes the ‘freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds ... including in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.’<sup>86</sup> For young people to have freedom and choice, they should have opportunities to experiment with different forms of expression, and to respond to different ideas expressed in a range of ways. Whether through music, sound, visual art, film, stories, poetry — or forms that have not yet been invented, or might go by different names — by participating in the arts children can find different ways to connect with the world, and to respond with their own experience and voice. Our experiences — and what they include or exclude — inform our understanding of the world, and of who we are, as well as our ability to offer our own responses and ideas. The richer the experiences, the better the questions; even if these questions have been asked before.

Questions like this one, borrowed from Ciarán Benson’s lecture, ‘Time, Vocabulary, and Art’s Thoughtful Uses of Feeling?’ — or from a child in her classroom:

*‘When is art?’*

## The Place of the Arts in Irish Education

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### Áine Hyland

87. Ireland. Department of Education. (1965). *Investment in Education: Report of the Survey Team Appointed by the Minister for Education in October 1962*, Dublin, Stationery Office

88. J. Coolahan. (1980). *Irish Education: History and Structure*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, 165.

The publication of the *Benson Report* in 1979 followed a decade of change and upheaval in Irish Education. A report on *Investment in Education* had been commissioned by the Irish government following Ireland's participation in the Washington Policy Conference on Economic Growth in 1961 and the report was published in January 1966. The *Investment in Education*<sup>87</sup> report was supported financially by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), then a relatively new international organisation of which Ireland was a member. The publication of the report triggered a tsunami of change in Irish education — not least of which was the announcement by Minister for Education Donogh O'Malley that free second-level education for all, with free transport where required, would be introduced in September 1967. John Coolahan subsequently described the report as one of the foundation documents of modern Irish education.<sup>88</sup>

The first of the comprehensive and community schools were built in the following decade and capital grants were made available for building, extending and improving voluntary secondary schools. Vocational school students were now allowed to sit the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate and the second-level school curriculum was revised. The first of the Regional Technical Colleges had been built and means-tested grants were available for university attendance. A new and exciting curriculum had been introduced for primary schools in 1971 and for the first time since the foundations of the State, the arts were highlighted as central to children's learning. It was an exciting decade in Irish education and the publication of the Benson Report was timely.

From a personal point of view, I was very engaged with all the changes that were taking place in education. When I sat the Leaving Certificate in 1959, I had intended to become a primary school teacher and I spent a few months in Carysfort Training College for primary teachers between September and December 1959. However, my experience there was disappointing and when I was offered a post

89. *Investment in Education: Report*, p. 280, par. 10.26).

90. Ireland. Council of Design (1965) *Report of the Council of Design*, Dublin, Stationery Office.

91. K. Franck, E. Herlow, A. Huld, G. Büllmann Petersen, E.C. Sorensen. (1961). *Design in Ireland: Report of the Scandinavian Design Group in Ireland*, April 1961, Dublin, Córas Tráchtála/The Irish Export Board, 1961-04, 49.

as an Executive Officer in December 1959, I left Carysfort and became a civil servant in the Department of Education in Marlborough Street. In 1962, I was seconded to work with the *Investment in Education* team, where I met my future husband Bill Hyland, who was the statistician on the research team. I was immersed in all kinds of facts and figures about Irish education during the two years I spent with the *Investment in Education* team and I developed a fascination with the education system. While the *Investment in Education* report did not go into detail about school curriculum it nevertheless noted the neglect of the arts in Irish education stating: 'The curriculum in a great many schools is limited and is of a classical grammar school type. Small schools in particular appear to have difficulty in providing a varied course.'<sup>89</sup>

During my time in the Department I had acted as a rapporteur for some of the meetings of the Council of Design, one of whose members was Louis le Brocquy. In its report published in 1965 the Council of Design<sup>90</sup> stated that 'Indifference to the importance of good design in every aspect of the school ... has been part of an educational tradition in which art as a whole has been gravely undervalued.' An earlier report in 1961, *Report by the Scandinavian Group on Design in Ireland*,<sup>91</sup> was also critical of the extent to which the arts were undervalued in Irish education. That report was scathing in its comment that 'the Irish schoolchild is visually and artistically among the most under-educated in Europe'.

