

A Primary Schools Audience Development Project

Conducted by The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children in association with the Irish Museum of Modern Art, under the guidance of Heather Maitland

by Jeanine MacQuarrie

May 2010

Arts Audiences: Build Your Audience scheme

In September 2009, Arts Audiences launched the Build Your Audience scheme, inviting submissions from arts organisations outlining projects where the services of marketing consultant, Heather Maitland, would be of assistance to them in a particular audience development initiative.

From submissions, three organisations were selected to receive free consultancy. This document, produced by Jeanine MacQuarrie, is an outcome from this process.

Arts Audiences is a partnership initiative of the Arts Council and Temple Bar Cultural Trust, further information is available at www.ArtsAudiences.ie.

Primary Schools Audience Development Project



Written by Jeanine MacQuarrie, May 2010



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Primary Schools Audience Development Project

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Summary

The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children (hereafter 'The Ark'), and the Irish Museum of Modern Art (hereafter 'IMMA'), have undertaken an audience development research project focusing on the relationship between our venues and our primary school audience. The project investigated the expectations, needs and issues facing principals and teachers in primary schools and how these can reflect in their capacity to access cultural venues. As the present challenging economic climate is exerting increasing pressure on school resources, this project set out to explore **how we, as cultural venues, can better prepare for the possible negative impact of the current economic crisis on primary schools' engagement with the arts.**

Under the guidance of a project team consisting of representatives from each cultural venue, the project conducted a forum and two Focus Group meetings involving a total of sixteen practising principals and primary school teachers during April and May 2010. The sixteen schools represented were mostly from the Dublin area with an even split between city centre based schools and those in the outer reaches of the county. They included two girls' schools, one special needs school, alongside two rural schools based in County Meath and County Wicklow. More than half of the primary schools involved in the project are designated as disadvantaged under the The Department of Education and Skills Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) plan to address educational disadvantage throughout the public school system.

The different groups were selected based on their present or past relationships with both venues and all identifying information about the participants has been removed from this report to preserve their anonymity. The Teachers' Forum group was made up of a group of principals and teachers whose schools have an established relationship with one or both venues, regularly accessing events and utilising resources. This meeting was followed by a Focus Group with teachers who have lapsed in their attendance to events at one or both venues. The final Focus Group met with teachers from schools that have never visited The Ark or IMMA or have not done so for a period of at least seven years.

Alongside the documentation of the findings from these meetings the project also sought to gain insight into the different experiences of Irish primary teachers through a series of one on one interviews with arts and education specialists. The project team met with representatives from the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS), Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) as well as a lecturer from Froebel College of Education and an artist and facilitator with extensive experience of working with school groups.

We hope that the results of this audience development project can help feed into the future planning of cultural events for primary schools in both The Ark and IMMA and will offer transferable learning to other arts organisations across the country.

The Ark and IMMA have produced this audience development research project as part of Arts Audiences "Build Your Audience" pilot scheme. **Arts Audiences is a partnership initiative of the Arts Council and Temple Bar Cultural Trust.**

Executive Summary of Findings

- The overwhelming feedback from the primary school principals, teachers and education advisors involved in this project was an affirmation of the high value placed on the arts in supporting the meaningful delivery of the primary curriculum.
- The current economic crisis is exerting more pressure on finance, time and staff resources within primary schools and this could increasingly limit the capacity of this audience to engage with cultural venues.
- Principals and teachers articulated very clearly that, despite increasing logistical difficulties, they are still determined, enthusiastic and committed to the continuation of access to creative engagements in venues due to the numerous positive benefits to children.
- Cultural venues must proactively engage with teachers to ascertain the needs and challenges which are facing primary schools. This task is essential in order to retain, support and build this audience group.
- Cultural venues must shift their position by developing programming and communication mechanisms to work alongside primary schools and teacher-training colleges, which can assist and continue the delivery of the primary curriculum through the arts.
- Professional Development courses are greatly valued by teachers. They enrich the confidence and creativity of the individual and are also a key motivating factor to encourage positive future relationships between the schools and cultural venues.
- Cultural venues can supplement the value and attractiveness of the events on offer to schools by developing layered programmes which extend into the classroom before and after their visit.
- Collaboration between cultural venues, and their capacity to operate in a more integrated way, will encourage attendance by primary schools looking to engage their students in a whole day experience.
- Parents play an increasingly active role in the engagement of primary schools with cultural venues. Venues need to develop systems to ensure that this involvement has a positive impact for all involved.

