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Exploring the Potential for Arts-Rich Education in the Primary Classroom:

Teacher Learning, Transformation, and New Trajectories.

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Since the foundation of a national system of primary education in 1831, curricular reforms – in the guise of the *Revised Programme of Instruction* (1900), *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (1971), and the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) – have succeeded in both broadening the definition and increasing the status of the arts in schools. However while these curricula each presented the arts disciplines as an integral component of primary education, the dearth of sustained professional development to support teachers in their implementation meant that the commendable aspirations of these reforms were never fully realised.

The importance of the arts within education has, however, been reaffirmed with the recent publication of the *Arts-in-Education Charter* (2013). This Charter – presented as a "formative step" towards situating the arts "at the core of our education system" – proposes to "incentivise and recognise" those schools which make the arts a key part of school life with the introduction of an Arts-Rich Schools scheme. In this publication the DES has promoted the concept of an arts-rich school without defining clearly what such a school would look like, or what teaching and learning would look like in such a school. It is a document that focuses predominantly on arts-in-education experiences, and is deficient in both actionable guidelines for teachers and commitments to their professional development. Teachers, however, play a central role in realising successful changes in education.

Inspired by this proposed scheme the aim of this research was to explore, collaboratively with a community of teachers, the potential for arts-rich education in the primary classroom. How might teachers be empowered to develop an arts-rich classroom? What are the characteristics of such a learning environment? To address these questions a qualitative study, utilising collaborative action-research, was designed. A small Professional Learning Community (PLC), comprised of five primary teachers, was formed. Data collected between September 2015 and June 2016 included audio-recordings of PLC meetings, teachers' reflective journals, photographs, classroom observations, individual interviews, and messages sent via WhatsApp.

Analysis of the data indicates that: developing an arts-rich classroom is an ongoing process that must be sustained over time and supported by ongoing professional learning and support; arts-rich education comprises not alone high-quality teaching in the arts but meaningful teaching *through* the arts; and that teaching through the arts has the potential to democratise the learning process by diminishing barriers to academic content posed by language or text-heavy media. This study further indicates that there is considerable potential in the development of PLCs as a vehicle for teachers' professional development in the arts.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The research described in this thesis – though influenced undeniably by a lifelong love of the arts; cognisance of the disconnect between the importance societies purport to place on the arts and their peripheral position in education; absolute faith in their inherent educational worth; and a firmly held belief that building teacher capacity in this domain would have a positive impact on pupils' learning – found its predominant source of inspiration in the 2013 publication of the *Arts-in-Education Charter* (Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht & Department of Education and Skills, 2013). In this policy the Department of Education and Skills (DES) has promoted the concept of an arts-rich school without defining clearly what such a school would look like, or what teaching and learning would look like therein. Indeed while Bamford (2012) has emphasised that it is the quality, skill, and enthusiasm of the teacher that is "at the heart of all successful arts and culture education programmes" (p. 84), this is a policy which makes no such acknowledgement and focuses predominantly on the valuable contribution that artists and arts organisations make to arts education. Therefore, in seeking to give a voice to the teachers marginalised in the only DES policy with an exclusive arts focus, in seeking to advance a vision for teacher-led arts-rich education in the national context, and in seeking to explore a model for the sustained professional development of teachers in the domain of arts education this research posed the question: *How might primary school teachers be empowered to create an arts-rich classroom, and what are the characteristics of such a learning environment?*

The Next Chapter of Our Story

In 2016 the people of Ireland came together to remember the events of 1916: to reflect on that seminal moment on the road to independence, on all that has happened in the intervening years, and to reimagine Ireland's future for the generations to come. It was a year in which the leaders of the Rising – not traditional soldiers but poets, artists, thinkers, and teachers – were to the fore of public consciousness. It was a year in which we were reminded that ours is a nation with a rich cultural heritage: that our artists, musicians, actors, playwrights, authors, and poets have left an indelible mark on the international stage. It was therefore fitting that *Centenary* – a spectacular narrative of Ireland's modern history conveyed through music, poetry, dance, and drama – concluded the commemorative events of Easter weekend, 2016. Standing on the stage of the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre Michael D Higgins delivered an address in which he, like Kennedy before him, extolled the abundance of literary and artistic talent to emerge from this small nation. Honouring generations past, but addressing those of the present and future, he proudly declared:

> Tonight we celebrate not only our rich cultural heritage, but also its contemporary expression, our new imaginings, and the many creative ways in which we are telling our stories. For ours is a story still in the making. ...we are committing ourselves to continuing the journey of imagination, committing ourselves to sustain the artistic work that will form the next chapter of our story. (2016, p. 1 of 2)

Our small nation does have a rich artistic and cultural heritage of which we are justifiably proud. That this artistic tradition has so passionately been revered by the head of state is something of which we are similarly proud. Yet if we are to truly commit ourselves to promoting, supporting, and sustaining "the artistic work that will form the next chapter of our story" then it is imperative that we find ways to promote, support, and sustain high-quality arts education.

The present trajectory of policy development – as highlighted in both *Creative Ireland* (Government of Ireland, 2016) and the *Arts-in-Education Charter* – points toward a promising future for the arts in primary education. While the former seeks to enable the creative potential of every child, the latter proposes to "incentivise and recognise" schools which place the arts centrally within the life of the school community and provide an arts-rich education for their pupils (DAHG & DES, 2013, p. 17). Neither policy, however, recognises or meaningfully acknowledges the teacher as the principal driver in the development of the child's creative, imaginative, and artistic growth. That schools will seek to develop arts-rich cultures, and be incentivised to do so, is a beautiful aspiration in policy, but it will not successfully translate into practice without first investing in teachers: in their professional knowledge and pedagogical practice. At present it is primary education that provides the only arts experience that an Irish child is *guaranteed* to have. It is therefore on primary arts education, and building teacher capacity therein, that this research is focused.

The Arts in Irish Society: A Great but Broken Tradition?

The arts – defined within the context of this work as the language arts, the visual arts, dance, music, and the dramatic arts – have forever occupied a significant place in Irish society. Our small nation's contribution to the artistic and cultural heritage of the Western world has, at times, been truly remarkable (Benson, 1979). However Benson (1979) has emphasised that the artistic tradition in which we take immense pride has, throughout history, been unbalanced and inconsistent. Citing periods of war and conquest, epochs of political turmoil, economic austerity, religious conservatism, and the inequality of access to high art to illustrate his point, Benson (1979) professed that ours "has elements of a great but broken tradition" (p. 17). Indeed, although the vast majority of the public believe that the arts play a

significant and valuable role in modern Irish society (Drury, 2006), the fragmentation of our rich artistic tradition continues today.

Benson (1979) once declared that "the neglect of the arts in Irish education has meant that whole generations have lost the opportunity of learning about their own artistic history and of acquiring the skills necessary to build upon it" (p. 18). While these words were written more than three decades ago, they serve as both a caution and a response to Higgins' commitment to "sustain the artistic work that will form the next chapter of our story". If children are not exposed to high-quality works of art, if they are not enabled to critically examine and reflect upon those works, if they are not provided with opportunities to create their own art in a variety of forms, then they can neither perceive nor build upon the artistic tradition they have inherited. It has therefore been argued that arts provision for children and young people is "the single greatest fault line in our cultural provision" (Braiden, 2008, p. 3).

Access to the Arts: a Matter of Equality

Although equality of access to the arts is considered a fundamental human right (Moore, 1998; UN, 1948), within human societies there has, for centuries, been great disparity in arts participation. Arts participation – which can involve any, or indeed all, of the processes conceptualised in Figure 1 – has been found to vary significantly between different social groups. In Ireland, for example, Benson (1979) has highlighted the centuries of dissonance between the artistic traditions of the wealthier Anglo-Irish population and more impoverished native Irish population. In the increasingly heterogeneous society of 21st century Ireland the fissure separating these populations is all but obsolete, however, regarding access to and participation in the arts, a considerable divide remains between groups of differing socioeconomic status (Lunn & Kelly, 2008; Moore, 1997; 1998; NESF, 2007; Smyth, 2016).
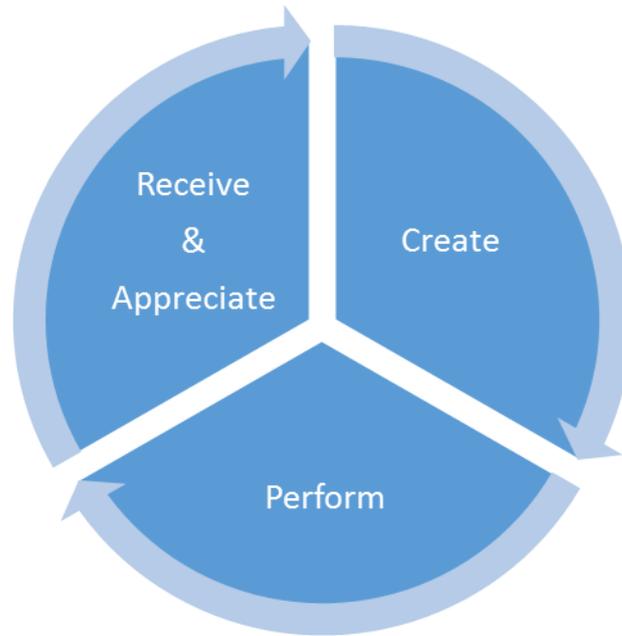
Figure 1. The processes of arts participation

Towards the close of the 20th century an examination into the accessibility of the arts for those living in poverty revealed, among participants, a perception of the arts as being a pursuit exclusively for the elite (Moore, 1997). While one Inchicore resident proclaimed that the arts are "for the toffs ... people with money. Not for us", a participant residing in Ballymun lamented that the arts were for "a minority of people living in luxury who have time to get involved... something that I wouldn't have the whereforall to even enjoy because I haven't had the luxury of education to even appreciate it" (Moore, 1997, p. 74). These remarks serve as a poignant reminder that while our rich cultural heritage is something of which we remain proud, it is not accessible to all of our citizens. These remarks serve as evidence of cultural exclusion.

Cultural exclusion – a term used to describe the marginalised access to the arts and cultural resources for those of low socioeconomic status when compared to their high socioeconomic counterparts – has been the focus of increased national attention within the past decade (eg Lunn & Kelly, 2008; NESF, 2007). It has been asserted by the National

Economic and Social Forum (NESF) that access to artistic and cultural resources; the capacity to create, maintain, and enhance cultural capital; and the ability to participate in active cultural citizenship are dispersed inequitably across Irish society (NESF, 2007). Indeed it has been reported that in Ireland arts participation varies markedly across a number of factors – principally educational attainment, social class, and income – with those of lower socioeconomic status considerably less likely to engage in either cultural consumption or creation (NESF, 2007; Lunn & Kelly, 2008). This is not alone true of adults, but also of their children (Smyth, 2016). Conversely, among those of higher socioeconomic status, not alone are adults significantly more likely to attend arts events, read for pleasure, and demonstrate an awareness of local arts centres (Lunn & Kelly, 2008), but their children demonstrate greater levels of participation in structured cultural activities (Smyth, 2016). The enriched cultural engagement of children in this socioeconomic group has been attributed to what Lareau (2011) terms "concerted cultivation". In seeking to stimulate their children's cognitive, social, and cultural development, parents enrol their children in organised extracurricular activities (Lareau, 2011). Not alone does this parenting style account for increased arts participation among children of higher socioeconomic status, but, as the education system "firmly and decisively" promotes and rewards this practice (Lareau, 2011, p. 18) it also accounts for social inequalities in academic achievement (Smyth, 2016; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Furthermore, as patterns of cultural engagement are established from an early age (Smyth, 2016), this practice may account, in part, for the disparate nature and extent of arts participation among Ireland's adult population.

While many of Ireland's cultural institutions encourage arts participation through free admission, Moore (1998) points out that for those of low socioeconomic status access is still restricted by a combination of barriers related to income, social class, and educational attainment. If we acknowledge that access to and participation in the arts is a fundamental

human right (Moore, 1998; UN, 1948), that cultural exclusion endures in the present, and that patterns of cultural engagement are forged at an early age, then we must also acknowledge that perhaps our best hope for mending the broken elements of our great tradition is to enhance the cultural lives of Ireland's children through high-quality arts provision: something achieved most equitably through education.

Providing Access to the Arts through Education

In its 2007 report entitled *The Arts, Cultural Inclusion, and Social Cohesion*, the NESF argued that policies pertaining to the arts and education for children and young people should not alone be central to all arts policy, but to policies associated with social inclusion and cohesion. Similarly, in its *Action Plan for Education* (2016), the DES has declared its intention to harness education to "break down barriers for groups at risk of exclusion" (p. 1). If the risk of cultural exclusion is to be mitigated, then cultural activities must be embedded in the daily routines of all members of Irish society, not just those whose socioeconomic status facilitates increased accessibility (NESF, 2007). One mechanism through which this might be achieved is through increased and enhanced access to the arts in education.

During their 8 years of primary education, Irish children are guaranteed access to the arts through the formal curriculum. Hours of curricular time per week are dedicated to the provision of meaningful arts experiences across a variety of disciplines including poetry, literature, the visual arts, drama, music, and dance. Indeed the premise from which this research has arisen is that enhancing teachers' professional practice within the arts disciplines – enabling them to facilitate purposeful arts experiences that will develop pupils' "capacity for creative expression and response" (GoI, 1999a, p. 7) and to position the arts more centrally in the education of their pupils – is not alone essential if the aims of primary education are to be realised, but also if we are to create a more equal and inclusive society.

At the 2010 *Encountering the Arts* conference however – a conference which invited national and international delegates to interrogate the relationship between the arts and education in Ireland – Dr Looney suggested that our education system has the potential to inadvertently perpetuate cultural exclusion (Barnard, 2010). She professed that by allowing arts experiences be consigned to the periphery of schooling we ensure that they become exclusively a pursuit for the privileged, for those with greater wealth (Barnard, 2010). The position of the arts at the margins of the educational experience has been established and maintained by politically-motivated educational policies. While a thorough discussion of national educational policy will be presented in the subsequent chapter, in positioning this research in its global setting it is prudent that we turn now to a brief overview of the international policy context.

The international policy context.

This research – which seeks to simultaneously enhance teacher capacity in the arts and to explore the potential for positioning the arts more centrally in primary education – is set against a backdrop of unwavering political faith in the economic potential of education (Wolf, 2002). The narrative of the global knowledge-economy imperative has seduced governments and policymakers worldwide (Baird, Isaacs, Johnson, Stobart, Yu, Sprague & Daugherty, 2011). This internationally shared belief that countries must develop a competitive knowledge-economy to ensure the economic wellbeing of their nation and their citizens has resulted in an intensified focus on national systems of public education (Baird et al, 2011). Consequently, as vast investments are poured into education reform, educational policy is increasingly perceived as being "central to the competitive advantage of national economies" (Grek, 2009, p.26). Indeed Wolf (2002) laments that "we have almost forgotten that education ever had any purpose other than to promote growth" (p. xiii).

In Europe, the knowledge-economy imperative has been driven by the targets of the Lisbon Council which declared it an aspiration of the European Union to "become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (EU, 2000), while in the national context Minister Bruton (2016) has proclaimed that a strong education system will "create sustainable well-paying jobs and strong economic growth" (p. 6). Consequently, Bruton (2016) has declared it his intention to make the Irish education system "the best in Europe" within the next decade.

The hierarchy of subjects.