However, not all aspects of the arts were neglected in Irish schools. In the 1950s I had been fortunate to attend a girls' secondary school where music was central to the life of the school. Although it was a small boarding school with fewer than one hundred students, we had an excellent choir which won awards almost every year for both secular and church music. Every girl in the school was taught to play a musical instrument and virtually everyone was in the school orchestra at some stage of their schooling. We also staged an operetta or a musical every year in which all students were involved. However, the visual arts did not play a significant part in my education and while I studied drawing at secondary school, the subject was taught by the mathematics teacher whose focus was largely on geometric patterns and shapes — the syllabus was more closely allied to today's technical drawing than to art.

92. Benson Report, 1979, 1.13.

When I got married in the mid-1960s, I had to resign from my post in the Department of Education, as the marriage ban, which forbade married women from working in the civil service, was still in operation. (The marriage ban was not lifted until 1973, following Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community — now the European Union). During the subsequent years I gave birth to three daughters, was awarded a Licentiate of the Royal College of Music which qualified me as a piano teacher, and completed a BA in Irish and French in University College Dublin (UCD), and the Higher Diploma in Education and a Master's degree in Education in Trinity College. For most of the 1970s, I was a part-time secondary teacher with music as one of my teaching subjects. Therefore, I had a special interest in the place of arts in Irish education and in the Benson Report when it was published in 1979.

At primary school level, the new curriculum in 1971 had introduced a very welcome focus on the arts. As the Benson Report noted: 'The inclusion of imaginative programmes in music, art and craft, drama and mime activities, physical education and dance, as integral parts of the curriculum, heralded a new era in Irish national education.'<sup>92</sup> The primary school attended by my young daughters throughout the 1970s had been a pilot school for the arts in the new curriculum and the arts played an important role in their schooling. When the Benson Report was published in 1979, I was a part-time lecturer in Carysfort College of Education, now totally transformed from the Carysfort Training College I had briefly attended in 1959 — and the arts were a central lynchpin in the education of future student-teachers. I remember some wonderful artistic renderings of children's literature in the College Library annexe — a stunning visual representation of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, made by students, stands out particularly in my mind. Music was also an important subject in the training of teachers — both academic music and what was referred to as professional music, that is, music as taught in the primary school. The college itself had acquired some impressive art works. We had art works by le Brocqy, Patrick Scott, etc on the corridor walls. And of course Seamus Heaney, afterwards awarded a Nobel prize for literature, was Head of English in Carysfort College at that time. It was an exciting and arts-rich environment for the training of primary teachers.

93. Benson Report, 1979, 1.18.

94. Benson Report, 1979, 1.21.

95. Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB). (1984). *Issues and structures in education*. Dublin: CEB.

In addition to the place of the arts within formal schooling, there were many opportunities in the 1970s to experience the arts outside school, although in less advantaged communities, these opportunities were scarce. The Benson Report referred to 'the often heroic and inspirational work of many individuals within the system'. It also pointed out that 'by means of various extra-curricular activities some pupils were encouraged to participate in the arts'.<sup>93</sup> However, Benson pointed out that some of the stereotypes associated with the arts were unhelpful: 'the arts are seen as more suitable for girls than for boys and for the less intelligent rather than for the more intelligent pupils'. 'They are often judged to be more interesting than useful ... it is no accident that Friday afternoon is such a popular time for art and craft in primary school.'<sup>94</sup>

While the 1980s witnessed a period of economic recession with cutbacks in many areas of the arts and education, the setting up of the Curriculum and Examinations Board by Fine Gael Minister Gemma Hussey in 1984 held out some promise for a renewed emphasis on arts education within the formal school system. A consultative document, *Issues and Structures in Education*,<sup>95</sup> set out a proposed framework for a Junior Cycle second-level curriculum which consisted of a core which would be obligatory for all students, and a series of options described as Additional Contributions. The framework included Creative and Aesthetic Studies, and the obligatory subjects would be Art, Design and Craft, Music, and Drama. Literature in both English and Irish would be obligatory and creative dance and mime would be optional subjects. However, when the coalition government fell in 1987, the Curriculum and Examinations Board was disbanded and its recommendations were ignored by the subsequent National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (although the current revised junior cycle curriculum has borrowed somewhat from the proposed framework of 1984).

