

MAPPING THE TERRITORY

A ROUND TABLE FOR THE MUSEUMS, ARTS AND FORMAL EDUCATION SECTORS
WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
HELD AT THE ARK_5 OCTOBER 2006

THE ARK, A CULTURAL CENTRE FOR CHILDREN_ THE HERITAGE COUNCIL_ IRISH MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

SUMMARY REPORT

This report is a summary document that aims to convey the findings and outcomes from *Mapping the Territory*, a round table event at The Ark on 5 October 2006. Organised jointly by The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children, The Heritage Council and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the aim was to provide an inaugural meeting for professionals from the museums, the arts and the formal education sectors, to stimulate dialogue about collaborative practice across sectors with children and young people.

Following the National Gallery of Ireland's symposium – *Museums, Galleries and Young People* – on 4 November 2005, Hugh Maguire, Museums and Archives Officer at The Heritage Council approached Eina McHugh, Director of The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children and Helen O'Donoghue, Senior Curator and Head of Education and Community Programmes at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, with a view to organising an event to mark International Museums Day in 2006. They felt strongly that such an event could be the start of an ongoing forum to address the broader need for more cross-sectoral collaboration involving children. It could also strengthen and develop links between sectors to enable a greater quality of cultural experience for children and to raise awareness of needs at a political and strategic level.

This was an experimental meeting in its charting of the current situation. Numbers were kept small in order to keep the dialogue focused. Sixty professionals representing an even spread of the three sectors were invited to participate. They represented policy-makers, organisations, venues and people working at the coal-face in each sector, i.e. influencers and practitioners alike.

The session was opened with welcoming introductory remarks by Hugh Maguire, Helen O'Donoghue and Eina McHugh, who outlined the context as above. Following the opening address by John Coolahan, Professor Emeritus of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, participants from across the sectors of education, arts and museums divided into three workshop discussion groups. These groups were convened to reflect an even representation from each sector and an even geographical spread where possible. The key findings, drawn from an integration of the three groups' discussions, are summarised in this document, followed by actions and recommendations pointing to a general way forward.

In summary, the focus of each group was as follows:

- **Red group** – issues of quality and practice between arts and education sectors.
- **Yellow group** – examples of collaboration and identifying commonalities across sectors.
- **Blue group** – identifying commonalities within sectors and ways of working together in future.

Professor John Coolahan made the opening address, in which he:

- provided a historical overview of the development (or lack) of arts education, specifically outlining the contrasting concepts for the arts in education held by Pearse and De Valera. Here, Pearse's concept was shown to be concerned with the inspirational capacity of the teacher, while De Valera was more preoccupied with the necessary mechanical routine than a teacher's individual style or personal enthusiasm for a subject.
- described the changing landscape of arts in education, reflecting on: developments within education; the arts at political and organisational level; changing attitudes to children; growth of arts infrastructure; arrival of professional arts in education provision; impact of new technologies and international links including Ireland as a multi-cultural society.
- referred to the poverty of arts education in Ireland despite the quality of reports, resources and new-found wealth of the Irish state.
- talked about the time being propitious to make progress in relation to arts in education as evidenced by the enthusiastic support for the round table and the recent appointment of the cross-departmental Arts and Education Committee set up by Ministers Hanafin and O'Donoghue.

Existing levels of connection & relationship across the sectors

There is a general lack of awareness about current practice across the three sectors. The arts and education sectors are better developed than the museums. It was agreed, therefore, that an audit of initiatives with children documenting the range of activities currently taking place across the three sectors would be beneficial.

Structure & information sharing

It was recognised that many people work in isolation and are re-inventing the wheel often making the same mistakes. This suggests a need to build a structure to facilitate interconnectivity and to overcome insularity. A communications challenge is evidenced by a lack of available information and co-ordination of existing information. How do we build a structure that enables people across sectors to communicate/exchange? We should pay more attention to how we record and share information on existing initiatives. An information forum and showcase of programmes already happening around the country would be an invaluable resource.

The need for documentation & dissemination of good practice

Documentation and dissemination of good practice is essential. It is clear that material exists but people don't know where or how to access it. Practitioners and new sectors need to catch up on what has already been done in the arts and education area. A repository of knowledge about who works in this area was also suggested – although it was highlighted that much of this information already exists in local authority arts offices.

Findings of the day

The need for co-ordination Groups suggested there should be greater “joined-up” thinking and “linking of the dots”. By their nature arts and heritage organisations tend to be individualistic and in spartan times tend to focus on their own concerns, rather than engage in outreach to other groups.

The need for a shift in mindset It was stressed that there is a need in contemporary Ireland to work at re-shaping our mindset so that it embraces the arts and museums as an integral dimension of personal and social living. Even in a competitive, individualistic type of society it can be demonstrated that the arts and museums can be beneficially incorporated. Creativity, imagination and innovation, which are at the core of artistic endeavour, have a key role to play in a society aspiring to be a knowledge and innovation society.