This preoccupation with education as a vehicle of economic growth has not alone narrowed the manner in which we think about educational policy, but "has narrowed – dismally and progressively – our vision of education itself" (Wolf, 2002, p.254). One repercussion of this narrowing view of education is what Robinson (2011) terms "the hierarchy of subjects". This hierarchy is evident in each facet of the education sector: in a prominent, prioritised position are mathematics, language, and science, some way down are the humanities, while invariably, at the bottom of the hierarchy, sit the arts (Robinson, 2011). Despite their significance to human societies, despite the pride civilisations exhibit in their cultural heritage and artistic traditions, and despite their omnipresence in popular culture, the arts occupy only a peripheral role in systems of education worldwide (Robinson 1999; Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). This phenomenon is based partly on the assumption that there exists a direct linear relationship between education and employment; consequently those subjects deemed most relevant to the world of work and a nation's economy are prioritised (Robinson, 2011). This hierarchy also reflects prevailing cultural philosophies about knowledge and human intelligence: those disciplines prioritised – mathematics, language, and science – are considered to be inherently more important, more academic (Robinson, 2011). While mathematics and the sciences are strongly associated with

objectivity, reality, and fact, the arts – sometimes considered disposable extras in education – are allied with emotion and self-expression (Robinson, 2011).

Minister Bruton (2016) has demonstrated enormous faith in the potential of education declaring that there are "few areas more pivotal ... to our ambitions as a nation" (p. 6). Not alone does he present the education system as the mechanism through which economic success might be assured, but as a mechanism which might "break cycles of disadvantage" (Bruton, 2016, p. 6). His remarks reflect what Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) declare to be a prevalent assumption in modern democracies: that education is "the main engine of social mobility" (p. 161). However while the philosophy underlying current education policy seems to be that education is the vehicle through which inequality might be overcome, through which all members of society might fulfil their potential, and through which all members of society might secure employment, the hierarchy of subjects makes the system itself complicit in the persistence of social and cultural inequality. A system of education which marginalises arts experiences disproportionately affects those of lower socioeconomic status, who have less exposure to the arts outside the formal curriculum.

Building upon the work of Bourdieu, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) emphasise that cultural markers of social difference – our use of language, our choice of reading material, our taste in film and television, the music we listen to, and our appreciation (or lack thereof) of the visual arts – often become matters of prejudice and classism. These authors further emphasise that these matters of taste, prejudice, and classism work to constrain the opportunities and wellbeing of those of low socioeconomic status (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). A system of education without a strong cultural emphasis will not, as Bruton (2016) phrased it, "break cycles of disadvantage" (p. 6). Conversely, recent analysis of *Growing up in Ireland* (GUI) data has revealed that pupils attending schools with a strong cultural emphasis were significantly more likely to read for pleasure and participate in structured

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cultural activities outside the formal curriculum (Smyth, 2016). This finding indicates that one mechanism through which barriers to social inclusion might be mitigated is to position the arts more centrally in education.

Repositioning the Arts in Primary Education

In Ireland's modern history the cause of the arts within formal education has been greatly advanced by both policy and curriculum developments pertaining to the symbiotic domains of arts-in-education and arts education. That the arts make a distinctive contribution to primary education is acknowledged by artists and educators alike. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, however, the interconnected areas of arts-in-education and arts education became increasingly distinguishable in policy, provision, and practice (Special Committee on the Arts and Education, 2008).

Arts-in-education.

In the national context The Arts Council is the primary agent of policy and provision for arts-in-education practice (Braiden, 2008). This broad field encompasses all practices whereby the education system interacts formally with the arts world, enhancing the arts curricula and broadening the cultural learning experiences of pupils. Though an expansive field, arts-in-education practice incorporates two strands: the first of which involves pupils engaging with the arts – attending exhibitions, concerts, or performances – in the public domain, while the second refers to interventions from the world of the arts – from artists, poets, musicians, dramatists, novelists or dancers – into the domain of formal education (SCAE, 2008).

Throughout the past four decades those arts-in-education practices which fall into the latter category, whereby the artist is central to the mediation of pupils' learning experiences, have occurred across the nation. Projects such as *Artformations*, Poetry Ireland's *Writers in Schools* scheme, and the *Vogler Quartet in Sligo Residency* – each of which was the focus of

a case study in Bamford's (2009) global compendium on the impact of the arts in education –

point to the educational benefits of arts-in-education. However it was suggested by attendees

of the aforementioned *Encountering the Arts* conference that such arts-in-education

programmes "can mask the deficiencies of an education system that fails to give adequate

cultural opportunities to children" (Barnard, 2010, p. 26).

The recent publication of the *Arts-in-Education Charter*, however, has signalled the

dawn of a new era for arts provision in Irish education. The Charter – which, alongside

relevant national policy documents, will be examined in detail in the next chapter – was

presented to the public as a "formative step" towards situating the arts "at the core of our

education system" (Deenihan & Quinn, 2013, p. 4). Although addressing both the domains of

arts-in-education and arts education, this policy document is focused predominantly on the

former and, while encouraging schools to utilise the arts to "enrich the curriculum and the

wider life of the school" (DAHG & DES, 2013, p. 17), makes no tangible commitment to

systematically enhancing the professional practice of the nation's teachers. Indeed while

passing reference is made to teachers' professional development, this will only be done "as

available resources permit and in line with prioritised curricular initiatives" (DAHG & DES,

2013, p. 14). Consequently, the DES launched an initiative which sought to explore the

teacher-artist partnership as a model of continuing professional development (CPD) (Kenny

& Morrissey, 2016). Although this worthwhile programme constitutes a positive step for arts

education, the focus of this initiative rests predominantly on advancing best-practice in the

teacher-artist partnership rather than on developing teachers' professional practice across the

arts disciplines. Despite the Charter's advocacy of making the arts "a key part of school life"

(DAHG & DES, 2013, p. 17), and despite the hours of curricular time devoted to the arts

disciplines in classrooms nationwide each week, no CPD with an exclusive focus on

enhancing teacher capacity across the arts disciplines has been provided.

While interventions from professional artists and arts organisations into formal education can enrich pupils' learning experiences (Bamford, 2009; Chemi, 2014), the programmes which have been implemented across the country are typically designed and delivered independently of each other (Barnard, 2010). Indeed a glance at *Arts, Education and Other Learning Settings* (2007) – a research digest compiled by the Arts Council – reveals the often localised and temporary nature of these arts-in-education practices. Bamford (2009) has suggested that many artist-in-residence programmes, whereby professional artists work collaboratively with education providers, frequently fail to develop the authentic partnership required of effective arts-in-education practice. Quality partnerships require considerable commitment from artists and teachers alike, and can only be fostered over time. Indeed Bamford (2009) has suggested that developing constructive, effective partnerships requires a minimum of 2 years. She has cautioned that the short-term involvement of creative professionals is unlikely to produce sustained change in the quality of arts provision within a school, and asserts that "there is a need for more training for key providers at the coalface of the delivery-chain" (Bamford, 2009, p. 11). As has previously been highlighted, it is primary school teachers who provide access to the only arts experiences an Irish child is guaranteed to have: it is primary school teachers who are at the coalface of the delivery-chain.

Arts education.

Arts education – which in the Irish context encapsulates the teaching and learning of drama, music, dance, literature, poetry, creative writing, and the visual arts within formal education – is the responsibility of the DES and education providers alike. However while it is through primary education that every child in Ireland has access to these arts experiences, it has been suggested that the implementation of the arts curricula has neither been entirely consistent nor entirely satisfactory (Coolahan, 2008; DES, 2005; Irish National Teachers Organisation, 2010; NESF, 2007; Smyth, 2016). Indeed calls for enhancing the professional

practice of teachers through in-career learning have been uttered consistently and repeatedly by numerous educational stakeholders for more than a decade (eg DES, 2005; INTO, 2010; NCCA, 2005; NESF, 2007).

Education can neither be presented nor conceived of as a vehicle of social mobility and inclusion if pupils' learning experiences in the arts do not enable them to enjoy art, to create art, and to become critical consumers of art: in short, if they are not enabled to become active cultural citizens. If high-quality arts experiences are not routinely provided within formal education then pupils risk being cut off from the powerful personal effects of the arts. While this would have a negative impact on all pupils, for those already at risk of cultural exclusion an education system which fails to facilitate meaningful arts experiences would merely compound existing disadvantage.

Cultural inclusion – the equal right to participate in the nation's artistic and cultural life – is presented by Gaffney (2008) as a fundamental democratic right. Merely allocating curricular hours to the arts disciplines is therefore insufficient. Arts provision within primary education must be of a high-quality, facilitating pupils' creative, artistic, imaginative, and cultural development: a vision of education attainable with skilled practitioners at the helm.

The Scope of this Research

While this chapter has presented a brief overview of arts-in-education practice, this research neither attempts to explore effective partnerships between artists and teachers nor to examine the potential of such partnerships for enhancing pupils' learning within the arts disciplines, valuable though such explorations would be. Rather the field of arts-in-education practice was brought to the attention of the reader for one distinct reason: while engaging with professional artists exposes pupils to cultural and artistic learning experiences they might not otherwise encounter, these experiences are often localised and short-lived and do

not necessarily lead to positive change in the pedagogical practice of teachers (Bamford, 2009). Even for those pupils who are fortunate enough to work with artists during their schooling, it is still the teacher who is the principal facilitator of arts experiences throughout their primary education. Therefore – though cognisant of the potential for arts-in-education practices in the provision of an arts-rich education – this research sought to work with a Professional Learning Community (PLC) of primary teachers to explore the capacity of the generalist teacher to place high-quality arts experiences more centrally in the education of their pupils. While situated firmly within the national context, this is a piece of work which speaks to any system of education in which generalist teachers are responsible for arts provision, or in which arts-rich school cultures are being explored or pursued.

Within the context of this work the term "the arts" is used to refer to all creative and cultural disciplines embraced within the *Primary School Curriculum*. This broad perspective has been adopted not alone because each of these disciplines makes a valuable contribution to primary education, but because each of these disciplines has fallen victim to the hierarchy of subjects. Indeed despite the fact that language is positioned alongside mathematics and science at the top of this hierarchy, the concept of language perpetuated within this vision is often reductionist: focused on the mechanics of reading as measured through standardised assessment with little to no emphasis placed on the creative and artistic elements of language (Ó Breacháin & O'Toole, 2013). Adopting this broad perspective of the arts also seeks to emphasise what these disciplines have in common, and to highlight their shared and interrelated role in enhancing pupils' evolving capacities of creative self-expression and reflection.

Organisation of the Thesis

This introduction constitutes the first of five chapters, and has sought to provide the reader with an overview of the context from which this research arose and in which it was situated. While a clear elucidation of the conceptual framework underpinning this work is offered to the reader in Chapter Three, this introductory chapter has highlighted the disconnect the between the role of the arts in Irish society – where they are interwoven in both our rich cultural heritage and contemporary popular culture – and the peripheral status of the arts within education. This chapter has further emphasised that inequality of access to the arts persists among Ireland's population, and it is only through primary education that an Irish child is guaranteed to participate in the arts and cultural experiences. While some pupils will benefit from arts-in-education experiences, it is the teacher who is the principal facilitator of arts experiences throughout their primary education. These interconnected domains are presented to the reader in Figure 2.
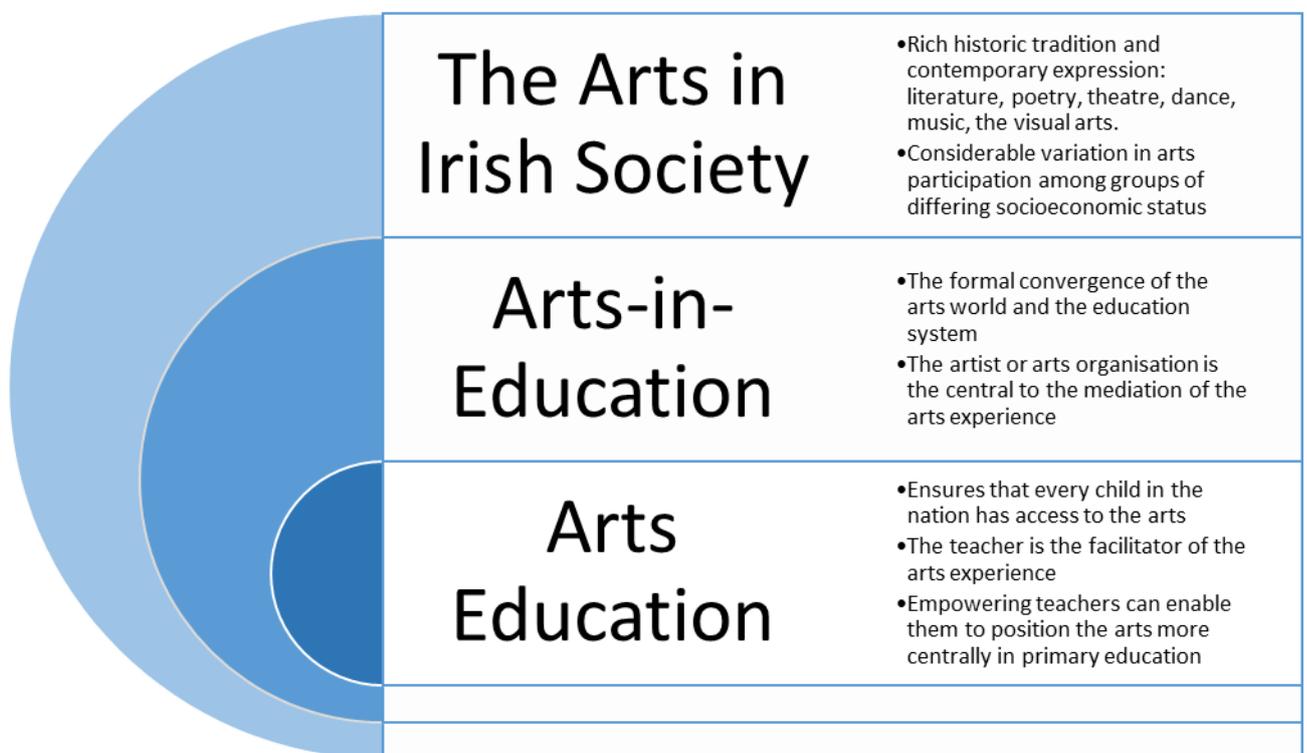
Figure 2. Conceptualisation of the arts in Ireland

The literature review presented in Chapter Two is organised into three sections. The initial section is concerned with the literature and research related to the role of the arts in society, culture, and education. Drawing on international perspectives the literature examined further seeks to investigate the impact of arts education and to explore the relatively new concept of arts-rich education. The second section, meanwhile, moves to the national context and offers a comprehensive discussion of the evolving definition and growing status of the arts in primary education in Ireland. Following this historical overview, the concluding section reviews the literature on teachers' professional learning that informed the development of this study. Key works by substantial contributors to the literature in each of these domains are explored, and the insights thus generated subsequently informed the research methodology, which is presented to the reader in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three presents a detailed exposition of the research undertaken and offers: an articulation of the conceptual framework; the overarching question which gave impetus to the study; a rationale for addressing this question with action research; and a description of the methods of data collection employed at each stage of the research. The chapter concludes by outlining the ethical issues that arose throughout the study and how these were addressed.

In Chapter Four the reader is introduced to the research participants and offered a rich description of the study in action. This chapter subsequently presents a detailed examination of the four themes – together with their constituent interconnected subthemes – which emerged prominently from, and consistently across, the multiple sources of data gathered throughout the study.