Carysfort College was one of the victims of the economic recession of the 1980s and when it closed in 1988, I went to UCD as a lecturer in the Education Department. Having been involved in the preparation of primary teachers in Carysfort, where the arts were highlighted and formed part of every student's repertoire, I was struck by the aridity of the training programme for secondary teachers. There was little or no reference to the arts — apart from the literature element of the language subjects. The separateness of the training of

96. Author. 'Galway celebrates Michael D. 1993', <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2018/0108/931702-first-minister-for-the-arts/>.

teachers of the visual arts (which happened in the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), and which had no relationship at that time with the Education Departments in either UCD or Trinity College), was noticeable. The physical surroundings of many of the teaching spaces in Belfield at that time were less than aesthetically pleasing and I don't think I ever saw a painting or even a print on a wall there during the seven years I spent as a member of the staff of the Education Department.

My appointment as Professor of Education and Head of the Education Department in University College Cork in 1993 happened to coincide with the appointment of Michael D. Higgins as Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht. His appointment was enthusiastically welcomed by the arts community nationwide but especially in his native city of Galway. Media coverage of his welcome in Galway was enthusiastic: 'As a poet-politician returned to his native city last night, the country's first ever Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht found himself engulfed in celebrations and the adulation of almost all of Galway's arts community.' Speaking to RTÉ reporter Jim Fahy, Higgins outlined the aim of his portfolio: 'My major function is to put culture, the arts, and the Irish language at the centre of Irish life.' Referring to his appointment, Adrian Munnely from the Arts Council emphasised the need for the arts to be funded properly and the need to 'secure funds from Europe in order to be able to complete the arts infrastructure ... to create arts centres and artists' studios and theatres around the country'. Professor Alan Titley stressed the urgency of getting the much discussed Irish language television service on air, and film-maker Louis Marcus also wanted to see the re-establishment of the film agency for Ireland, which was axed in 1987.<sup>96</sup> In retrospect we can see that the new Minister did indeed deliver on many of these visions — although of course there remains still a lot to be done.

The relatively high profile given to the arts by the appointment of Michael D. as Minister provided an impetus for me in my role as Head of the Education Department to engage more actively with the arts in education. I invited the students of the Crawford Institute in Cork who were enrolled on the Diploma course for teachers of Art and Design to attend some of the education lectures in University College Cork (UCC). I also invited a number of schools in less advantaged areas to collaborate with the Education Department in enriching their school programme by enhancing their arts education

97. Hyland, A. (2000). *The Multiple Intelligences Curriculum Project Final Report*, Cork, Multiple Intelligences Curriculum and Assessment Project, Education Department, UCC.

98. T. Connolly, C. Deane and Á. Hyland. (2004) *Bridging the Gap Evaluation Report*, Education Department, University College Cork.

curriculum. We were fortunate to source funding for this initiative, initially from The Atlantic Philanthropies and later from a local philanthropist, Tomar Trust. This enabled us to provide financial support to the schools, initially through a research project on Multiple Intelligences, Teaching and Assessment,<sup>97</sup> and later by a project called Bridging the Gap.<sup>98</sup>

During my period as Head of the Education Department in UCC, my educational philosophy was strongly influenced by the research and writings of Howard Gardner in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. His seminal book, *Frames of Mind*, first published in the 1980s, posited the theory of Multiple Intelligences and I became an advocate of this theory and its significance for teaching and learning. Some colleagues and myself, and in later years the principals of some schools in disadvantaged areas of Cork city, attended summer schools annually between 1996 and 2004 run by Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Project Zero (PZ) had been set up in the late 1960s by Nelson Goodman who was concerned that virtually nothing (ZERO) was known about how effective learning occurred. Howard Gardner had been involved in PZ from the beginning and led many research projects on teaching and learning. Initially the focus of PZ was on learning in and through the arts as well as on the importance of the arts in their own right, and those of us who attended the summer schools learned many strategies about enhancing learning through and with the arts.

In a recent publication, Ellen Winner (wife of Howard Gardner) who has undertaken significant research of the role of the arts in education, wrote:

*The arts have been in existence since the earliest humans, are parts of all cultures, and are a major domain of human experience, just like science, technology, mathematics and humanities. In that respect, they are important in their own rights for education. Students who gain mastery in an art form may discover their life's work or their life's passion. But for all children, the arts allow a different way of understanding than the sciences and other academic subjects. Because they are an arena without right and wrong answers, they free students to explore and experiment. They are also a place to introspect and find personal meaning.*

99. Winner, E. (2013). T.R. Goldstein, V.-L. Stéphan, *Educational Research and Innovation Art for Art's Sake? The Impact of Arts*, OECD Publishing, 249-265, 265 and 262.