Question 1

What are the needs and expectations of primary school teachers when planning a trip for their class?

Taking a school trip or tour forms a regular part of the annual planning of principals and teachers in primary schools, and is noted in the Department of Education and Skills guidelines as an important part of the school life experience of children.

- *The objective of educational tours for schools should be that they be of benefit to the intellectual, cultural and social development of the pupils taking part in them.*

Department of Education and Skills

All of those involved in the research elements of this project had organised a variety of school trips for a class of students in their care. These ranged from trips to art galleries and theatres to farms, sports grounds, cinemas and parks. All participants were enthusiastic in their agreement of the benefits of taking a school trip for their students.

- *They learn so much when they go out on a trip...sense of social behaviour...you can't quantify it but it's absolutely massive.*
- *I don't think you could go on too many trips with children. What they gain is immeasurable. The more windows into the classroom the better... for everybody concerned.*

Teachers' Forum

Enjoyable school trips are linked to common elements including low cost, ease of access (in particular by local public transport links or by walking), the quality of the experience for the group and the relevance of the educational activity.

Cultural trips outside of the classroom offer the opportunity for students and teachers to meet and work with experts in their field. They get to work in a creative space unrestricted by the usual dimensions and demands of the classroom.

- *They're not restricted to the size of a piece of paper that would fit on their desk at school.*

Focus Group with Lapsed Users

- *It's very good for you as a teacher to see them in some other space.*

Teachers' Forum

This freedom allows children to creatively express themselves and discover unknown talents whilst being involved in an artistic event.

- *[It allows children] ...to explore their own ideas and that it's not prescribed.*

Visual Artist and Facilitator

A trip to a cultural institution was particularly memorable for one teacher as the experience began even before they left the classroom. The venue provided prints of the images that the class would be shown on their visit to the gallery and the teacher was therefore able to display these around the school. By enabling the students to study the artworks in advance they developed an appreciation and opinion of them which lead to a more in depth experience when they saw the real thing during their school visit.

Allowing schools access to view and respond to contemporary art was one of the main compliments made of IMMA.

- [IMMA] *opened their [the children's] eyes and the teachers eyes to different ways of seeing, which is very much IMMA inspired.*
- *It's always wonderful, it always sparks off something for the year that you can work with.*

Teachers' Forum

The Ark was similarly praised for the range of the work on offer and the quality of engagement recognised in Ark performances and activities.

- [The Ark's programmes are]...*things that you'd love to think you'd do in class, but you'd be running from it.*
- *Frequently the best thing that I come to in the [Dublin] Theatre Festival is at The Ark.*

Teachers' Forum

In addition to the quality of the experience, teachers are keen to ensure that a visit to an art gallery would be structured and keep the attention of the students. Visits are enhanced by the opportunity to combine the gallery experience with something hands on.

- [Cultural venues offer]...*the chance for people to access and look at artistic work that engages them and then be involved in a practical exploration of it. [It helps] ...them to understand the link between the two.*

Visual Artist and Facilitator

There is increased job satisfaction for teachers who can see a student, who might otherwise struggle with the curriculum in the classroom, become '*unlocked*' by a creative activity. These experiences become even more worthwhile as they spark creativity back in the classroom, within the school and perhaps even at home.

One teacher described how the last trip she had made to The Ark was supported by a number of parents attending with the group for additional supervision. They were able to see the children enjoying a new activity in a new environment and many have since approached the teacher to volunteer to help on the next class outing. School trips involving parents can give them a greater understanding of the benefits of the arts curriculum and an opportunity to enjoy an educational activity with their children.

- *It would be great for parents to see a children's art workshop and to see the amount of problem solving involved, the decision making.*
- *They see the value of it.*

Teachers' Forum

A key comment from the Teachers' Forum and Focus Groups was that by combining a number of activities within the same day the trip became a more enjoyable and worthwhile experience.

- *A day out approach to planning a trip is favourable, where schools can take advantage of being able to access a couple of activities in one day – make best use of time and financial resources.*

Irish National Teachers Organisation

Some primary schools have developed a whole school policy for planning trips, to ensure that all children have the opportunity to experience the range of activities open to them. Some schools have an annual focus such as music or science and all activities within that year, including school trips, will be based on that subject. Other schools, without such a policy in place, are very much dependent on the enthusiasm and dedication of individual teachers to ensure that children have the opportunity to experience a range of out of school activities.