The concluding chapter offers a discussion of the findings of this research. These findings are presented in three categories pertaining to arts-rich education, professional learning communities, and the teacher-as-researcher. The implications of these findings for

policy, practice, and future research are highlighted while the chapter concludes with an

optimistic glimpse into a future full of potential for the arts in primary education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Nisbet and Entwistle (1970) have declared that while ideas for research should be original, they are developed most successfully from a comprehensive review of previous research and associated literature. Indeed for many scholars this critical review serves as a stimulus to thinking and creativity (Good, 1963). Furthermore – as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) emphasise – a researcher's literature review lends both credibility and legitimacy to their research, establishing the theoretical sphere for the study, defining key terms and concepts, demonstrating knowledge of previous research, and making evident that the research to be undertaken will break new ground in the field. The literature review, they surmise, can be conceived of as "a springboard into the researcher's own study, raising issues, showing where there are gaps in the research field, and providing a partial justification for the research or a need for it to be undertaken" (Cohen et al, 2011, p.112).

Cognisant of such considerations, the literature review offered in this chapter neither attempts nor purports to present an exhaustive review of arts education scholarship: rather, as advocated by Cohen and his colleagues (2011), this chapter seeks to chronicle the literature that was formative in the development of the research undertaken. Drawing discerningly and perspicaciously from previous research and related literature this chapter aspires to: demonstrate to the reader the significant contribution the arts make to both society and the individual; explore some of the more significant debates that have characterised international discussion around the place of the arts in education; examine the concept of arts-rich education; trace the evolving definition and developing status of the arts in primary education in Ireland; and survey both national policy and international theory related to teachers' professional learning.

For the purpose of clarity, this literature review is organised into three sections. While the initial section is concerned with the literature and research related to the role of the arts in society, culture, and education, the second explores the place of the arts in primary education in Ireland. Finally, the concluding section reviews the literature on teachers' professional learning that was integral to the development of this study. Works by substantial contributors to the literature in each of these fields are explored, and the insights thus generated provide a rich basis from which to investigate the research topic giving rise, in turn, to the study's methodology which is presented to the reader in Chapter Three.

The Arts in Human Societies

From the dawn of civilisation, ever before formal systems of writing came into existence, humanity has simultaneously capitalised upon and relished the expressive qualities inherent in music, in dance, and in the visual arts (Ewing, 2013). For millennia these art forms have not alone been utilised in giving expression to human elation and envy, triumph and torment, love and loss, but also in the transmission of cultural heritage. The arts are, and from the dawn of civilisation have been, intrinsic to the human experience (Bamford, 2009). They are "part of the organic process of human evolution" (Read, 1958, p. 14). Indeed the arts are so embedded in the human experience that there is no known society or culture on this planet in which artistic activity cannot be found (Benson, 1979).

Herbert Read once professed art to be "one of the most elusive concepts in the history of human thought" (1958, p. 14). However while there exist inevitable disparities in what varying human societies regard as art (Benson, 1979), across international borders, political ideologies, and cultural divides, people worldwide actively engage in the arts, and have done so for millennia (Bamford, 2009). Not alone do the arts provide societies with the means to reflect upon themselves – their deep-seated traditions, firmly held beliefs, and directions of

development – but through literature, poetry, theatre, music, dance, and the visual arts members of a society are offered the opportunity to transcend the mundanities of daily life (Benson, 1979). There are works of art so captivating that through them we are changed, transported to another time, another place, or presented with an alternative lens through which we view the world. This is a point presented most eloquently by Eisner (2002):

> There are human achievements in every culture on this earth that represent the quintessential attainments of the human imagination, works of such stunning accomplishment that they alter the ways in which those who see or hear or read them look upon the world. (p. xiii)

Works such as these are a testament to human accomplishment: to our capacities to create, imagine, invent, express, document, and dream. Works such as these are valuable beyond measure, for in them we embrace the pinnacle of human achievement. To protect works such as these, people have risked their lives.

In 1943, amidst the unprecedented destruction of the Second World War, the Roberts Commission, established by President Roosevelt, founded the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) unit of the Allied forces. The MFAA, more commonly known as "The Monuments Men", were tasked both with retrieving works of art plundered by the Nazis and with the preservation of cultural properties: the protection of vulnerable museums, churches, and other monuments and objects of cultural import (Monuments Men Foundation, 2016). Approximately 345 unlikely men and women – many of them accomplished museum curators, architects, artists, archivists, and educators – thus dedicated their wartime effort. While two Monuments Men lost their lives in the execution of their duties, the unit's protection of cultural treasures was utterly without precedent. During the final year of war, and into the early years of post-war Europe, the Monuments Men retrieved and repatriated more than 5,000,000 artistic and cultural items plundered by the Nazis (Monuments Men

Foundation, 2016). Indeed the immense achievements of the Monuments Men served as the foundation upon which the 1954 Hague Convention was predicated (Appendix A).

While it is true that not all works of art are created equal – that not all are works of such stunning accomplishment that they alter our perceptions of the world – the urge to create is primordial, and an innate aspect of what it is to be human. It is an urge not easily extinguished. Even in the midst of conflict, conflict which so endangers elements of our cultural heritage, this urge to create subsists. While awaiting execution in Kilmainham Gaol, Pearse wrote poetry. Surrounded by the utter devastation of the Holocaust, internees of Nazi concentration camps created drawings and paintings. Amidst the brutality of Soviet gulags, the creative urge of prisoners could not be smothered: theatre groups and musical ensembles were formed – often with the support of officials – while the resourcefulness of inmates enabled their participation with literature, storytelling, and the visual arts. O'Connor (2015), though referring exclusively to arts participation in Nazi concentration camps, beautifully describes this resolute urge to create that is so characteristic of the human condition:

> These pieces of art ... speak of the deep human need to create artistic statements so as to not merely tell the stories of what is happening in our worlds, but also to imagine our worlds as other than they are. They speak of an indefatigable desire to find beauty and meaning in a world where that has been systematically and deliberately extinguished. (p. 315)

Through participation with the arts – through the creation and consumption of literature, poetry, theatre, music, dance, and the visual arts – restraints on the imagination are relaxed, and as Eisner (2002) has cautioned, "A culture populated by people whose imagination is impoverished has a static future" (p. 5). The arts – though an infinitely and inherently diverse ensemble of disciplines – are unified in both their role within and contribution to human societies: to culture, heritage, citizenship, and to creativity (Bamford, 2009).

The Place of the Arts in Education

Since the time of the ancient Greeks, long before formal systems of public education came into existence, the arts have – in various guises and to various degrees – held a place in education (Akuno, Klepacki, Lin, O'Toole, Reihana, Wagner, & Restrepo, 2015). However while discourse on the relationship between art and education has endured, such discourses – and the ideas, understandings, and definitions of art and art's relationship to education they engender – emerge from the social and historical contexts in which they are formed (Fleming, Bresler, & O'Toole, 2015). Consequently, though the arts appear in educational policy and curricula in almost every country on earth, "arts education" as a term is both culture and context specific (Bamford, 2009). Although music, drawing, painting, and craft are almost universal elements of arts education, Bamford's (2009) global research compendium reveals that while developed nations have been seen to embrace new media within their arts curricula, countries in the developing world give greater prominence to culture-specific art forms, with hairstyling and stilt-walking being taught in Senegal and Barbados respectively.

Though a diverse array of disciplines, the arts share similar processes and fulfil interrelated roles in the education of the child (Gulbenkian Foundation, 2008). As Ewing (2013) asserts, "each art form embeds play, experimentation, exploration, provocation, expression and the artistic or aesthetic shaping of the body or another media" (p. 3). Similarly, despite considerable international variation on the components of arts education, what is internationally acknowledged – and affirmed by the United Nations (UN) – is that access to the arts is a fundamental component of a high-quality education (UNESCO, 2010). Indeed emerging from the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989) – which enshrines in international law both the child's right to an education which will develop their personality, talent, and ability, and the right to participate freely in the arts and cultural life (Articles 29 and 31) – comes the assertion that, more than merely comprising a component of

a high-quality education, arts education itself is a fundamental human right for all learners (UNESCO, 2006). It is, therefore, the duty of the each nation to ensure that the conditions are in place for all children to exercise this right (Akuno et al, 2015).

The impact of arts education.

Arts education complements the central aims of education itself, with high-quality arts provision contributing to the child's intellectual, emotional, cultural, moral, aesthetic, creative, physical, personal, and social development (Robinson, 1999). Arts education – which further aspires to develop in pupils an awareness and appreciation of their cultural heritage, and to enable them to create their own artistic language – impacts the child on both personal and academic levels (Bamford, 2009).

A balanced high-quality arts education will, according to Robinson (2015), engage pupils in two complementary processes: creating art and appraising art. When afforded the opportunity to create works of art within a high-quality arts programme, the child is developing simultaneously both their technical skill and creative voice (Robinson, 2015). When provided with occasion to appraise the work of others – be that work in the language arts, dramatic arts, musical arts, visual arts, or movement arts – the child is developing simultaneously their contextual knowledge of other people's work and their growing powers of critical judgement (Robinson, 2015). However while Robinson (2015) presents a two-pronged approach to arts education, the UN (2006) conceives of arts education as comprising three complementary pedagogical processes: the engagement in arts practices; direct contact with artistic works; and the study of artistic works. Although there is considerable agreement, the UN differentiate between the learning inherent in interacting with works of art – be they performances, written works, or visual objects – and the knowledge developed through the study of an art form, and of its social, cultural, and historical context.

Since the earliest days of formal education, some of the most ferocious debates to rage across the field have centred on the content of education: on what should be taught in our schools (Robinson, 2015). Despite the fact that access to the arts is a fundamental human right (UNESCO, 2010), and despite the fact that international policy routinely emphasises the importance of the cultural and creative aspects of education (Robinson, 1999), Bamford (2009) has identified a considerable gulf between the "lip service" paid to arts education and arts provision within schools. Plagued by political apathy and often inadequate provision in schools (Eisner 1997; Holt 1997), arts education is frequently typified by a paucity of coherent, developmental programmes which has, in turn, trivialised learning in the arts (Bamford, 2009). Consequently, many advocates of the arts have been ardently detailing the benefits of arts education in seeking not alone to justify its inclusion, but perhaps strengthen its position, in national curricula.

The Arts in Schools (Gulbenkian Foundation, 2008) – originally published in 1982 amidst a deepening economic recession which sparked intense debate about the relationship between education and the labour market – was written with the expressed objective of placing the arts firmly into the debate on the future of state education in England. Throughout the report, which seeks to clearly present the case for the arts to policy-makers at all levels, arguments for the inclusion of arts education in the national curriculum are presented on the grounds of: the child's aesthetic and cultural development; their creative exploration and growth; and the promotion of a richer understanding of intelligence (Gulbenkian Foundation, 2008). Such arguments are echoed and affirmed throughout the literature, with advocates arguing that the arts – in encouraging diverse ways of thinking and alternative forms of representation – serve to expand access to meaning and broaden conceptions of human intelligence (Catterall, 2009; Robinson, 2015). Indeed the implications of our enriched

understandings of intelligence – emerging from Gardner's seminal work in the field – are cogently articulated by Professor Catterall (2009):

> Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences have been regarded by educators to imply that different children may benefit from different ways of understanding and communicating experiences – through linguistic, visual, kinaesthetic, mathematical, and interpersonal forms, for example. So including visual art, or movement, or theatre or dance in academic curriculum experiences may provide children with access to subject matter and ways of thinking, children who might otherwise be shortchanged in a classroom dominated by language-centred or didactic methods of instruction. (p. 36)

Catterall, whose academic career in educational economics and disadvantage inadvertently led him to the field of arts education research, has himself emerged as a key advocate for the arts. Focusing predominantly on educationally disadvantaged pupils, one of Catterall's most significant pieces of research tracked more than 12,000 pupils through their secondary education and into early adulthood. This 12 year longitudinal study sought to explore the impact of arts participation on the achievements and values of young adults (Catterall, 2009). Utilising data garnered through the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88) – which followed more than 25,000 American pupils through middle and high school gathering more than 1,000 pieces of information about each participant – Catterall (2009) revealed that involvement in the arts was associated with positive developments, academic and social, throughout participants' secondary education. Not alone did those engaged in the arts show positive academic developments at each stage of the research, but the comparative gains – which were also observed in pupils of low socioeconomic status – were revealed to become more pronounced over time (Catterall, 2009). By the conclusion of their secondary education, those who reported consistently high levels of involvement in instrumental music showed significantly higher levels of mathematics proficiency, while sustained involvement in the

dramatic arts was associated with gains in reading proficiency (Catterall, 2009). Indeed sustained involvement in the dramatic arts was further associated with increased motivation, gains in self-concept, and with greater levels of empathy for others (Catterall, 2009).

In juxtaposing arts-involved pupils with those reporting little to no arts participation throughout their secondary education, Catterall's analyses revealed "substantial and significant" differences – consistently favouring arts-engaged pupils – in academic achievement and in important attitudes and behaviours (2009, p. 3). Arts involvement was revealed to be associated with more positive attitudes towards school and with greater rates of school completion (Catterall, 2009). Furthermore the subsequent waves of data collection – conducted when participants were aged 20 and 26 – revealed that the benefits of arts engagement throughout secondary education extended into adulthood and were associated with higher levels of college attainment, and with many indications of pro-social behaviour such as voluntarism and political participation (Catterall, 2009). Consequently Catterall (2009) has concluded that, in education, "The arts do matter – not only as worthwhile experiences in their own right… but also as instruments of cognitive growth and development and as agents of motivation for school success" (p. 31).

Art for Art's Sake?

The non-arts outcomes of arts education, such as those emphasised by Catterall (2009), have, in recent years, become the focus of intensified international attention. Indeed in seeking to examine the impact of arts education on pupils' academic performance and the development of their social and creative skills, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) commissioned a critical review of existing research in the field of arts education (Winner et al, 2013). In *Art for Art's Sake?* (2013) Winner and her colleagues examined the accumulated empirical knowledge about the impact of arts education on these non-arts skills. While these authors caution that research on arts education constitutes a mere

sliver of educational research, they highlight some of the individual benefits of specific arts disciplines emphasising the relationships found to exist between: music education and academic performance; drama education and enhanced verbal skills; visual arts education and geometrical reasoning; dance education and visual-spatial skills (Winner et al, 2013). Winner and her colleagues also draw attention to the finding that pupils participating in arts education courses frequently demonstrate a more ambitious attitude towards their academic work as well as enhanced levels of commitment and motivation. These authors, however, emphasise that within advocacy literature claims for the transformative effects of the arts on non-arts skills "often exceed the evidence" (Winner et al, 2013, p. 41). This does not disprove the claims which have been made in the research literature, rather the weight of evidence presented does not allow for firm conclusions to be drawn (Winner et al, 2013). Indeed, in the case of Catterall's (2009) aforementioned study, Winner and her colleagues (2013) are similarly analytical and declare that while his work provides evidence of a positive correlation between arts education and academic performance it cannot claim causality. As they concluded, "We cannot know from a correlational study whether the higher academic achievement of children exposed to the arts has anything at all to do with the arts exposure they are getting" (Winner et al, 2013, p. 63).