100. Grant, M. (2000). *Breaking the Cycle of Education Disadvantage: A Celebration of Learning Through the Arts*. Dublin: Department of Education and Science.

She further stated:

*We do not believe that the existence of arts education should be justified in terms of skills in other, traditional academic subjects: if one seeks first and foremost to develop skills in geometry, studying geometry — rather than music and dance — is always likely to be more effective. Indeed, as mentioned above, one can raise the question of why training in the arts should improve skills in reading or mathematics or science. What is the underlying mechanism? Even if one could show that arts training has some effect on reading, writing and arithmetic (the so-called 3 Rs) it should be obvious that improvement in these basic subjects is more likely to come about if they are the direct focus of the curriculum.*<sup>99</sup>

Around the same time, back in Ireland, the Department of Education had funded a national programme for schools in disadvantaged urban areas called Breaking the Cycle. Maura Grant<sup>100</sup> was co-ordinator of this project and she believed and indeed demonstrated that involvement in the arts could be a powerful factor for success in and out of school. The project culminated in a visit to each individual school by the President of Ireland at the time, Mary McAleese and by a major showcasing event in Dublin's National Concert Hall in the millennium year, 2000. A report on the project noted that:

*When young people engage in the arts process, they are likely to experience joy, appreciation, engagement and flow. When learning through the arts, children learn new ways of self-expression and communication. Through the arts, children master complex symbol systems and develop thinking skills which are positive experiences that enrich their lives ... the arts can play a vital role in learning how to learn, as essential ability for fostering achievement and growth through their lives.*

In University College Cork, the Multiple Intelligences Curriculum and Assessment project (1996 to 2000) and the Bridging the Gap project, which got under way in 2001, highlighted the arts in education. While Bridging the Gap did not initially focus solely on the arts, it became clear that exposure to and an opportunity to engage in the arts would be a very significant way of bridging the gap between pupils from less advantaged backgrounds and their more

101. Winner, E. and S. Vincent-Lancrin. (2013). 'The Impact of Arts Education', in eds E. Liebau, E. Wagner, M. Wyman, *International Yearbook for Research in Arts Education 1/2013*, 71-78, 78.

advantaged peers. The annual report of the project in 2004 noted that the arts and other curriculum enrichment activities had been successfully promoted as a way of improving the pupils' learning experiences. A large number of school-based projects which were supported financially by Bridging the Gap provided access to music, drama and visual arts activities for children who would not otherwise have these opportunities. The schools reported that involvement in these activities had a positive impact on the pupils' learning dispositions and that this in turn produced gains in achievement.

Notwithstanding claims made by some teachers that the arts had contributed to an overall improvement in pupil attainment, the report made it clear that there was no empirical evidence that any of the interventions targeted at addressing educational disadvantage, either in Cork or anywhere else, had produced measurable gains in the achievement of pupils on standardised tests e.g. of literacy and numeracy. We shared the view articulated by Ellen Winner that 'the primary justification of arts education should remain the intrinsic importance of the arts and the related skills that they develop'.<sup>101</sup>

The schools involved in Bridging the Gap collected data to show how involvement in the arts had an impact on a range of factors that affected learning. One school showed significant improvement in reading test results following an arts programme. Several schools described the impact of the arts on learning in other curricular areas, and on the development of generic transferable learning skills. Many of the projects reported visible improvements in pupils' self-esteem, which was seen as contributing to more positive learning dispositions. Some schools described improvements in attendance and in the involvement and support of parents — an important factor in the achievement of children. In several of the projects it was clear that a major outcome of engagement in the arts was the raising of expectations of parents and teachers. (There is an extensive literature documenting the relationship between teacher expectations and learner outcomes). A number of the schools reported that teachers developed their own skills through working alongside arts specialists as part of a school-based project. This enhanced their professional practice and broadened the range of teaching and learning resources available in the school. It inspired teachers to adopt new routes to learning in their classrooms.

One school which had not previously emphasised music in the curriculum reported that 'each child in the school now plays a musical instrument and can read music. Parents are also involved. They met with the music teacher to learn basic music theory and to discover how to make the practice of music enjoyable for their children.' One of the parents told us that:

*Giving my child music lessons was something that financially I would never be able to do. So when the programme started in our school, I must say both my daughter and I were excited. With great patience and dedication from her music teacher, she now has a great love for music.*

Another school principal reported that the most important learning point was an ability to play a musical instrument in a large group setting and the discipline involved. By extension it became a community project with parental participation an important aspect.