Politics, policy & implementation There were some calls for more detailed policy, while others felt that there was sufficient policy in place, but it was agreed that connections need to be made between policy and practice. It was also deemed to be important that those with an interest in this area of practice need to lobby, advocate and activate at a political level as well as rolling out programmes of high quality which continue to add to the case for mainstreaming this way of working. Key points made included the need to advocate for children as citizens with cultural rights, not as audiences of the future.

Potential of the museums and heritage sector There was a strong consensus that museums have much untapped potential as resources and agents of engagement with schools. They are undervalued and under-resourced. Barriers to such activity include lack of vision, resources, training and expertise. Examples show there is significant potential for arts organisations and museums to

make powerful alliances. Museums need to dispel their older image as repositories of materials that are not dynamically interpreted.

The partnership model Partnerships were deemed to be the best way of working, particularly locally-based partnerships as they form the context for interventions and activities that are relevant and congruent.

Sustainability Collaborative projects have long life-cycles and are difficult to sustain. Relationships need to be maintained once invested in. Sustainable initiatives are lacking, particularly at post-primary level.

The need to build on the status of the arts Insufficient *status* of the arts – particularly within post-primary education – makes it extremely difficult to combat challenges of the over-packed curriculum and lack of time both for those within the system and outside of it. We need to negotiate for a more satisfactory incorporation of arts and heritage into school life. The points system adds to this undervaluing as arts activity is often seen to be cutting across the “real” work. There is a need for a nationally adopted policy on this matter.

The relevance to young people of arts and heritage programmes How do we draw in those not being reached? Programmes need to be more relevant to young people – particularly post-primary students. Students either do not choose art or drop it due to: perceived difficulties in getting high grades relative to other subjects; parental pressures; and the broader view of art as a ‘frills’ subject within the context of the points race.

The practical issues of accommodating arts and heritage within the school environment - particularly at post-primary level

Many practical issues are barriers for teachers, schools, young people and parents. Some mentioned were: securing after-hours commitment and activity from schools/teachers; transport difficulties in accessing arts and museums activity; getting cover for teachers who may be going out of school with children; taking children out of exam classes and perceptual/cultural barriers.

Engaging with parents The difficulty of connecting with parents was seen less as a class or socio-economic issue, and more as a generational and historical issue (referencing Professor Coolahan's earlier comments on De Valera's vision of education). Local arts and heritage resources have an important role in creating opportunities for parents to become involved in the cultural life of children. Shared experiences between parents and children need to be focused on the effect of pupils' interest in the arts and heritage on their family lives. This shouldn't be underestimated as family engagement can be nurtured through young people's involvement in arts and heritage activity.

The importance of social inclusion Reaching out to parents and young people in disadvantaged areas is particularly challenging. It was recognised that some schools in disadvantaged areas provide more innovative arts and heritage activities than those in better-resourced areas. Education's reach needs to be broadened to extend beyond the school day so that ongoing child development is promoted. This requires looking at out-of-school time and broader issues of family education and supports. The non-formal education sector is very important in this regard.

Young people-led arts and heritage

activities Strong views were expressed about the importance of young people-led arts and heritage activity and the need to elicit and include children's and young people's perspectives on the arts. Youth and community groups' teaching and learning styles have much to offer the formal education sector by way of creative innovation.

The over-reliance on personality-led

leadership styles All groups raised this issue and see it applying equally to key personnel in schools (subject to transfer and mobility) as well as museum and arts sector personnel. The school community, through its school plan, should be built-in to the arts in education dimension of school life. There is a need for wider community 'buy in'.

Actions and recommendations

In terms of moving ahead, the following suggestions were made within each of the groups. These have been edited and integrated to reflect timeframe (short, medium and long term horizons) and areas of activity (information, politics and research). There are 16 in total.

Short-term actions

1. Circulate participant contact details and record of this meeting.
2. With his permission, circulate Professor Coolahan's introductory paper.
3. Send a submission and a report from this event to the new Joint Committee on Arts and Education. Key messages should include: the need to consult widely; the need for evaluation, professional development, training and commitment to standards; the current lack of communication and coherence between sectors; the lack of fora, opportunities for networking and information sharing; the need to acknowledge the diversity of opinion; the need for better funding structures; the need to document, showcase and disseminate models of good practice and to recognise our roles regarding policy and curricular development.

Medium term actions

4. Arrange other meetings along the *Mapping the Territory* model. There is a real need for more conversations to take place – intra-sectorally (particularly within the museums sector), inter-sectorally and at a local and national level. The next meeting should have wider representation – particularly more involvement from the non-formal sector and beyond Dublin.

5. Organise some kind of *show and tell* where new sectors can get a sense of good practice, in practice.
6. Appropriate network/advocacy support models should be investigated (e.g. Theatre Forum); a plan developed and funding sought from key stakeholders to support it. There was no appetite for attempts at networking without personnel dedicated to the task and funding to support it.
7. Make a submission to the new recreation policy to be published by the Office of the Minister for Children.

Long term recommendations

8. Create a professionally managed resource/advocacy organisation to take on leadership and development in this area.
9. Address the practicalities of making arts and museums activity available to each and every child and young person and meeting set standards. There needs to be access for ALL. Resources need to be more evenly distributed so that the arts and museums can be true resources for education.