While the assertion that high-quality arts education has a positive impact on pupils' academic achievement is repeated throughout the literature (Bamford, 2009; Ewing, 2013; Ingram & Seashore, 2003; Winner et al, 2013), there are those who caution that arts advocates must not attempt to justify the mission of arts education thus (Eisner, 2002; Hetland & Winner, 2001; Hetland, Winner, Veenema & Sheridan, 2013). Indeed Hetland and her colleagues (2013) have critiqued those who have come to resort to "instrumental justifications" for arts education and, in doing so, have overlooked the fundamental question of the core benefits of high-quality arts education (p. 1). Rather than relying upon the "extra-

artistic consequences" of arts education (Eisner, 2002, p. 235), arts advocates should highlight, prioritise, and emphasise what is distinctive about the arts in education (Eisner, 2002; Hetland & Winner, 2001; Hetland et al, 2013). Stressing the role of arts education in pupils' cognitive development, Eisner (2002) argues that "many of the most complex and subtle forms of thinking take place when students have an opportunity either to work meaningfully on the creation of images – whether visual, choreographic, musical, literary, or poetic – or to scrutinize them appreciatively" (p. xii). Through active participation in the arts, pupils develop unique forms of thinking associated exclusively with the creation and appreciation of artistic works (Eisner, 2002). The arts, Hetland and Winner (2001) agree, offer ways of thinking that are "unavailable in other disciplines" (p. 5). Through the creation of artistic works pupils are enabled to share their ideas, feelings, and aspirations with others; through this act of representation pupils are engaged in a profound process of communication (Eisner, 2002). The emphasis which Eisner (2002) places on the cognitive dispositions developed through arts education has been reiterated by Hetland and her co-authors (2013). Their research, which sought to examine the teaching and learning that takes place in high-quality visual arts lessons, identified six "habits of mind" (besides the development of artistic craft and an increased understanding of the art world) developed through arts education: observation; envisioning; reflecting; expressing; exploring; engaging and persisting (Hetland et al, 2013). Further highlighting the unique contribution the arts make to the education and development of the child, both Hetland (2013) and Eisner (2002) – echoing the sentiments of *The Arts in Schools* (Gulbenkian Foundation, 2008) – emphasise the opportunities for aesthetic development inherent in each of the arts disciplines. Eisner (2002) further argues that of all subjects taught in schools, the arts are at the forefront in the celebration of diversity and individuality.

Although research has drawn attention to the positive impact of high-quality arts education on: child, parent, and community perceptions of the school (Bamford & Wimmer, 2012; Ingram & Seashore, 2003); the social climate of the school (Bamford & Wimmer, 2012; Fiske, 1999); the development of the child's social and cultural understanding (Bamford, 2009); and the increase of respect, cooperation, and tolerance among children (Bamford, 2009; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005), for Eisner (2002) – as for Hetland and her colleagues (2013) – these "extra-artistic consequences" remain secondary to the distinctive role of the arts in the creation of mind. Schools, he has argued, play a significant role in the creation and development of the child's mind: this invention of mind is "promoted both by the opportunities located in the curriculum and by the school's wider culture" (Eisner, 2002, p. 240). It is to this wider school culture that attention is now drawn.

Arts-rich education.

Anne Bamford – a leading scholar in the field of arts education – has repeatedly lamented the fact that although it is widely acknowledged that the arts are beneficial to both the individual and society, a fundamental problem persists: the arts remain on the periphery of schooling. Bamford is not alone in this assertion, for in the hierarchy of subjects – a feature of education systems worldwide – privilege of place is consistently afforded to mathematics, language, and science, while the arts are, inevitably and invariably, located at the bottom (Robinson, 2011; Winner et al, 2013): conceived of as something nice, but ultimately unnecessary (Eisner, 2002). However, despite the obstinate and persistent devaluing of the arts, or perhaps indeed because of it, the past two decades have borne witness to the resurgence of arts initiatives and to the emergence of the term *arts-rich education*.

While there exists a dearth of literature on the topic of arts-rich education, the literature that has been published is somewhat muddied, often obfuscating rather than

clarifying what an arts-rich education actually entails. In some instances authors have utilised the term arts-rich without first offering a clear definition for such (eg. Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012; DAHG & DES, 2013; Goff & Ludwig, 2013), while in others, only limited definitions are presented. Hirsch (2008), for example, considers an arts-rich school to simply be one "with an abundance of arts resources and replete with arts enthusiasts" (p. 218), while for Catterall (2009) the arts-rich, arts-poor, or arts-barren status of a school can be determined by a scale of easily quantifiable factors including the availability of arts programmes and the number of staff hired to deliver them.

Following a critique of available literature, and emerging from subsequent research seeking to determine what an arts-rich school looks like in practice and explore pupil perceptions of same, Brustein (2016) has concluded that art-richness is a complex and multifaceted concept with many interrelated elements making it difficult to either define or assess. Yet, amid scholars in the field, there exists relative agreement that of fundamental concern to this concept of arts-rich education are the quantity and breadth of arts experiences offered to children, and, significantly, the broader climate of the school (Brustein, 2016). Catterall (2009) for example, like McCarthy and his colleagues (McCarthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras, & Brooks, 2004), conceives of arts-richness as something which permeates the culture of the school: as an environment, an integral aspect of the school's identity. This culture – which simultaneously demonstrates and fosters an appreciation of the arts – can manifest itself in: the display of pupils' artwork; the infusion of the arts into non-arts disciplines; the availability of extracurricular arts activities; and the production of school plays and performances (McCarthy et al, 2004). An arts-rich school environment is one which offers multiple and varied opportunities for pupils to develop a positive attitude toward the arts (McCarthy et al, 2004); it is a culture whereby, in the words of Stevenson and Deasy (2005), the arts saturate the school.

An arts-rich culture, McCarthy and his co-authors (2004) hypothesised, has the potential to: improve pupils' attitudes towards the arts, and towards school itself; develop pupils' sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy; and strengthen relationships between pupils and their teachers as well as amongst the pupils themselves. However, while these authors could only speculate on the positive impact of a school's arts-rich culture, Catterall (2009) – whose aforementioned research highlighted the benefits of arts participation on pupils – utilised NELS:88 data to locate schools on a scale of arts-richness. He subsequently juxtaposed those schools identified as arts-rich with those categorised as arts-poor or even arts-barren (Catterall, 2009). While this scale was – in Catterall's (2009) own estimation – limited, its utilisation points to some of the benefits pupils experience in an arts-rich school. His analysis revealed that pupils attending an arts-rich school, even those whose arts participation was negligible, experienced better outcomes in the academic arena than their counterparts in arts-poor or arts-barren schools (Catterall, 2009). Arts-rich schools, Catterall (2009) declared, have certain unique characteristics that may account for this advantage. Not alone were teacher and pupil morale revealed to be higher in arts-rich schools, but the relationships between teachers and their pupils were also discovered to be more positive. Reflecting on pedagogical practice in such schools, Catterall (2009) posited that arts-rich schools have succeeded in creating a climate for achievement: in schools identified as arts-rich there was comparatively more emphasis on both problem solving and collaborative learning, pupils were exposed to more literature and afforded more opportunities for personal writing, and teachers were afforded more control over the materials used in their classrooms.

Scholars suggest that there is something distinctive about arts-rich schools (Bamford, 2009; Brustein, 2016; Catterall, 2009; McCarthy et al, 2004), a climate and a culture that fosters positive academic and social outcomes: it is therefore unsurprising that policy makers have begun to take note. In 2012, the *Creative Learning Initiative* – a school improvement

plan which, over the next decade, seeks to provide an arts-rich education for each child in the independent school district of Austin, Texas – was launched. The initiative, though welcome in its affirmation of the importance of arts education, liberally utilises the terms "arts-rich" and "creative learning" as though stakeholders instinctively know what these contested terms mean, or indeed what they look like in practice (Brustein, 2016). Similarly, just one year later in the Irish context, it was declared that a national scheme would be launched to incentivise and recognise those schools providing an arts-rich education for their pupils (DAHG & DES, 2013). However, like their American counterparts, these policy-makers failed to provide either a definition of arts-rich education or guidelines as to how a school might become arts-rich. Therefore, a return to the literature is necessary.

For Bamford (2009), arts-rich education comprises "any educational plan, curriculum, educational practice, [or] model of teaching and learning that involves the arts in a significant and substantial way" (p. 22). While there is considerable overlap between Bamford's definition and those offered by other scholars in the field, she alone highlights that neither the quantity nor breadth of arts experiences offered to the child negate the significant importance of quality. Indeed, lest the role of quality in arts education be undermined, she has asserted categorically that the benefits of arts-rich education "are only tangible within high quality programmes" (Bamford, 2009, p. 11). Bamford, echoing a sentiment recurrent throughout the literature, differentiates between high-quality education in the arts disciplines themselves – in the visual arts, music, dance, drama, and the language arts – and the utilisation of the arts as pedagogical tools to enable children's learning in other subject areas. Indeed, though somewhat contested, what the literature makes evident is that arts-rich education comprises both education in the arts, and education *through* the arts (Bamford, 2009; McCarthy et al, 2004; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005).

Arts integration.

Literature on *arts-integration* has – in tandem with progressively growing interest – been emerging steadily from the United States (US) for more than a decade. Arising not alone from persistent challenges to the notion of discrete and separate subject areas in education, but from a faith in the potential of the arts to transform school cultures and deepen pupils' learning, arts advocates and policy-makers alike have sought to implement programmes utilising the arts to enhance learning across the curriculum (Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007). Amid proponents of arts-integration – those school districts, councils, arts groups, and non-profit organisations advocating its utilisation – there have been various models of implementation: indeed the term itself is not uncontested (Burnaford et al, 2007).

Arts integrated Solutions (AiS) – a non-profit organisation established in 2004 with the expressed intent of transforming education by bringing arts-integration to "every child, in every classroom, every day" – describes arts-integration as the use of the arts to enhance pupils' learning in other academic areas (2014): an understanding which can be summarised, in essence, as what Bamford (2009) terms "education through the arts" (p. 11). One programme that fits comfortably within this perception of arts-integration is Housen and Yenawine's *Visual Thinking Strategies* (VTS). VTS – which has been employed in art galleries worldwide and in more than a hundred schools across the US – uses art to develop a variety of skills: visual literacy; complex critical thinking; collaborative problem-solving; and the communication skills of effective listening and expression (Yenawine, 2014). Through the utilisation of VTS, teachers are enabled to embed art deeply in the classroom experience while developing pupils' evolving capacities in non-arts disciplines (Yenawine, 2014). Indeed Yenawine (2014) has asserted that VTS – whereby pupils are asked to examine an image and articulate what they believe is happening therein, referring to details from the image to explain and justify their stance – is something teachers can integrate into their

teaching across the curriculum. It is therefore unsurprising that VTS has formed an element

of numerous arts-integration programmes implemented across the US (Goff & Ludwig,

2013).

In their understanding of arts-integration however, Stevenson and Deasy (2007) go

further, asserting that "In integrated arts lessons, arts and non-arts content and skills are

taught in tandem, with the content and methods of the disciplines woven together for mutual

reinforcement" (p. 11). Theirs is a perspective shared by The Kennedy Center for the

Performing Arts, who conceive of arts-integration as "an approach to teaching in which

students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a

creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving

objectives in both" (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, p. 1). As Burnaford and her colleagues (2007)

emphasise, despite current interest in arts-integration and its educative potential, a consensus

on neither the theory nor practice of arts-integration has been reached. Indeed, as Deasy

(2003) – who himself conceives of arts-integration as the effort to construct relationships

between learning in the arts and learning in other areas of the curriculum – asserted, this is a

phrase which, evidently, means different things to different people.

Developing consistently alongside the proliferation of arts-integration throughout the

US is the body of research literature examining its impact. While an exhaustive review of the

research literature would no doubt prove worthwhile, it is, in the current context, impossible.

The discussion which follows seeks merely to illustrate the varying manners in which arts-

integration has been implemented and the types of benefits school communities have been

found to enjoy. This discussion will, therefore, be necessarily selective and limited to the

examination of two studies investigating arts-integration: *Arts for Academic Achievement* and

Third Space. These studies were selected not alone because they are large-scale studies which

have been recognised within the field of arts education research, but because they include a specific focus on the American equivalent of primary education.

Arts for Academic Achievement.

Arts for Academic Achievement (AAA) – a programme which was implemented in public schools in Minneapolis over a four year period – sought to increase the integration of various art forms into the core curriculum with the expressed objective of increasing pupils' academic achievement (Seashore, Anderson, & Riedel, 2003). While educational reform efforts aimed at raising academic standards routinely push the arts further to the margins of education (Goff & Ludwig, 2013), *AAA* encouraged more widespread exposure to the arts for pupils in participating schools. The theory of action which gave impetus to the programme was that, with the utilisation of arts-integration, "instruction in non-arts disciplines becomes more effective and student achievement increases" (Ingram & Seashore, 2003, p. 1).

The establishment of professional learning communities – comprising teachers, arts specialists, and artists – sought to foster a culture of collaboration among, and simultaneously facilitate the professional development of, these stakeholders (Seashore et al, 2003). Indeed, only three years after the programme's initial implementation, participating artists reported that teachers involved in *AAA* had not alone increased their ability to collaborate with other professionals, but had altered their pedagogical practice as they became more proficient in arts-integration (Werner, 2002). By the final year of implementation over 80% of participating elementary teachers reported the utilisation of arts-integration in their lessons. These teachers did indicate, however, that their use of arts-integration was not distributed evenly across the curriculum stating that they were more likely to use this approach in reading lessons than in mathematics, for example (Ingram & Seashore, 2003). However, despite the somewhat inconsistent use of arts-integration across the curriculum, Ingram and Seashore (2003) reported that through participation in *AAA*, teachers' instruction became

more child-focused as they became increasingly comfortable adopting the role of facilitator over that of knowledge dispenser. Furthermore, these authors report that arts-integration enabled pupils to make more personally meaningful connections with their learning. Significantly – in light of the expressed objective of the programme – Ingram and Seashore (2003) suggest that there exists a significant relationship between arts-integrated instruction and pupil achievement in the domains of reading and mathematics. While these gains in achievement were not consistently realised for every pupil every year, further analysis by Ingram and Seashore (2003) revealed that it was not the mere presence of arts-integration, but the intensity of arts-integration, that related to gains in pupils' learning. In the estimation of these authors, *AAA* was a reform initiative that brought with it meaningful change in teachers' pedagogical practice, in teachers' perception of pupils' capabilities, and in the quality of pupils' learning (Ingram & Seashore, 2003).

 Third Space.

 Another reform initiative which sought to explore arts-integration as a means of facilitating school improvement was the Arts Education Partnership's *Third Space* programme (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). While participation in *AAA* was an option for all public schools in Minneapolis, this study sought to examine arts instruction in 10 specific case study schools – each serving economically disadvantaged communities – which had been identified as having "outstanding arts programmes" (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, p. 2). The resultant narrative paints a vivid picture of these learning communities – of the teachers, arts specialists, artists, and pupils therein – and illustrates how schools can utilise the arts, and the pedagogical approaches typically found in arts instruction, to develop and improve.

 Like their counterparts in *AAA*, teachers involved in *Third Space* frequently worked with artists to develop and deliver arts-integrated instruction in their classrooms (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Furthermore, just as those teachers involved in *AAA* were seen to alter their

pedagogical practice as a result of this collaboration, it was revealed that working alongside artists and arts specialists had a positive impact on teachers' instructional practice (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Indeed, not alone was this collaboration found to have a positive impact on teachers' satisfaction in teaching as a profession, but it also succeeded in strengthening schools' ties to their local communities (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005).