In one boys' primary school, Bridging the Gap provided funding to buy musical instruments for a marching band. The school principal reported:

*As well as pride in their sons, the project undoubtedly reached out to parents who otherwise had little to do with the school. Barriers came down, ghosts from their own past seem to have been banished, as their feelings towards the school and towards the school's efforts became more warm and positive. ... what no evaluation can measure is that look of fierce pride manifest in a parent's face as they look into the school yard and see their son, lost in concentration, as he and one or two others play the pieces which they have practised for so long.*

Bridging the Gap also subsidised some visual arts projects. One such project — a print-making project in collaboration with Fota Wildlife Park — was called 'Tyger, Tyger Burning Bright'. Pupils from a number of schools visited Fota Park to see the tigers there and subsequently made prints of the tigers which they framed and sold for a profit. This was an example of an inter-disciplinary project which combined reading, geography, environmental studies and art, and the children learned some new and valuable transversal skills in the process. And of course, the schools had access to the wonderful resources of the

then newly-opened Glucksman Gallery in University College Cork where pupils and their teachers were introduced to the rich collection of art owned by the university. The project also collaborated with Cork Opera House to provide subsidised access for children and young people from less advantaged backgrounds who would never otherwise visit the Opera House to attend performances there. Throughout the five-year life of Bridging the Gap, the university hosted a major showcase of the artistic work of the primary and secondary school pupils every year — their artwork, poetry, choirs, orchestras, rap groups — a rich demonstration of what had been achieved.

Like so many initiatives in the arts which depend on the leadership of committed individuals and on once-off project grants, Bridging the Gap ended when I retired from University College Cork in 2006. However, its legacy still remains in a number of schools which have continued with their choirs and orchestras and with a greater than usual emphasis on the arts.

At a national level, the launch of the Arts in Education Charter, jointly published in 2012 by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht gave a new and welcome impetus to the arts in education and seems to augur well for the future. The charter was largely the dreamchild and work of the late Professor John Coolahan who had been a champion of the Arts and an inspirational leader throughout his life. The Arts in Education Charter includes a commitment by government to set up a High-Level Implementation Group and to introduce a number of initiatives including the Arts Rich Schools initiative and the development of a portal site for arts in education. The online portal showcases a rich collection of arts activities throughout the country and encourages the sharing of ideas among practitioners in the arts and education communities. When I accessed the arts-in-education portal recently, I was very pleased to see that the Glucksman Gallery in UCC continues to support arts experiences for schools and pupils. The Gallery's recent exhibition, 'The Classroom Museum' (January 2020), enables schoolchildren in rural Ireland to participate in an imaginative programme of creative learning around contemporary artworks from the UCC art collection. The initiative facilitates the loan of artworks into the classroom space and includes a visit by the artist to the school, a collaborative art project by the children and an exhibition of this work in the Glucksman Gallery.

In summary then, in addition to the 1979 Benson Report, other developments and initiatives which influenced me and convinced me of the importance of the arts in education included firstly the *Investment in Education Report* in the 1960s which uncovered the shortcomings in Irish education and pointed the way to educational reform. The new Primary School Curriculum of 1971 was hugely significant and introduced the arts as an integral part of children's schooling. I saw this in the education of my own three daughters who were fortunate to attend primary schools where the arts were central to the curriculum. My seven years as a staff member in Carysfort College in the 1980s also convinced me that the arts could indeed contribute significantly to teaching and learning and this conviction was strengthened when I got to know the work of Howard Gardner and his colleagues in Project Zero in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The educational projects which I led in University College Cork — the Multiple Intelligences, Curriculum and Assessment project and the Bridging the Gap project provided myself and my colleagues with an opportunity to share and learn from exciting initiatives in the arts with teachers, pupils and parents in schools in the less advantaged areas of Cork city.

As we look to the future, we hope that the Arts in Education Charter and its Implementation Group will ensure that there will be ongoing political and financial commitment to the arts in education. The death of John Coolahan in 2018 was a sore loss to the implementation of the charter and the recent move by Orlaith McBride from her post as director of the Arts Council to her new position as director of the National Archives will also be a loss. However, we must remain optimistic. Much has been achieved since the publication of the Benson Report forty years ago — but much still remains to be done.

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