- *A lot depends on the teachers you have in the school...if a teacher leaves who's involved in music, then that can fall flat... you're falling back on the goodwill of teachers.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

With the increased competition of arts venues with school programmes on offer, teachers often have a number of venues that they would like to access. If they are restricted to only taking one trip a year they will operate these trips on a rotating basis, resulting in them not visiting the same venue every year and in turn flagging them as a lapsed user for any one venue.

For many teachers the practical aspects of planning a trip will take over soon after an activity has been spotted as a potential class trip. These include planning it into the school timetable, organising supervision, getting parental permission, preparing contact lists. It may be enough to know that the activity has been designed specifically with children in mind and the main restrictions of these practicalities such as the cost, transport, timings may outweigh the content of the programme to an extent.

Cultural venues offer teachers an opportunity to access specialist experiences and expertise which might not be easily available to them in the school environment. Curriculum and teacher guidelines from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment outline how this access enhances the experience and engagement of children with the primary curriculum.

- *Purposeful visual arts activities expand children's ways of exploring, expressing and coming to terms with the world they inhabit in a structured and enjoyable way. Children who have had experience in exploring and experimenting with a variety of art materials and media are likely, as they develop, to produce art that is personal.*

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

One of the key ways that cultural venues can support the delivery of the curriculum is in the looking and responding strand, by enabling access to galleries of artwork. Other strands of the curriculum which were identified as being areas needing support were clay, construction, fabric and fibre and drama.

However, simply experiencing the arts is part of the primary curriculum as it teaches students to *'become more informed of our visual environment'*. In addition the experiential element of going on a school trip is part of the primary curriculum in that it is a learning activity in itself. Children experience being with their class outside of the classroom, interacting with new environments and people. Teachers are aware that,

- *Just by participating, you're engaging with the curriculum.*

Irish National Teachers Organisation

Question 2

What kinds of barriers face primary schools planning trips to cultural venues?

While most participants in this research shared a common pleasure in engaging their class with experiences outside of the primary classroom environment, they also shared common difficulties in the planning of such activities.

The effects of the current economic climate

The current economic crisis has resulted in staff cuts, increased class sizes and reduction in grants and funding. The number of special needs assistants in primary schools has been halved in the past year. A possible impact of these cutbacks is that primary school teachers may withdraw from extracurricular activities.¹

Cost

A barrier to engaging with cultural venues, exacerbated by the impact of the current economic climate, is the cost of a school trip. This has been the immediate response from all those involved in this project.

- *Money is king*
Focus Group with Lapsed Users

- *With the tickets and the bus fares it just becomes very expensive.*
Teachers' Forum

Many schools are unable to fully subsidise a trip out of the classroom and so it is necessary for teachers to request the money from parents. However financial demands are being made of parents in many ways throughout the year, to pay for, amongst other things, reading lists, arts materials and sports activities. Teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to approach parents for money for school trips as they are aware of families experiencing pay cuts and job losses.

Transport

The cost of transport is a further barrier to teachers wishing to engage in activities outside of the classroom, especially when planning a trip for a large group where access to a car or

¹ Sean Flynn, The Irish Times (2010). INTO issues work to rule directive.

using public transport is not an option. Coach hire was quoted as raising the cost of a trip for one teacher by at least €5 per child.

Accessibility is also a barrier at venues where there is no drop off or parking provision for school coaches. Teachers are far more confident to bring their class to a venue where they are sure that the children can be safely delivered to and picked up from the front door.

Supervision

An effect of the recent cutbacks in primary schools is that staff resources have been stretched across the country. By law it is necessary for groups travelling outside of the school grounds to ensure a certain ratio of adults to children and it is also necessary to increase this ratio as the age of the children is lowered. With less staff on hand to travel with a group, teachers are looking to parents to offer support in this capacity. But even this option is becoming more problematic as parents seem to be less available.

Time

Another barrier discussed in all meetings and emphasised in the interview with the Irish National Teachers Organisation was time or the lack of it.

In 2005 and 2008 The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) conducted reviews of the primary curriculum in Ireland and in both principals and teachers cited time as one of their greatest challenges in implementing the curriculum.

The Irish National Teachers Organisation was keen to highlight that under these time pressures extra curricular access to art and sports activities might become neglected. The prominence of these subjects is becoming very much linked to the enthusiasm of individual teachers.