For each of these case study schools the arts were considered to be of fundamental importance to the question of education, and the narrative which emerges from their experience demonstrates the manner in which the arts enabled them to create powerful learning contexts (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Climates were fostered whereby: pupils were enabled to take risks, exploring ideas, questions, and solutions; pupils' abilities to think creatively, and to be adaptive and flexible in their thinking, were nurtured; pupils took ownership of their learning; pupils' self-efficacy was developed; and pupils became more engaged in school (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). In each of these schools a space was created whereby pupils, together with their teachers, succeeded as learners, as members of an "open and inclusive community with a fulfilling and meaningful present and a hopeful future – the type of community that can be the foundation of a democracy, fulfilling the primary purpose of … public schools" (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, p. 117).

Arts integration: a potential component of arts-richness in Irish primary education?

In schools participating in each of the aforementioned studies, the integrity of the arts as discrete disciplines was maintained, while positive exposure to the arts became more widespread through the utilisation of arts-integration. While arts-integration – as manifest in either of the guises elucidated above – could not be faithfully transferred to the Irish primary context, its essential spirit could certainly become central to the concept of arts-rich education.

Both the *Arts for Academic Achievement* and *Third Space* programmes relied on considerable funding which enabled the sustained, meaningful involvement of artists and arts specialists; involvement which was hailed by Ingram and Seashore (2003) as a "critical ingredient" in the successful implementation of arts-integration (p. 10). While recent years have brought with them a modest increase in the number of artists in schools, and an increased investment in fostering partnerships between artists and teachers, collaboration of that nature – whereby the artist-teacher partnership seeks to enhance teaching and learning in non-arts disciplines – is, in the Irish context, without precedent. Indeed in the Irish context the term itself, given its utilisation of the word "integration", is not unproblematic. Integration – as a principle underpinning the current *Primary School Curriculum* – is heralded as having the potential to give children's learning a richer perspective, emphasising the interconnectedness of knowledge and reinforcing learning across the curriculum (GoI, 1999a): an understanding not incompatible with espoused concepts of arts-integration. However, although integration is repeatedly advocated in curriculum documents, an NCCA (2010) investigation into curriculum overload proposes that the design of the curriculum as a series of separate subjects has "overshadowed the notion of the curriculum as a holistic construct" (p. 13), suggesting that the aspiration of an integrated curriculum has not been achieved. Furthermore, the reference to cross-curricular themes which appears in the introduction to the *Primary School Curriculum*, coupled with the thematic planning exemplars presented throughout curriculum documents (eg GoI, 1999c, p. 48; 1999e, p. 50; 1999i, p. 23-24) and the emphasis placed on thematic planning in initial teacher education (ITE), has all but ensured that in the Irish context – if they approach teaching in an integrated manner at all – teachers have adopted what Turner-Bisset (2000) terms "integration by topic" (p. 5). Indeed the emphasis which has been placed on thematic teaching within primary

education has, Flannery (2012) suggests, impinged upon the implementation of elements of the visual arts curriculum.

Therefore, arising from a synthesis of definitions presented in available literature (eg Bamford, 2009; Burnaford et al, 2007; Hoffman Davis, 2008; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005), and cognisant of the particularities of the Irish educational context, I propose to utilise the term *arts-infusion* to describe the process of educating children *through* the arts. Though not as prevalent as "arts integration", this is a term purposely and judiciously selected and is used by the author to describe the meaningful and purposeful utilisation of relevant art form(s) to enrich children's learning and provide multiple entry points to academic content – and varied tools for the assessment of same – across all areas of the curriculum. This is a term which is also used by Hoffman Davis (2008), who declares that the infusion of the arts into non-arts disciplines – that allowing the arts to permeate classroom activities – has the capacity to enrich pupils' learning experiences. However, while Hoffman Davis' use of this term (2008, p. 17) encapsulates arts-in-education practice, within the context of this work arts-infusion is conceived of as an approach or methodology which is entirely within both the remit and the ability of the generalist teacher. By meaningfully infusing the arts into non-arts disciplines teachers are enabled to enhance arts provision within their classroom by increasing pupils' exposure to high-quality arts experiences. Though aspirational, this vision of arts-infusion could, with dedicated professionals at the helm, potentially be realised, thus strengthening the position of the arts in Irish primary education. However, before one can discuss strengthening the status of the arts in any meaningful way, one must first see clearly the educational terrain in which they stand: it is timely, therefore, that our attentions turn to a full discussion of the evolving definition and developing status of the arts in primary education.

<h1 align="center">Arts Education in Ireland's Primary Schools</h1>

Public education – that which is provided by national governments, funded through taxation, and free at the point of delivery – is inherently political. Indeed Walsh (2012) has professed that educational policy should routinely be considered in light of what it reveals of a government's understanding of the nature and purpose of education. Sensitive to the indivisibility of these intertwining threads of education and politics, a comprehensive discussion of the evolving definition and growing status of the arts in primary education is offered: through the ideology of cultural nationalism to the overwhelmingly economic concerns which govern policy today. This historical overview is offered not alone to situate this work in its specific cultural and historical context, but so that recurrent rhetoric and repeated deficits in the provision of arts education might be identified.

Primary Education 1900 – 1922

As the 19th century drew to a close, the *Report of the Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction* (1898) concluded that Ireland's system of primary education – with its over-emphasis on reading, writing, and arithmetic – had become outdated and was in need of fundamental reform (Coolahan, 1985; Walsh, 2007a). Critiquing a system of education which was "one-sided in its character" and left "some of the most useful faculties of the mind absolutely untrained" (Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction, 1898, p. 4), the Report presented a vision for primary education which encompassed the attitudes and principles of the child-centred movement (Coolahan, 1985; Walsh, 2007a).

Its review of national and international best practice led the Commission to endorse a significantly broader curriculum range than that provided in Irish schools heretofore, and to promote a more child-friendly vision for education than had previously been imagined (Coolahan, 1985; Hyland, 1987). It was strongly recommended that the philosophies and practices of the Kindergarten classroom – which pursued "the development of all the faculties

of the child in an orderly and harmonious fashion" – be "kept steadily in view" throughout all stages of primary education (Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction, 1898, p. 13). Furthermore, the Commission emphasised that the manual and practical disciplines which would promote and facilitate pupils' holistic development should not be conceived of as "subsidiary subjects", to be accommodated once the task of education had been completed, rather theses disciplines should be considered integral to education itself (1898, p. 13). On these points the Commission was both consistent and unrelenting, for "education, in the true sense of the word, is at once broader and deeper than mere formal instruction in the 'three R's'" (1898, p. 10). The recommendations of the Commission subsequently formed the basis of the *Revised Programme for National Schools* (1900), implemented at the dawn of the 20th century. For the first time since the foundation of a national system of primary education in 1831, this revised programme – which introduced drawing, singing, and physical education – guaranteed access to the arts in Ireland's primary schools.

This reimagining of primary education was – in principle at least – nothing short of revolutionary. Not alone was a much broader range of learning experiences provided within primary schools, but this "radically changed programme" discouraged the compartmentalised teaching of subjects (Coolahan, 1985, p. 34). Rather, where possible, opportunities for subject integration were to be pursued (Coolahan, 1985). Both Coolahan (1985) and Walsh (2007a) report that school life soon became more varied, more stimulating, and more pleasant for the nation's pupils. Indeed the newly introduced subjects – including the arts disciplines – were soon being taught "in almost all schools in a fairly satisfactory manner" (Coolahan, 1985, p. 36). However, despite the fact that the Commission had emphasised that not alone was it of "utmost importance" that ITE be restructured to ensure that future teachers would be enabled to provide high-quality learning experiences in these newly introduced subjects, but that existing members of the profession would require considerable support if they were to do

likewise (1898, p. 54), implementation of the revised programme proved problematic (Benson, 1979; Coolahan, 1985, Hyland, 1987). It was acknowledged by the Commission that the professional support it advocated – which was multifaceted in nature consisting of the gradual implementation of new subjects; professional development workshops; guidance and advice from subject-experts on-site; and practical lesson demonstrations (1898, p. 56) – would require considerable expenditure. One fundamental stumbling block for the implementation of this revised programme was the absence of adequate funding. Indeed William Starkie (1911), who was then Resident Commissioner of National Education, came to publicly criticise the government for its failure to adequately invest in this curricular reform and declared of its modest implementation that "we were attempting to make bricks without straw" (as cited in Hyland, 1987, p. 171).

While the aspirations of the *Revised Programme for National Schools* were never fully realised, they permeated educational discourse and reinvigorated educational thought (Walsh, 2007b), albeit briefly. In the years approaching the establishment of the Irish Free State, a heightened patriotic fervour and idealism pervaded national thought (Coolahan, 1985). This ideology of cultural nationalism was, ironically, to prove a considerable stumbling block, both to the development of arts education in Ireland's primary schools and to the child-centred focus which had been embodied in reform at the opening of the century.

Primary Education 1922 – 1971

Following independence from Britain, education was envisaged as a crucial element of the foundation upon which our newly independent state would be built. It was a time which saw primary education promoted, almost exclusively, as a vehicle for the restoration of the Irish language and the revival of Gaelic tradition (Benson, 1979; Coolahan, 1985). Upon the birth of the Irish Free State, as Coolahan (1985) succinctly phrased it, "Energies were harnessed for a cultural revolution based on schools" (p. 39).

The *First National Programme Conference* – convened by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) in 1921 – sought to provide a framework for an educational programme harmonious with "national ideals and requirements". Addressing the overriding objections to the existing system of primary education – discontent with the poor status afforded to the Irish language and claims of curriculum overload – the report of the conference proposed considerable adjustments to educational provision (Coolahan, 1985). This report formed the basis of curricular policy in the Irish Free State and advocated the resurgence of the Irish language in its recommendation that the status of the language – both as a discrete subject and an instrument of instruction – be raised (Coolahan, 1985). Furthermore, in emphasising the promotion of Gaelic culture, the report not alone recommended considerable curricular modification, but the abolition of many obligatory subjects (Benson, 1979; Coolahan, 1985).

The aims that governed educational policy in the Irish Free State aspired to revive the cultural inheritance denied to successive generations of Irish children, and it was made evident that the principal goal of education was mastery of the Irish language (Benson, 1979; Coolahan, 1985). On the island of saints and scholars – home to the internationally renowned Books of Kells and Durrow – drawing was considered irrelevant, and summarily disposed of from an educational programme which sought the promotion of Gaelic culture (Benson, 1979). Physical education was similarly discarded (Benson, 1979). Indeed only one element of arts education, singing, survived the cull. So that it might become more harmonious with national ideals, however, only Irish language songs were to be taught (Coolahan, 1985).

The narrow educational programme implemented in primary schools proved a radical departure from that which existed prior to independence, and despite wide-ranging proposals for reform remained largely unchanged until 1971 (Coolahan, 1985). While educational policy sought to strengthen the fabric of Irish society – affording the language, history, and

tradition of Ireland a prominent status in education – it succeeded in denying generations of Irish children access to the arts. This considerable deficit aroused significant concern from a number of educational stakeholders. While the Commission on Vocational Education (1944) called for the inclusion of drawing in primary education, the INTO's *A Plan for Education* (1947) urged for a broader, more child-centred approach which would embrace literary, aesthetic, and physical education (Coolahan, 1985). Similarly, the Council of Education (Department of Education, 1950) argued not alone for enhanced music provision throughout Ireland's schools, but for the reintroduction of both drawing and physical education as compulsory subjects in primary education. Echoing the criticisms of the Commission on Vocational Education and the INTO, the Council of Education (Department of Education, 1950) critiqued the narrow programme operative in the nation's primary schools, declaring it "a decided educational loss" that drawing was not continued throughout the duration of a child's primary education (p. 200), and professing the absence of physical education to be a "defect in the existing curriculum" (p. 190). Its declaration that these subjects "must be formally included in the curriculum" (Department of Education, 1950, p. 118) – neither taught incidentally through other subjects nor considered a mere add-on to be pursued only once the formal work of education had concluded – was reminiscent of the caution, uttered more than half a century previous, that these disciplines not be perceived as "subsidiary subjects" (Commission on Manual an Practical Instruction, 1898, p. 13).

The unapologetic marginalisation of the arts in education reflected a broader attitude of apathy towards the arts in the Irish Free State. Indeed O'Neill (1999) argues that for the first three decades of independence "the arts were officially neglected, treated with suspicion and occasionally contempt as a relic of the colonial British presence in Ireland" (p. 9). Perhaps the most scathing appraisal of the arts-deprived nature of national policy was

Bodkin's (1949) *Report on the Arts in Ireland*. Unflinching in his criticism, Bodkin (1949) asserted that since gaining independence:

> We have not merely failed to go forward in policies concerning the Arts, we have, in fact, regressed to arrive, many years ago, at a condition of apathy about them in which it becomes justifiable to say of Ireland that no other country of Western Europe cared less, or gave less for the cultivation of the Arts. (p. 9)

With regard to education, Bodkin's (1949) criticism of the neglect of the arts was echoed by a 1961 report which claimed that, visually and artistically, Irish pupils were the most under-educated in Europe (Benson, 1979).

During this period, it could be argued that the needs of the child were secondary to the needs of the state. An educational programme predicated on the experiences and potential of the child was of little importance when compared to the restoration of our cultural heritage. This was a period in which primary education in Ireland "was 'curriculum-centred' rather than 'child-centred'" and the role of the teacher was reduced to that of a functionary, merely transferring knowledge unto their pupils (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971a, p. 15).

Primary Education 1971 – 1990

Curricular reform of 1971 heralded a new beginning for primary education in Ireland. Drafted and revised at the close of the 1960s, the publication of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* bore witness to the significant reimagining of the aims and function of primary education. The centrality of the child was enshrined in curriculum documents, and it was declared imperative that education "endeavour to cater for the full and harmonious development of each child" (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971a, p. 13). In both its ideology and content, this curriculum was a striking contrast to that which preceded it (Coolahan, 1985; Walsh, 2012).

The advent of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* signalled the dawning of a new era for the role of the arts in primary education. With the reintroduction of previously discarded subjects, and

the considerable revision of those which had subsisted, arts education was established as an indispensable dimension of primary education. Dance, declared in curricular documents to be "the highest form of artistic movement" (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971b, p. 300), was incorporated into the reinstated physical education programme. However rather than reinstate drawing, *Curaclam na Bunscoile* introduced a broad arts and crafts syllabus which advocated for a range of creative and artistic experiences across a variety of media. Art and crafts – which would provide an outlet for pupils' creative and artistic ability – was professed an essential component of primary education (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971a). Indeed it was declared of art and crafts that "It is doubtful if any other aspect of the curriculum can do so much to foster simultaneously intellect, imagination, observation and manipulative skill" (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971a, p. 297).

Singing, which had occupied a place in primary education since its introduction in 1900, would now become an integral aspect of a broader music programme (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971b). Music education – incorporating song-singing, vocal technique, ear training, notation, and creative activity – was envisioned as "a pleasant and living element of school life", providing pupils with "a vital means of self-expression … and a basis for future musical appreciation and creation" (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971b, p. 211). Similarly, while language had always occupied a prominent position in primary education, the introduction of this new curriculum heralded a fundamental reimagining of both the content and role of the language arts. Reading for pleasure, story-telling, poetry, and creative writing in prose and poetry each formed an essential component of the balanced English syllabus envisaged in *Curaclam na Bunscoile*. However perhaps the most significant departure from the programme which preceded it was the incorporation of dramatic activity into the language syllabus. It was professed in curricular documents that:

In the primary school, dramatic activity has a special value in that it enables the child to express externally his thoughts and feelings in different situations. It complements his creative endeavours in such activities as art and writing. Indeed it might be regarded as the most personal of all art forms in that here the artist uses voice, facial expression and body movement rather than paint, pen or instrument. (An Roinn Oideachais, 1971a, p. 87)

It was not merely the presence of the arts disciplines, but the inclusion of creative and imaginative activities in dance, art and craft, music, writing, and drama that cemented this as a new era for the arts in primary education (Benson, 1979). Indeed Benson's seminal report *The Place of the Arts in Irish Education* (1979) – while unwavering in its criticism of the historical neglect of the arts in education – highlighted that recent changes "would now seem to allow a much more favourable environment in which the arts might flourish and assume their rightful place as a central concern of our educational process" (p. 28). Alas the significant commitment to the arts embedded in curricular policy, and the immense potential for educational change this promised, went largely unrealised in Irish primary schools (Benson, 1979; INTO, 2010).