Information

10. National cultural institutions should let more people know what resources are available and for whom.
11. Schools need basic information on how to access artists.

Examples of recent cross-sectoral collaborations that were discussed

12. A database or list of seminal documents should be created so people can access and read them with a view to acting on them. Peter Johnson (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) has offered to disseminate information on the new curriculum in fora (local interest groups, sectoral interests etc).

Political

13. Individuals and individual organisations need to:

- Lobby local politicians (particularly with a general election in sight).
- Feed into the new Arts and Education Committee.
- Look for opportunities to publicise activity and to ensure that policy makers and key thinkers are invited – put your local TD on your mailing list.

14. Interrogate the national children's strategy with a view to clearly identifying the role of arts and culture. How should we be talking about culture and the child?

15. Ask questions about the broader political agenda – i.e. the feminisation of the arts and education sectors and what that means in terms of power, policy and resources.

Research & Development

16. Engage in research from the child's perspective, i.e. action research that captures their experiences.

- Local Authority Curators' Group exhibited on the theme of childhood, working with teachers' focus groups and linking projects with primary schools and to new curriculum.
- CREATE collaborated with NCAD on youth arts student placement programme (now in its seventh year and extending to DIT next year).
- National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) initiated pilot Creative Engagement Scheme supporting 22 school projects for between €200 and €5000.
- Glucksman Gallery forged links within UCC and with national organisations. Eg: Trocaire's child labour campaign and exhibition themed on 'work'.
- Year-long artist residency in Cavan Co. Museum where artist collaborated with art teachers and museum staff. Unable to meet level of demand from schools.
- National Youth Council of Ireland set up Certificate in Youth Arts in NUI Maynooth.
- Chester Beatty Library worked with The Ark accessing their primary schools database with the aim of bringing multi-ethnic groups together.
- IMMA spent its first six years testing models of practice and worked in partnership with many organisations both in formal and informal education. Their primary schools programme is the most developed but they find work with post-primary still a challenge.

Full list of attendees

- Louise Allen** Butler Gallery
Tania Banotti Theatre Forum Ireland
Rebecca Bartlett Youth Arts Consultant
Helen Bermingham Kerry County Museum
Alice Black Irish Film Institute
Marie-Louise Blaney Model and Niland Gallery
Patsy Bodkin Art Teachers' Association
Marie Bourke National Gallery of Ireland
Niamh Brennan Donegal County Archives
Kate Buckley Artist and Arts Facilitator
Melinda Byrns O'Brien Exploration Station
Caroline Carr Donegal County Museum
Aidan Clifford Curriculum Development Unit
Sarah Dunne National Print Museum
Margaret Edwards Derry City Council
Dominic Egan Local Authority Curators Group
Maria Farrell National College of Art and Design
Michael Finnerman Mary Immaculate Education College
Emelie Fitzgibbon Graffiti Theatre in Education
Marilyn Gaughan Galway Arts Office
Amanda Geary Department of Education and Science
Rhonwyn Hayes The Heritage Council
Deirdre Healy CREATE
Nora Hickey Lewis Glucksman Gallery
Jan Hinde The Arts Council
Peter Johnson National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
Anne Kelleher Kildare Teacher Education Centre
Una Kelly Department of Education and Science Inspectorate
Orla Kenny Kids Own Publishing
Theresa Loftus Monaghan County Museum
Mark Maguire Irish Museum of Modern Art
Mary Manley Primary Curriculum Support Unit
Una McCabe Froebel Training College
Emer McGowan Draíocht Arts Centre
Gerard McHugh Dublin West Teacher Education Centre
Padraig MacSitríc Department of Education and Science Inspectorate
Della Meade Second Level Support Service, Blackrock Education Centre
Lali Morris Barboró Galway International Festival for Children
Grace Mulqueen Knock Museum
Sharon Murphy Dún Laoghaire Rathdown Arts Office
Stephen O'Brien Office of the Minister for Children
Jane O'Hanlon Poetry Ireland
Stephanie O'Neill Discover Science and Engineering
Helen Robbins Art Alongside
Rosemary Ryan Waterford Museum of Treasures
Tony Sheehan Triskel Arts Centre
Mary Shine Thompson St Patrick's College
Jenny Siung Chester Beatty Library
Gaye Tanham The Arts Council
Katie Verling Glór Irish Music Centre
Derek West National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
Mary West St Andrew's College
Pádraic Whyte Children's Research Centre, TCD
- Chaired by:
Professor John Coolahan
- Facilitators:
Annette Clancy, Susan Coughlan, June Meehan
- Rapporteurs:
Sarah Finlay, Johanne Mullan, Mags Walsh
- Organisers:
Hugh Maguire The Heritage Council
Eina McHugh The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
Helen O'Donoghue Irish Museum of Modern Art
Jo Holmwood & Tanya McLoughlin
The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children
- This record was compiled by Susan Coughlan, based on notes provided by Professor Coolahan, the facilitators and rapporteurs.*



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