Schools operate on a whole school timetable and trips have to fit in with this, working around other extra-curricular activities and falling at a time in the year when a teacher can manage all the practical aspects of planning a trip. Time cannot be afforded to repeatedly ring a venue to try and book in for an event.

Time is critical factor when considering bringing younger classes to events. Teachers have to be sure that they can attend the event and still have enough time to return to school before the end of the day.

Schools in 2010 have also had to contend with the unusual and unexpected barrier to their normal routine caused by the extreme weather conditions in January. All schools were closed for a number of days and consequently they have been reluctant to lose any further classroom time to taking school trips.

Venues

Where there is a perceived inconsistency in the nature of the events on offer or how they are being advertised, and the booking system for events is not transparent, schools can easily be put off from attempting to book.

Some teachers involved in this project commented on being discouraged from attempting to book with both The Ark and IMMA following periods where both venues appeared to be booked up in advance. A perception can develop that only people 'in the know' can avail of the trips on offer.²

- *You would spot something you would like to go to and think to contact them way in advance and it's all booked up.*

Teachers' Forum

Confidence

A teacher's sense of lack-of-confidence or competence in the delivery of the arts elements of the primary curriculum can be a barrier to their seeking for means to explore it outside of the classroom. One of the findings in the NCCA curriculum review was that teachers are still learning about the visual arts as a curriculum subject.

Principals and teachers can access continuing professional development to support all aspects of their responsibilities. The current system for departmental approved professional development courses in the summer months is run under the incentive of time off in lieu during the school year for any teachers that participate. Individual primary schools are not allocated a budget, and teachers cannot claim for the costs of professional development courses operated by independent venues or organisations (regular in-service training is provided by the Department of Education and Skills).

Changing priorities

In spite of the range and increasing pressures exerted on primary teachers, there remains a passionate commitment to ensure that children in their care are given opportunities to experience the arts.

- *We do not change our commitment to children, to education, to arts.*

Teachers' Forum

² The Ark and IMMA run inclusive programmes which are openly advertised through mailing lists and marketing to ensure that all audiences are informed at the same time, IMMA has also operated a school online booking service since September 2009.

- *We haven't that much money at the moment but we do spend it a lot on the arts...because we know that the children really enjoy it.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

There was an overwhelming response from all those who consulted on this project, regardless of whether their relationship with The Ark and IMMA had lapsed or not, of a high satisfactory rating for the arts and its positive impact on the development of their students.

- *If you don't give the children the chance to experience something...you don't know what sort of a genius you have there...it's a question of opportunity as much as anything else.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

All primary school teachers saw the arts as a highly positive and meaningful method for delivering the primary curriculum. However, they wanted to give their feedback that logistical barriers play a real factor in restricting the access of schools to cultural events.

Limits are being placed in some schools on the number of trips that can be taken in a year. With an increase in curriculum assessment there is a pressure to keep children in the classroom and ensure that they are reaching learning targets. Time away from the classroom can be viewed as non-educational. Parents will often quantify the educational benefits of a subject by the amount of homework their child brings home with them.

In a changing society the expectations of parents have grown as they seek to ensure that their children have access to educational activities and experiences that they did not. At the same time parents are looking for more value for money and are beginning to question the necessity of certain school activities that they are requested to fund such as swimming lessons.

Teachers may also need to consider the changing priorities of their students who now expect to be entertained by whatever activity they are doing.

- *The minute they get bored there's a problem.*
- *They enjoy being challenged and learning but without knowing that they're learning.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

For children in more disadvantaged areas this expectation can be even more heightened.

- *At home they wouldn't be getting all of this, but in school they expect that when you're bringing them somewhere you're going to entertain them...they expect to be compensated.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

It was commented on by this Focus Group that it will be interesting to see, in these changing times when money is not as readily available, what effect it will have on children when they cannot demand the same experiences. Children and in turn teachers will need to become more resourceful with their own creativity.

Question 3

What can cultural venues do to build their primary school audience?

This project worked with a diverse group of individuals working in or with the primary school education system. In engaging with them we sought to address how to retain our current audience, encourage further contact with lapsed users and broaden our audience.

Whether meeting with those who have regularly utilised the services of The Ark or IMMA or those with little or no knowledge of what these cultural venues offer, there was an agreement between all participants that the services and skills that these organisations possess can be hugely beneficial to teachers in accessing the full potential of the primary curriculum.