Upon reviewing appraisals of curriculum implementation, Benson (1979) declared it evident that the benefits of the arts disciplines included in *Curaclam na Bunscoile* were not adequately being realised in Irish schools. Inadequate funding, unsuitable school buildings, and the dearth of sustained professional development for teachers each proved a considerable obstacle to the successful implementation of primary arts education (Benson, 1979; INTO, 2010). Indeed barely more than a decade after the Irish Government affirmed the importance of arts education, Herron (1985) declared the Irish schoolchild to be among the most grievously disadvantaged in the domain of music education, while Drury (1985) professed that "The acknowledged neglect of the arts in education continues": a cry echoed by the

Curriculum and Examinations Board's (1985) reference to "the indefensible neglect of arts education". Despite the promise, and despite the potential, "arts education remained the Cinderella of the education system" (INTO, 2010, p. 30).

Primary Education 1990 – 1999

At the dawn of the final decade of the 20th century the review of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* – which commenced in 1987 – was concluded, and Ireland entered its next era of curriculum change. This was not, however, a radical swing of the pendulum. Rather – for the first time since the foundation of a national system of primary education – curricular reform would comprise the revision, refining, and updating of the existing educational programme. Embedded firmly in the philosophy, principles, and spirit of *Curaclam na Bunscoile*, any new plan for education would embody the development of what was best in the primary school curriculum (INTO, 1996).

The *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (GoI, 1990) – compiled by a diverse group of educational stakeholders tasked with examining the aims and objectives of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* as well as the effectiveness of its implementation – concluded that the revision and reformulation of the aims, scope, and content of the primary curriculum was necessary. Similarly, following an examination of its implementation, the Review Body concluded that substantial resources were required to develop a planned and structured in-service programme which would ensure that proposed curricular changes could be "adequately disseminated and implemented throughout the system" (1990, p. 96). Indeed the group's chairperson, Moya Quinlan, argued that the limited success of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* should be seen "as a tribute to those teachers whose task it was to implement that curriculum to the best of their abilities ... within the constraints which inevitably ... exist" (1990, p. 5).

Within the domain of arts education the Review Body lamented the segregated treatment of the arts disciplines in *Curaclam na Bunscoile* and advocated that any new plan for education prepare "a general statement of aesthetic principles from which the aims and objectives of all the arts disciplines in the curriculum can be derived" (GoI, 1990, p. 59). The Review Body was also critical of what it determined to be a seriously unbalanced arts curriculum which overemphasised expressive activities to the detriment of cultivating the child's critical and appreciative capacities (GoI, 1990). The vision of arts education promoted by the Review Body was one which would balance expressive and appreciative learning opportunities in a variety of arts disciplines including the language arts, music, art and craft, drama, and dance (GoI, 1990). Within each of these disciplines the group was consistent in recommending that enhanced and expanded professional development opportunities be made available to primary school teachers, while specific curricular recommendations – including the active fostering of creativity and the imagination within the language arts; the revision of music literacy targets and a greater balance between the performance and appreciation of music; a major revision of the art and craft programme to redress the imbalance between art creation and appreciation, and to enhance the child's ability to work with a range of materials and techniques; the utilisation of educational drama as a pedagogical tool across the curriculum; and an increase in the time devoted to physical education – were also made. Although adamant that "educational drama should have an important place in the curriculum" (GoI, 1990, p. 69), this group fell considerably short of recommending that drama be considered a subject in its own right, and instead presented drama as a resource which might enhance children's learning across the various subjects of the primary school programme.

While the Green Paper on Education – *Education for a Changing World* (Department of Education, 1992) – did not envisage a role of any significance for the arts in education, the White Paper on Education – *Charting our Education Future* (DES, 1995) – signalled a

commitment from Government to both affirm the centrality of the arts within primary education, and to broaden the range of arts experiences offered in the curriculum. This framework for education development proposed a broad understanding of the creative and performance arts which would incorporate the visual arts, music, drama, dance, poetry, and story-telling (DES, 1995). It was a document which, like the *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (1990) before it, advocated artistic and aesthetic learning experiences as key elements of primary education, and further declared that "such a nurturing of creativity assists the young person to become a tolerant, critically aware and socially committed citizen who can live with confidence in the world" (DES, 1995, p. 22).

Subsequent curricular reform of 1999 signified the Government's dedication to a broad and holistic curriculum which would promote pupils' diverse intelligences and afford greater opportunity for creative and constructivist learning (Coolahan, 2008). The *Primary School Curriculum* celebrates the uniqueness of each pupil, and is designed to nurture all dimensions of their life including the emotional, imaginative, physical, and aesthetic (GoI, 1999a). This broad and balanced curriculum reflects the many facets of human experience, activity, and expression, and aspires towards the development of the full potential of each pupil (GoI, 1999a).

While building firmly upon the foundations laid in 1971 – embracing both the child-centred philosophies and affirmation of the arts embodied in *Curaclam na Bunscoile* – the *Primary School Curriculum* presents a broader, more comprehensive understanding of arts education. Dance – which remains an element of pupils' physical education – is highlighted in curriculum documents as inherently distinctive amongst the disciplines advocated within the physical education programme (GoI, 1999b). Concerned principally with the expressive, aesthetic, and artistic qualities of movement, dance education comprises both traditional folk dance and creative dance (GoI, 1999b). Engagement with traditional folk dance encourages

both the enjoyment of dance and active engagement with cultural tradition, while in creating dances – individually and collaboratively – pupils are encouraged to focus on the expressive potential of movement (GoI, 1999c). It is envisaged that in exploring, creating, and performing dances, pupils will "come to understand that dance is a medium for the expression of ideas, thoughts and feelings" (GoI, 1999c, p. 7).

The advent of the *Primary School Curriculum* saw art and crafts reimagined as the visual arts, which would now incorporate the previously unexplored domain of aesthetic education: the child as receiver of art (INTO, 2010). Advocated within this revised visual arts programme are the interrelated activities of creating art and responding to art. Expressive activities are balanced with opportunities for pupils to examine and respond to visual art forms of different styles, created in different media, hailing from different cultures (GoI, 1999d). This broad new visual arts curriculum – encompassing drawing, paint, print, construction, clay, and fabric and fibre – presents an array of activities in perceiving, exploring, creating, responding to, and appreciating the visual world (GoI, 1999d). Similarly, it is envisaged that in creating and responding to artwork across a range of media, pupils will develop sensitivity towards the visual elements of line, shape, form, colour and tone, texture, pattern and rhythm, and spatial organisation. Within curriculum documents the unique benefits of the visual arts are affirmed, and it is declared that purposeful activities in this field expand pupils' "ways of exploring, expressing and coming to terms with the world they inhabit in a structured and enjoyable way" (GoI, 1999e, p. 2).

In addition to the inclusion of aesthetic education, a significant departure from art education as envisaged in *Curaclam na Bunscoile* is the considerable emphasis placed on the child's imaginative development, and the consequent importance afforded to the creative process in all artistic endeavour. Indeed Ní Bhroin (2012) asserts that the single overriding principle of the visual arts programme is that pupils have personal input into all artwork

created, for in the visual arts "the *process of making* is as valuable as the final product" (GoI, 1999e, p. 12).

Pupils' imaginative and creative development is similarly emphasised in the revised music programme, for music education would now incorporate composition – promoting creative expression in enabling pupils to produce their own musical sequences. Indeed it is highlighted in curricular documents that the expressed aim of activities in composing is "to develop the child's creativity and uniqueness, first and foremost by providing an avenue for self-expression" (GoI, 1999f, p. 7). Music education – comprising activities in performing, listening and responding, and composition – aims to develop the entire spectrum of pupils' intelligence (GoI, 1999f). Within curriculum documents not alone are the academic benefits of music education – including the development of long and short-term memory, enhanced spatial reasoning, and enhanced problem-solving skills – emphasised, but music education is hailed as contributing to pupils' "knowledge and understanding of others, their times, their cultures, and traditions" (GoI, 1999f, p. 6). Furthermore, just as it is envisioned that all activities in the visual arts will develop pupils' sensitivity towards the visual elements, it is envisaged that activities across the music programme will develop pupils' awareness of and sensitivity to the elements of music: pulse, duration, tempo, pitch, dynamics, structure, timbre, texture, and style (GoI, 1999f).

Whilst the increased emphasis on pupils' imaginative and creative development is made evident in the learning activities advocated in the revised dance, art, and music programmes, so too is it evident in the revised English syllabus. Pupils' emotional and imaginative development through language is highlighted in curricular documents as addressing an important facet in the development of their personality; "In exploring emotions they can come to a better understanding of themselves and of their relationships with others. Through the world of the imagination they can glimpse the infinite possibilities of the human

condition" (GoI, 1999g, p. 9). It is similarly asserted that through literature pupils are given the opportunity to explore the world of the imagination: to navigate a path through the realms and universes brought to life through language (GoI, 1999d). Embracing the thrust and spirit of the language programme introduced in 1971, this revised programme emphasises reading for pleasure, reading for information, story-telling, poetry, and independent writing across a variety of genres as essential constituents of a balanced English curriculum (GoI, 1999g).

Although still presented as a teaching-methodology within the English syllabus, perhaps the most noteworthy advancement for arts education to materialise with the introduction of the *Primary School Curriculum* was new status afforded to drama, which would now be promoted as a discrete subject in its own right. Educational drama as it is envisaged in the *Primary School Curriculum* – that is to say process drama as opposed to performance drama – is a creative process that allows pupils to craft a story through enactment (GoI, 1999h). Indeed it is declared in curriculum documents that "It is in this act of creating story that the educationally liberating power of drama resides" (GoI, 1999h, p. 16). Rather than dwell on the display element of drama – which is acknowledged in curricular documents to have some benefits – the *Primary School Curriculum* advocates educational drama which will reflect life in a realistic or metaphorical way and involves every aspect of the pupil's personality: moral, emotional, imaginative, intellectual, and physical (GoI, 1999h). The integrity of drama as a discrete discipline is consistently affirmed, and it is professed that through drama pupils are afforded incomparable access to new experience, knowledge, and understanding: "Drama provides a unique gateway to learning and affords a dimension of knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible" (GoI, 1999h, p. 3).

Just as the visual elements and the elements of music are highlighted in their respective curricula, so too are the elements of drama. These elements – namely belief, role and character, action, time, place, tension, significance, and genre – are declared to be "as

relevant to process drama in the classroom as they are to the corpus of world theatre" and are explored thoroughly in the teacher guidelines that accompanied the newly introduced drama curriculum (GoI, 1999h, p. 46). Indeed, to support the implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum*, a book of teacher guidelines was compiled to accompany each curriculum statement. These guidelines – which explored a range of approaches and methodologies, and provided detailed advice on curriculum planning – were designed as a resource for school communities as they undertook to implement the recommendations of the revised educational programme for primary schools (GoI, 1999a). Ní Bhroin (2012) declares that, in the field of arts education, the concept of providing teachers with practical guidelines and lesson exemplars is rare. Indeed this was a measure with the potential to ameliorate some of the implementation issues which had arisen in the wake of previous curricular reform.

The *Primary School Curriculum* declares the arts to be an integral aspect of primary education, and the arts disciplines are commended for their ability to promote thinking, sensitivity, creativity, and imagination (GoI, 1999e). Indeed it is declared in curricular documents that "a purposeful arts education at primary level is life-enhancing and is invaluable in stimulating creative thinking and in promoting capability and adaptability" (GoI, 1999e, p. 2). Not alone does the *Primary School Curriculum* reiterate the sentiments of *Curaclam na Bunscoile* in acknowledging the unique contribution the arts can make to the development of the child, but this revised programme went further, raising the status of the arts disciplines in primary education. Furthermore, while consistently emphasising pupils' imaginative and creative development, this revised curriculum simultaneously empowered the creativity of the teacher. For, as Ní Bhroin (2012) has observed, "Although outlining at each stage what the child should be enabled to do, the curriculum is not prescriptive and allows the teacher to devise, within its framework, a creative … programme to suit his/her own pupils" (p. 53). Although writing exclusively about the visual arts programme, Ní

Bhroin's (2012) assertion is true for each of the arts disciplines endorsed within the *Primary School Curriculum*.

The advent of this revised programme signalled a new era for the arts, for embedded in curricular policy is a considerable commitment to the place of the arts in primary education. However, just as *Curaclam na Bunscoile* seemed to allow for a more favourable educational environment in which the arts might flourish (Benson, 1979), the immense potential for arts education inherent in the *Primary School Curriculum* has never been fully realised. Indeed almost three decades after Benson's seminal (and ultimately critical) report on the position of the arts in education, Coolahan (2008) echoed his sentiments, almost verbatim, when he declared:

> While schools are much better positioned now than they used to be for promoting the arts in education, there is evidence that a great deal remains to be done so that the arts are genuinely embedded as part of the holistic education which it is intended all pupils should receive. (p. 38)

Primary Education 2000 – Present

The implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum*.

Former Chief Inspector Eamonn Stack (2005) acknowledged that curriculum implementation is a challenging, complex task. He noted that "Curriculum change takes place in the classroom and it involves teachers translating curriculum documents into practice, embracing new teaching programmes and methodologies, and providing a broader range of learning experiences for their pupils" (p. i). The phased implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum*, which began in the year 2000 and concluded 7 years later, was therefore supported by two newly-established bodies: the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and School Development Planning Service (SDPS). Their respective purposes were to mediate the curriculum for teachers and facilitate professional development enabling the

implementation of this revised programme in individual schools, and to support planning

therein (DES, 2005).

While the *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (GoI, 1990) had

advocated a "major infusion of resources into in-service education" to facilitate the

dissemination and implementation of its proposed curricular changes (p. 96), it did not

recommend any specific model of professional development for Irish teachers. It was

apparent, however, that teachers had not been adequately supported in implementing

Curaclam na Bunscoile, and that an enhanced and modified approach was required to

facilitate the effective implementation of the *Primary School Curriculum* (Johnston,

Murchan, Loxley, Fitzgerald & Quinn, 2007). Consequently, each subject of this revised

programme was phased in over a 2 year period. During this time teachers attended subject-

specific seminars facilitated by the PCSP which provided an introduction to the content and

methodologies of each curricular area, and participated in subject-specific school-based

planning days (DES, 2005; Johnston et al, 2007). Indeed, as specialist advisors could be

invited to visit schools – providing advice on curriculum content, methodologies, and

planning, or indeed conducting demonstration lessons (Johnston et al, 2007) – the supports

made available to primary school teachers in implementing the *Primary School Curriculum*

bear a striking resemblance to those envisioned by the Commission on Manual and Practical

Instruction (1898) more than a century previous. However, despite the fact that teachers were

positively disposed to curricular reform and generally satisfied with the quality of in-service

facilitated by the PCSP (INTO, 2006), many voiced concern at the compacted, condensed

nature of the CPD provided. Indeed it was asserted by O'Connell (2006) that "teachers would

welcome regular professional development opportunities on an on-going needs basis" (p.

111). O'Connell (2006) was not alone in her assertions, for references to sustained and on-

going professional development for primary school teachers arose consistently throughout the INTO's *Consultative Conference on Education* (2006).

To date, of the arts disciplines included in the *Primary School Curriculum*, official reviews of curriculum implementation have been confined to the language and visual arts. These comprehensive evaluations, which took place in 2005, were carried out by the NCCA and the Inspectorate. While these reviews were predominantly positive – emphasising examples of effective practice and commending the manner in which practitioners had embraced new methodologies – considerable shortfalls in curriculum implementation were identified.

In the domain of the language arts, the Inspectorate expressed concerns around the limited use of improvisational drama, poetry, and rhyme as approaches to language development and recommended the more extensive use of same (DES, 2005). Furthermore, it was noted that in almost two-fifths of classrooms, teachers experienced considerable difficulty in facilitating pupils' emotional and imaginative development through language (DES, 2005). Pupils in these classrooms were not provided with opportunities to express a personal response to ideas, images, artwork, music, films, or emotions, either orally or in writing (DES, 2005). Indeed it was in the domain of writing that perhaps the most critical appraisals of curriculum implementation were noted (DES, 2005; NCCA, 2005). As a result of their evaluations, both the NCCA and the Inspectorate stressed the need for further professional development which might enable teachers to implement a more effective writing programme in their classrooms. Indeed in more than half of the classrooms observed by the Inspectorate, teachers were seen to be experiencing considerable difficulty in the teaching of writing. In these classrooms, teachers placed insufficient emphasis on the writing process, demonstrated an overdependence on workbook activities resulting in pupils partaking in undemanding writing tasks, and rarely afforded pupils the opportunity to make decisions

about their own writing (DES, 2005). Expressing serious concern about the widespread inadequate teaching of writing, the Inspectorate declared that "An improvement in the quality of the teaching of writing should become a priority for all involved in the implementation of the English curriculum" (DES, 2005, p. 23).

In the field of visual arts education, while acknowledging that in the majority of classrooms visited pupils were active agents in the design and completion of their own artwork, inspectors reported that almost one-quarter of classroom environments were not supportive of pupils' creativity (DES, 2005). It was declared that in these classrooms, poor lesson stimulus, inadequate display, and ineffective use of resources stifled pupils' creativity, spontaneity, and independence (DES, 2005). Furthermore, it was noted by the Inspectorate (2005) that "in some classrooms insufficient motivation, overprescriptive starting-points, lack of appropriate strategies and failure to provide stimuli prevented the realisation of curriculum objectives" (p. 41). More worryingly it was reported that in a minority of classrooms activities in the visual arts were almost exclusively teacher-directed, overemphasising the creation of formulaic template art to the detriment of pupils' creativity (DES, 2005).

While providing a breadth of visual arts experiences was reported by teachers to be the greatest success of the revised visual arts programme (NCCA, 2005), it is unsurprising that teachers felt most comfortable facilitating activities in the familiar two-dimensional media, particularly drawing and painting (DES, 2005). Indeed it was noted by the Inspectorate (2005) that the imbalance between art activities in two and three-dimensional media, coupled with the disproportionate time afforded to making art at the expense of responding to works of art, limited the implementation of the broad and balanced visual arts programme envisioned in the *Primary School Curriculum*.

Although highlighting many positives, the evaluations of both the Inspectorate and the NCCA draw attention to what Coolahan (2008) terms "significant deficiencies" in arts

provision in primary education (p. 38). Coolahan is not alone in his criticism. Echoing the condemnations uttered more than two decades previously, Braiden (2008) has asserted that "Arts provision for children and young people both in and out of school is arguably the single greatest fault line in our cultural provision" (p. 3). While she declares that this is "recognised by practitioners and public alike" (Braiden, 2008, p. 3), the INTO (2010) has professed that "One need only enter schools with their bright murals, student-created sculptures and enthusiastic dramatic and musical performances to know that something special is alive in primary arts education" (p. 31). Is it possible that the health and well-being of arts education in Ireland's primary schools is a matter of perspective?

Obtaining a snapshot of teachers' views and practices.

In the absence of official reviews, and cognisant of the dearth of Irish research in the field, the INTO sought to obtain a picture of teachers' views and practices in relation to primary arts education. The organisation's Education Committee consequently designed and randomly circulated a questionnaire to 1,000 teachers seeking their perspectives on the teaching of drama, music, and the visual arts (INTO, 2010). While not representative of the population of primary teachers in Ireland, and although eliciting no information on either dance or the language arts, the replies of the 209 respondents do provide some insight into educational practice in the arts.

The questionnaires, circulated 3 years after the nationwide implementation of drama education in 2006, yielded information on: teachers' confidence in teaching drama; teachers' practices in teaching drama; time allocated to the teaching of drama; and difficulties experienced in teaching drama. Despite the provision of practical guidelines and lesson exemplars, and in spite of the countrywide in-service education provided to practitioners, almost half of respondents indicated they were "not very confident" or "not at all confident" in teaching drama (INTO, 2010). Indeed, almost one-third of respondents reported that their

schools had employed the services of a specialist teacher to deliver elements of the drama programme (INTO, 2010). Similarly, one-third of respondents indicated that they had not taught all elements of the drama curriculum, while three-fifths of respondents indicated that they devoted less than the recommended one hour per week to the teaching of drama (INTO, 2010). When asked to suggest ways in which they might be facilitated in fully implementing the drama programme as envisioned in the *Primary School Curriculum*, the most prevalent recommendations included the provision of practical ideas and ongoing professional development (INTO, 2010).

With regard to the revised music programme – implemented 5 years previous to the circulation of the questionnaires – teachers' views were sought on: confidence in teaching music; time allocated to the teaching of music; challenges in implementing the revised music curriculum; and supports to facilitate the full implementation of the programme. Although almost three-fifths of respondents declared themselves "confident" or "very confident" teaching music, almost half of respondents indicated that their school had hired the services of a professional to teach some element of the music curriculum (INTO, 2010). It is perhaps unsurprising that the familiar area of performing – incorporating singing, which has held a place in primary education since 1900 – was revealed to be the area of music education to receive the majority of respondents' teaching time (INTO, 2010). Conversely, composing was revealed to be a "hugely problematic area" with a significant majority of respondents indicating that this element of music education received less than a quarter of their teaching time (INTO, 2010, p. 70). It was reported that respondents perceived their own lack of musical knowledge and ability as considerable barriers to the full implementation of the music education programme it is intended each child receive (INTO, 2010). While there are many positives to be gleaned from this survey – including the fact that over nine-tenths of respondents indicated their schools were resourced with a variety of musical instruments – it

was noted by the organisation that not all respondents were exploiting the full potential of the music curriculum and consequently recommended that teacher professional development be considered a high priority (INTO, 2010).

Visual arts – the first element of the revised arts programme to be implemented in primary schools – was revealed to be the area of arts education with which respondents were most at ease (INTO, 2010). However while three-quarters of respondents declared themselves either "confident" or "very confident" in teaching the visual arts, information gleaned through this questionnaire suggests that activities in drawing and painting dominate the visual arts programme (INTO, 2010). Conversely, activities in construction, fabric and fibre, clay, and print were declared by respondents to be the most difficult to facilitate (INTO, 2010). Indeed just over one-quarter of respondents indicated that their schools had availed of the services of a specialist teacher to deliver elements of the visual arts curriculum (INTO, 2010). Resonating profoundly with the evaluations of the Inspectorate (2005) and the NCCA (2005), a considerable imbalance between opportunities afforded to pupils in making art and in responding to artwork was highlighted in the responses to this survey. In fact three-quarters of respondents claimed to devote all teaching time in the visual arts to the creation of artwork (INTO, 2010). In exploring this repeatedly identified shortfall in what is otherwise considered a relatively well-embraced curriculum, Flannery (2012) has indicated that teachers' expressionistic epistemological leanings, their position of loco parentis, their digital and cultural literacy, and the thematic approach to planning advocated in the *Primary School Curriculum* each contribute to the poor implementation of this aspect of the visual arts programme. His conclusion that teachers require greater and continual professional development and access to appropriate resources (Flannery, 2012) echoes the priorities outlined by respondents to this questionnaire who declared planning resources, professional

development, and funding to be their chief requirements in supporting the full implementation of the visual arts programme (INTO, 2010).

While one teacher described the arts disciplines as an escape from the heavy learning of more serious academic subjects, and another expressed concern that they not detract from the significant importance of the core disciplines, those primary school teachers who completed the INTO's questionnaire were found to be positively disposed towards arts education. Respondents did, however, identify a number of areas where they believed change and development were necessary in relation to arts education in our primary schools (INTO, 2010). While the provision of adequate funding was identified by respondents as the area which required most attention if the arts curricula are to be successfully implemented, teachers to participate in this INTO study were consistent in highlighting the need for ongoing and regular professional development. On a related note, respondents highlighted specific areas of the arts curricula – namely composition, music notation, fabric and fibre, and print – which they believed to be outside the remit and ability of the generalist teacher (INTO, 2010). In short, although the evidence seems to indicate that Ireland's primary schools are certainly hospitable to the arts, it is clear that "additional support and resourcing from the Department of Education would be welcome if the arts curriculum is not to flounder" (INTO, 2012, p. 76).

Creativity and the arts in early childhood education.

Since the advent of the *Primary School Curriculum* one significant development in the Irish educational landscape – not alone for early childhood education, but for the substantial role of the arts advocated therein – was the 2009 introduction of *Aistear*. This document, focused on learning in early childhood, was hailed by former Minister Andrews (2009) as having the capacity to enrich the lives of Ireland's youngest citizens. This early childhood curriculum framework sought to address the educational needs of children from infancy

through to 6 years of age, providing guidelines to help adults facilitate enjoyable and challenging learning experiences (NCCA, 2009a). *Aistear* recognises that while learning occurs naturally in early childhood – through discussion, curiosity, exploration, and play – adults have the capacity to design experiences which will enhance that learning. *Aistear* therefore addresses not alone the learning that occurs in the home, but learning that occurs across a range of settings including day-care, pre-school, and the infant classroom.

In the infant classroom, however, *Aistear* is not a substitution for the *Primary School Curriculum*, but rather is designed to complement and enhance its aims (Gray & Ryan, 2016). Within the *Aistear* framework children's learning and development is presented within four themes: well-being; identity and belonging; communicating; exploring and thinking (NCCA, 2009a). Within each of these themes the role of the arts – of imaginative play, music, movement, story-telling, and the visual arts – is emphasised as contributing significantly to the realisation of *Aistear's* aims. Indeed that children develop the capacity to "express themselves creatively and imaginatively" is one of the expressed aims of *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009a, p. 35).

In *Aistear* it is not alone advocated that children are exposed to learning activities within the arts disciplines themselves, but that teachers in the infant classroom utilise the arts to facilitate learning in other areas. Gray and Ryan (2016), however, have advised that there is little evidence to suggest that the introduction of *Aistear* has transformed classroom practice. Indeed these authors assert that although this play-based curriculum is implemented nationwide, play occupies only a peripheral status in infant classrooms across Ireland (Gray & Ryan, 2016).

Further developments in educational policy pertaining to the arts.

Within national rhetoric – from the birth of a national system of primary education in 1831 to the present day – the perception of education has undergone considerable

transformation (O'Sullivan, 2009). Once perceived as a vehicle for the restoration of our cultural identity, and as a conduit for moral growth and development, education has been reimagined under human capital theory as a primarily economic device (O'Sullivan, 2009): a view in which Irish education policy has been entrenched for decades (Conway & Murphy, 2013).

The economic concerns which govern education policy have become increasingly evident since the worldwide recession of 2008, which left a trail of failed businesses, masses of debt, and significant unemployment in its wake. The Irish economy was left in a precarious state, and in 2011 nationwide political discontent brought with it a change in national leadership. Upon entering government, the Fine Gael-Labour coalition avowed its determination "to build a knowledge society" (GoI, 2011, p. 39). Education, and raising the standards therein, was declared an urgent national priority and heralded as the "engine of sustainable economic growth" (GoI, 2011, p. 39). Consequently, Ruairí Quinn was situated firmly in the national political spotlight on his appointment to the position of Minister for Education and Skills.

During his time in opposition, Quinn had been a harsh critic of Ireland's education system and, following the 2010 publication of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, was keen to problematise national standards of literacy and numeracy as indicative of a failing system. Although education in Ireland had experienced an unprecedented degree of reform since the 1990s (Coolahan, 2008), under Quinn's leadership the DES became a particularly powerful policy entrepreneur. Quinn – described by Flynn (2011) as the most reform-oriented Minster for Education in a generation – had a very clear reform agenda as he sought to reinvigorate the education system (Flynn, 2011).

For the nation's primary schools, the Quinn-era of education reform brought with it the significant restructuring of ITE, a rising tide of accountability at the level of school and

teacher, and an intensified focus on literacy and numeracy (Conway & Murphy, 2013). His policies, born in what the Government have termed some of "the darkest hours in the history of our independent state" (GoI, 2011, p. 2), reveal an unmistakeable faith in education as a vehicle of economic growth. What follows is an exploration of two such policies, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) and the *Arts-in-Education Charter* (DAHG & DES, 2013), in seeking to examine the place afforded to primary arts education in knowledge-economy of modern Ireland.

Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life.

While curricular developments at primary level have both broadened the definition and increased the status of arts education, the earliest inception of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) – *Better Literacy and Numeracy for Children and Young People* (DES, 2010) – asserted that in the interest of the nation's youth priority must be given "to the improvement of literacy and numeracy over other desirable, important but ultimately less vital issues" (p. 11). In a time of perceived crisis, the arts – being "less vital" – were considered disposable extras in the *Primary School Curriculum*: a stance revealed through the suggestion that the time allocated to drama education be subsumed into the time devoted to literacy (DES, 2010). While this did not come to pass – due in no small part to the impassioned response of the Association of Drama Education in Ireland (ADEI) – the suggestion exposed a political misapprehension about the significant contribution the arts make to pupils' holistic development. Indeed the "cherished principle" of the *Primary School Curriculum*, that "core concept of the child as a holistically developing learner", was declared by the Reading Association of Ireland (RAI) to be entirely absent from the document (RAI, 2011, p. vi). Indeed, like the ADEI, the Association strongly criticised the manner in which this draft strategy proposed to increase the time allocated to literacy development through the

sacrifice of other subject areas, declaring the suggestion "contrary to the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum*" (RAI, 2011, p. vi).