Collaboration

A desire for increased collaboration between schools and cultural venues was cited in a number of meetings with those involved in this project. All teachers were interested in the chance to build relationships with venues through advance visits.

- *You can't beat human contact. If IMMA and TheArk are looking to encourage people in it's better to go out first with something, and then build up the relationships.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

Collaboration between cultural venues within a manageable geographical area would also encourage increased attendance from schools where combined visits to a couple of events would offer a whole day experience and better value for money.

- *If you can amalgamate a few things...we make a day of it*

Teachers' Forum

This is an aspect of IMMA that is already utilised by many teachers, where they might visit the gallery, participate in a workshop and then have lunch and a run around in the museum grounds.

- *The grounds in IMMA are a trip in themselves...you don't need to go outside the gates.*

Teachers' Forum

Teacher training colleges

Collaborating with teacher training colleges would be an important way of ensuring teachers know what cultural venues can offer before they enter the classroom. It is also a way of imparting skills and knowledge which will enhance their teaching ability.

- *Visiting a specific arts education/cultural site invites the student to develop awareness and understanding of how art can be presented to and digested by children.*
- *To have an artist visit a college of education to either present or discuss an art education programme can inspire student teachers to develop their creativity.*

Lecturer, Froebel College of Education

Programming

Cultural venues must build an awareness of the needs and difficulties for teacher and schools to ensure that annual programming of events is both relevant and accessible.

The students and their experience of the event is the most important part of the planning for teachers. If the activity or the person leading it is not suitable, or the event is not age appropriate, then that teacher or school will not use the service again.

The findings from all elements of the research, whether meeting with current, lapsed or non-users of The Ark and IMMA, was that teachers want to see the children in their care experiencing something out of the ordinary and that will broaden their horizons when considering a visit to a cultural venue. Teachers want to ensure that,

- *They're all engaged, they're all happy*
- *[That the children experience] ...something for life...that it opens something for them.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

Cultural venues should look to '*plug the gaps*' for teachers in the primary curriculum, allowing access to materials, equipment and expertise that teachers cannot always explore themselves in the classroom.

Looking and responding is a key element of the curriculum where cultural venues can offer support as they have greater access to artworks which can be displayed in a gallery setting for groups to enjoy.

Teachers described being more interested in events that can be extended past a once-off experience. Many enjoyable experiences described in the meetings were linked to the opportunity to do preparatory work in the classroom before and sparked ideas for development work after a trip.

- *Take experience 'beyond the activity' into the classroom*

Primary Professional Development Service

Also activities that involve repeat visits would appeal more to teachers. Children have the opportunity to become more familiar with the space and the experience will in turn have more of an impact.

- *It's great to have an ongoing thing because a lot of the children in our areas anyway...wouldn't have their parents bring them anywhere...if they just go on a once off, they don't know where it is.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

With cost as a barrier to engagement, schools are in search of value for money from proposed activities. Many are looking to bring work into schools as a means of maximising the number of children that will experience the event but at a lower cost when transportation is not a factor. Rural based schools in particular would like to see Dublin based cultural venues engage in more outreach work, and bring performances, workshops and exhibitions to rural venues.³

Communication

As competition grows, with numerous venues offering programmes for primary schools, cultural organisations must ensure that the nature and method of communication is effective to attract and retain audiences. Teachers are attracted by the opportunity to bring their class to something new, something different or something that they are unable to experience in their school.

Word of mouth is the most reliable source of marketing. Schools are overwhelmed with literature from organisations and individuals advertising activities for schoolchildren. Teachers do not have the time and cannot risk limited finances on a product which they are unsure of or have no reputation to base an opinion on.

- *I cannot get over the amount of interesting stuff that comes into the school and I don't even distribute it because we haven't the time.*
- *It can be difficult sometimes to figure out exactly what will engage...you can be surprised or disappointed quite easily.*

Focus Group with Non-Users

Marketing material should give lots of detail about an event so teachers are clear on what to expect and that they can be sure that the person leading the activity is an expert in their field. Teachers want to know the age group that the activity is suitable for, the costs and what opportunities there might be for extending the trip to include other activities in the area or in the classroom.

Teachers have to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the primary curriculum. The Irish National Teachers Organisation recommends that cultural venues support primary school teachers by making the connections to the curriculum and being explicit about the strands that the activity would engage with. Principals and teachers may have the knowledge of cultural venues and even the range of programmes and experiences on offer but this

³ Since 1996 IMMA has run a National Programme which loans works from the IMMA Collection to up to 15 venues per annum and provides integrated Education and Community programmes.

information only 'clicks' when it becomes relevant to that teacher, to what they are working on with their class or what they would like to do in the future.

As timing is such a critical element in the planning of an out of school activity, communication should allow for advance planning. Teachers stated that one to two months planning is necessary for most trips. Where this period of advance knowledge is allowed, teachers are then able to enhance the experience of the class by doing some preparatory work in the classroom.

There was no consensus as to the type of marketing material that has the most impact in primary schools. Some teachers described their preference for the tactility of a printed program which would sit on their desk to act as a prompt for a future event. Other teachers responded better to the immediacy of email communication. However, there was an agreement that marketing material has the greatest impact when it is addressed to the individual.

- *When sending brochures etc, it might be useful to address it to 'The Arts Co-ordinator' or 'The Music Co-ordinator' and it would have a better chance of getting to the correct person.*

Primary Professional Development Service

There are opportunities to influence principals and teachers through educational publications and conferences throughout the year. The Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) conference, Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) conference and the education centre network are all additional means of reaching teachers.

ICT (Information Communications and Technology) is an increasingly central part of the curriculum to be utilised to enhance the learning across all academic subjects. It was recommended that venues like The Ark and IMMA utilise their web resources to create a more layered experience of their programmes. Websites could provide advance resources for preparatory work in the classroom and could follow up on an activity by displaying the creative work of the students in an online gallery. This in particular would have a great impact on the students as they could display their work to their peers and families at home.

Interactive whiteboards are becoming a widespread resource in schools with many schools saving up to buy them. An interesting initiative would be to set up a seminar between schools and arts venues to look at how this resource could be utilised. The Irish National Teachers Organisation would be interested to be part of this as well.

Professional Development

Both The Ark and IMMA commit elements of their annual programme to the planning of professional development courses for teachers and a key part of this project aimed to assess the reaction to these courses in the education community.

There was great support for the provision of professional development courses from cultural venues. Teachers are more inclined to bring a class to a venue when they know what to expect.

- *You're much more likely to do things that you've experienced yourself*

Teachers' Forum

- *The key resource that we can provide is to invest in the personal development of the teacher and in turn give them the confidence to explore what they can then take in to the classroom.*

Visual Artist and Facilitator

Alongside the personal development of the teacher involved in a professional development course are the potential transferable benefits to their school and their students, both in and outside the classroom.

- [Professional development course] *...let me be me and let me succeed where I thought I was failing.*
- *Get teachers in – get classes in – get children to be confident to access cultural events and venues in their own lives.*

Focus Group with Lapsed Users

As teachers grow in their own self confidence, venues featuring galleries, such as IMMA, may see teachers becoming more assured in their ability to take their class on self-guided tours around an exhibition. This will in turn increase the access of children from primary schools to the venue.

Recommendations from the Primary Professional Development Service include delivering workshops to teachers after school for between 2 and 2 ½ hours maximum. Groups work best with around 15-20 participants and teachers would be willing to pay around €10-€25 per session depending on the content and materials on offer.

The numbers applying to do face to face professional development courses as part of the department approved summer programmes are decreasing, and demand and participation is increasing for on-line courses. The Irish National Teachers Organisation ran an online art course last summer which worked very well. The advantages of this style of professional development course are that it is flexible, people can access the course wherever they are and there is not the same time commitment as an in-person course.

To ensure that school audiences continue to access events, the Irish National Teachers Organisation advised that venues '*must win the hearts and minds of teachers*', and professional development would be an effective means of doing this. By investing in teachers in this way cultural venues will in turn be investing in educational development of the children they hope to engage with.

- *I'm convinced that the more art you do with children...it feeds into absolutely everything else. It leads to greater cooperation, it improves their language skills. There are so many areas that it covers...it's so tremendous and that doesn't change. It's feeding into what we do as well; it also gives us a great stimulus. The written work that you get when you've bought them to somewhere like this...is at a different level.*

Teachers' Forum

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Cover Images

Mandscape, The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children contemporary visual art programme, 2008/09. Photo credit: Paola Mezzaroma

New Media with John O'Connell: The Curriculum & Contemporary Art, IMMA workshop series on Saturdays for primary teachers, 2008/09 and 2009/10. Photo credit: Claire Halpin