When Ruairí Quinn took the helm of the DES this draft national strategy, and the numerous responses it inspired, provided the solid base from which *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) emerged. While this revised strategy did not officially eradicate any subject area, it has been highlighted by Ó Breacháin and O'Toole (2013) that the natural marginalisation of other curricular areas – resultant from the intensified focus on literacy and numeracy the strategy generated – thoroughly undermines the child-centred ethos of the *Primary School Curriculum*. Eisner (1992) holds that the curricula prescribed for schools convey unambiguous messages to the child about what society believes it is worth learning. Ó Breacháin and O'Toole (2013) similarly argue that "there is no more telling indicator of the perceived importance of subjects than the amount of time allocated to them" (p. 403), and, in the wake of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) have expressed serious concern for the arts in primary education. In increasing the emphasis on literacy and numeracy in ITE, in increasing substantially the curricular allocation for both literacy and numeracy in primary schools, and in increasing the focus on national and international assessments of pupils' achievement in these domains, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) both reinforces and intensifies the existing hierarchy of subjects. As has been emphasised, within this hierarchy those subjects deemed most relevant to the economy are prioritised (Robinson, 2011), and such economic concerns are evident in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life*:

> Representatives of business, industry and enterprise pointed to the increasing demands for high levels of literacy and numeracy in all sectors of employment. They emphasised the importance of raising standards to the levels achieved in the highest

performing countries in order to continue to grow our indigenous knowledge economy and continue to attract high-value jobs. (DES, 2011, p.8)

While it is declared within the strategy that "placing a strong focus in schools on the development and monitoring of students' literacy and numeracy skills is not incompatible with a broad and balanced curriculum" (DES, 2011, p. 44), it is simultaneously acknowledged that, within education, there are many "desirable but ultimately less important activities" (DES, 2011, p. 15). Not alone is this strategy problematic for the arts in its undermining of the holistic education advocated in the *Primary School Curriculum* and its unapologetic prioritisation of literacy and numeracy over other curricular areas, but the view of literacy posited within *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) has been criticised as narrow and reductionist (McGraw Lewis, 2013; Ó Breacháin & O'Toole, 2013).

One manner in which the narrow view of literacy advocated within the policy makes itself evident is in the fact that within the document, as highlighted by Ó Breacháin and O'Toole (2013), the word "literacy" is swiftly replaced with the word "reading". Furthermore, while the *Primary School Curriculum* acknowledges literature as an art form through which the child can explore the world of the imagination, while poetry is heralded as a form of language which can provide unique and striking glimpses into the human experience, while the process of writing is declared as important as the product, in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) these artistic elements of language are not explicitly referred to even once. In fact McGraw Lewis (2013) asserts that the concepts of creative value, explorative engagement – and indeed the benefits of such actions with any type of text – are entirely absent from the strategy. He further challenges the policy for its failure to incorporate film and moving image media into a broader literacy education more compatible with the current digital climate (McGraw Lewis, 2013).

While *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011) has maintained the integrity of the six diverse subject areas encapsulated in the *Primary School Curriculum* it has both undermined significantly the artistic and creative elements of the language curriculum, and exacerbated the existing hierarchy of subjects. On the international stage there are dissenting voices that express concern at such reforms, not least of whom is Ken Robinson (2011), who cautions "A narrow unbalanced curriculum will lead to a narrow, unbalanced education" (p.27).

The Arts-in-Education Charter.

Launched in 2013 – and informed by the research and resultant report of the Special Committee on the Arts and Education – the *Arts-in-Education Charter* is a joint publication of the DAHG and the DES. While the Arts Council has for 30 years published policy and research documents pertaining to the arts, this charter is the first DES policy with an exclusive arts focus and so is singularly positioned to provide insight into both the position of the arts in primary education and the position of arts education in the knowledge society our Government has undertaken to build.

Quinn, while in the position of Minister for Education and Skills, repeatedly emphasised education as the means through which we, as a nation, would "regain our economic sovereignty" (2012). In an article written for *Studies*, Quinn declared it his intention to build a "vibrant, dynamic and creative education system" (Quinn, 2012). In that same article Quinn lauded the successful transformation of the Finish economy to one "based on information and knowledge" whereby schools place increased emphasis on "cultivating greater creativity, flexibility, initiative … among their students" (2012). These economic concerns resonate strongly in the *Arts-in-Education Charter*, and indeed its supporting press release, for foremost among those discourses which emerge as dominant is the neoliberal discourse of skills for the knowledge-economy. A mere 25 months previous to the publication

of this policy, the suggestion that drama be reverted to a teaching-methodology rather than a discrete subject in its own right exposed a political misapprehension about the significant contribution the arts make to pupils' holistic development. Further misapprehensions were exposed at the launch of the *Arts-in-Education Charter*, as Quinn veritably reduced its aims – and, it could be argued, the very role of arts education – to that of developing "creativity in our economy and our society". Although a broad perspective of the arts is advocated within the *Arts-in-Education Charter,* the benefit of arts education has been almost exclusively reduced to its capacity to foster and develop creativity:

> We believe creativity must be placed at the heart of our future as a society and a country. The arts are our first encounter with that rich world of creativity… (p. 4)
>
> Arts education makes an important contribution to … the wider goal of developing creativity in our society and economy (p. 7)
>
> The nature of the Irish economy and the paradigm shift which it experienced in recent years underscores the need for economic and social policies that are underpinned by an education system that fosters and nourishes creativity (p. 7)

Economic concerns are similarly made evident with the introduction of a Public Service Education Dividend, which will ensure demonstrable value-for-money from Government-funded artists and arts organisations by placing new obligations on those in receipt of public funds (DAHG & DES, 2013). Indeed financial concerns are made evident not alone in these new requirements to be placed upon artists receiving Government funding but also in the claim that, with regard to arts education in our schools, the DES will allocate resources to curricular and professional development only "where available" (DAHG & DES, 2013, p. 19).

The *Arts-in-Education Charter*, a joint publication of the DES and DAHG, is a policy document which presents a number of mixed messages. Indeed Wodak (2001) asserts that, as

it is rare for a text to be the sole authorship of an individual, texts ought to be perceived as "sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing … ideologies contending and struggling for dominance" (p. 11). This policy could be declared a site of such struggle, for evident in the linguistic choices of the final document are seemingly competing ideologies. These tensions are revealed in those declarative statements strongly in favour of the arts which are immediately moderated by caveats:

> …we believe in placing the arts, *alongside other subjects*, at the core of our education system… (p. 4)

> …art education will be an integral part of the junior cycle experience. Art, Craft, Design and Music will remain among the subjects *on offer* (p. 9)

> The Department of Education and Skills allocates resources to the arts … *as available resources permit* and *in line with prioritised curricular initiatives* (p. 14)

> The Minister for Education & Skills … commits to greater … *out of hours* use of school facilities to give children and young people access to arts activity (p. 16)

> ...recognise the need to allocate resources, *where available*, to curricular and professional development in relation to the arts, *in line with educational priorities*... (p.19)

Amid the economic concerns and apparent contradictions however, the proposal to introduce an Arts-Rich Schools scheme (ARIS) – which will incentivise and recognise those schools "which place the arts centrally within the life of the school community" (DAHG & DES, 2013, p. 17) – is a most welcome development. This national scheme will give expression to the Charter's commitment to embed creativity and the arts in the heart of the school. While the Charter outlines a set of criteria which might be included in the scheme, no definition of an arts-rich school is provided, nor are practical strategies for teachers outlined. Indeed, though originally scheduled to commence in 2015, there is still little official

information available on the scheme except that it will be based on endeavour and improvement within each school (Coolahan, 2014). Such omissions, however, are not unique to this policy, for in the realm of arts education "even well-meaning education and arts organisations have struggled with delineating clear guidelines for the development of quality programmes" (Bamford, 2009, p. 85).

Although this Charter signals a genuine commitment to arts education from the Irish Government, for arts advocates the commitments of this policy – though welcome advances – do not go far enough. Indeed some have described the Charter as a "working document, with potential, if re-worked" (Blaney, 2013), while others have declared it to be "an important stepping stone towards developing a coherent policy on Arts Education" (Jordan, 2013). Although the narrative of cultural crisis runs through the policy and its formative documents, this crisis evidently does not warrant as urgent or drastic a response as the economic crisis which framed the problem of national standards of literacy and numeracy (DES, 2011). While *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* increased substantially the time allocated to both language and mathematics in response to the "vital national task" of raising educational standards, the *Arts-in-Education Charter* makes no commitment to strengthening the status of the arts within schools. Instead, the DES merely commit to greater "out of hours use of schools facilities" (p. 16) in affording children the opportunity – outside the conventional curriculum – of increased access to the arts. Similarly, the linguistic tension evident throughout the policy could be perceived as undermining the commitments articulated in the Charter. The conflicting ideologies these tensions reveal were echoed in the Ministerial speeches at the Charter's launch. While Deenihan (2013) proclaimed that "giving young people access to the arts" was something he had "been keen to progress for many years", Quinn (2013) veritably reduced the aims of the Charter to that of developing "creativity in our economy and our society".

Much of the literature in the field of arts education is concerned with explorations of the arts-education partnership (eg Kenny & Morrissey, 2016). While interventions from the world of the arts into the field of education can enrich the learning experience of the child, it is primary school teachers who are at the coalface of arts provision for our nation's youth. It is primary school teachers who provide access to the only arts experiences an Irish child is guaranteed to encounter, yet the *Arts-in-Education Charter* ignores, almost completely, the role of the teacher. Indeed this utter disregard of the teacher has given rise to significant criticisms from the education sector. The need to recognise and appreciate the role of the primary school teacher as the principal driver in the development of pupils' creative and imaginative growth was highlighted by Ó Sé, Manley, Kitterick, and Hallissey (2013). Furthermore, these authors have asserted that the aims of the *Arts-in-Education Charter* will not be fully realised unless "the place of arts in education is understood and placed in the context of the broader arts education programme as outlined, particularly, in our visionary arts curriculum" (Ó Sé et al, 2013).

Primary Arts Education in Ireland: Concluding Thoughts

While it is evident that curricular developments at primary level have allowed the arts to currently enjoy a status unfathomable to generations past, it is similarly evident that we have not yet arrived at the golden age of arts provision in primary education. For while a commitment to the arts in primary education is embedded in curricular and policy documents, a number of inconsistencies emerge.

Although arts education is said to encompass "a range of activities in the visual arts, in music, in drama, in dance and in literature" (GoI, 1999a, p. 2), in the *Primary School Curriculum* only the visual arts, music, and drama are presented as arts subjects. Dance is subsumed within the physical education curriculum, while literature, poetry, and other language arts are subsumed within the English curriculum. While it could be argued that these

arts experiences are still catered for within primary education, to consider dance an element of the child's physical education rather than an element of their arts education shifts the learning focus: similarly so with the language arts, particularly when educational policy marginalises the creative and artistic elements of language. Throughout *The Arts in Schools* (2008) report the Gulbenkian Foundation asserts that music, dance, drama, visual arts, and language arts share similar processes and fulfil interrelated roles in the education of the child: a point similarly emphasised in the Irish context in the *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (GoI, 1990). Their argument that a more coherent provision for arts education could be ensured within an equal and common framework for all arts disciplines (Gulbenkian Foundation, 2008) – given the inconsistencies evident in curriculum documents – resonates strongly with Ireland's education system.

Similarly, while the *Primary School Curriculum* emphasises the development of the whole person, policy developments of the Quinn-era of education reform considerably undermine not alone this central philosophy, but the status of the arts, and indeed the capacity of the teacher to deliver a high-quality arts education. It is primary school teachers who provide access to the only arts experience an Irish child is guaranteed, yet the repeated cries for sustained professional development in this domain (Benson, 1979; DES, 2005; INTO, 2010; NCCA, 2005) have been largely ignored. It is apparent that if Irish pupils are to be provided a high-quality arts experience at primary level, we must invest in teachers.

Professional Development and Teacher Learning: The Irish Educational Landscape

In the final decade of the 20th century citizens in the developed world perceived that they were bearing witness to the birth of a social and technological revolution. As the pace of this change continued to gather momentum it came to be accepted, nationally and internationally, that knowledge could no longer be considered absolute (Sugrue, Morgan,

Devine, & Raftery, 2001). Rather, in an era characterised by rapid technological development and considerable societal change, all knowledge is tentative, provisional, and fleeting (Sugrue et al, 2001). The emergence of this shared narrative – that knowledge has a limited shelf-life – coincided with the birth of "lifelong learning", a phrase now embedded in policy documents worldwide (Sugrue et al, 2001).

Simultaneously – as advanced industrial nations transitioned toward economies based on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge and information – education was reframed as central to economic competitiveness (Grek, 2009; OECD, 1996). Across international borders and political spectra, vast investments have been – and continue to be – poured into education and educational reform, for in this global knowledge-economy the competitiveness and wealth of a nation is presented as being entirely dependent on its having a well-educated workforce (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Sugrue et al, 2001). Villiegas-Reimers (2003) has consequently emphasised that within educational reform the "double role" of teachers – being both the subjects and agents of change – has served to draw increased attention to the sprawling and challenging arena of teacher professional development (p. 7).

In short, the final decade of the 20th century brought with it an unparalleled examination of the aims of education, unprecedented scrutiny of the teaching profession, and an intensified focus on in-career learning (Coolahan, 2013). Indeed it was asserted by the OECD (1991) that the best returns from increased investment in teacher education would come from a carefully formulated nationwide induction and in-service professional development system, built upon the concept of the "teaching career". The impact of this review is evidenced in subsequent publications from both the INTO (1993) and the Government of Ireland (1995). In *The Professional Development of Teachers* (INTO, 1993), citing the unprecedented rate of societal change and the nature in which schools and society

are intertwined, the INTO stated categorically that it was naïve to consider ITE sufficient to equip teachers with the skills required to tackle all that they would encounter throughout their career. Similarly, embracing the concept of the teaching career espoused by the OECD (1991), *Charting our Education Future* (GoI, 1995) advocated the concept of the "teaching continuum", asserting that ITE could not be regarded as the final preparation for a lifetime of teaching. As such, it was declared a responsibility of the nation's teachers to participate in CPD, the central aim of which was "to equip teachers with the capacity to respond effectively to major changes in the education system, including changes in curriculum, teaching methodologies, assessment, school organisation and management, and to provide for teachers' personal and professional development needs" (GoI, 1995, p. 135). In emphasising the importance of CPD both the Government of Ireland (1995) and the INTO (1993) acknowledged that the professional development needs of the nation's teachers had increased substantially in the preceding years, and were likely to intensify into the future.

The concept of teaching as a learning profession – while neither a new nor novel idea – has gained considerable currency in recent decades. Concurrently, the narratives of lifelong learning and the knowledge-economy imperative have become intertwining threads spun into the fabric of teachers' professional learning. Indeed former Minister for Education, Noel Dempsey, declared that the "era of lifelong learning" demanded a new policy approach to teacher education, an approach which would address not alone ITE, but also induction and in-career development "as interconnected and necessary supports" (2003, p. ii). This intensified focus on teachers' professional learning, Dempsey (2003) declared, arose from "a conviction shared by ministers of education internationally that improvement in learning and teaching in a rapidly changing world hinges on quality in the teaching force" (p. ii). In the intervening years, such political attention has merely deepened. Indeed in the build up to the 2016 General Election the nation's two largest political parties – Fine Gael (2016) and Fianna Fáil

(2016) – made explicit reference to teachers' professional development in their manifestos, with Fine Gael (2016) pledging 35 million per annum to fund additional CPD, including "mandatory modules" in curricular areas deemed to be national priorities (p. 47).

Within state discourse, CPD is, at present, conceptualised as both an obligation and entitlement of the nation's primary school teachers (INTO, 2014; Teaching Council, 2016). Teachers' learning – which begins in ITE, is consolidated through the induction process, and continues throughout their career – is simultaneously a professional right and a professional responsibility which must become embedded in the routines of professional practice (INTO, 2014; Sugrue et al, 2001). These interrelated concepts – those of teachers as learners, and lifelong learning as essential in combatting the limited nature of knowledge – have become entrenched in national policy, and it was in such a context that in March 2016, the Teaching Council launched *Cosán*: the national framework for teachers' professional learning.

Cosán

While professional development activities have a lengthy tradition in the lives of Irish educators – whether Department-mandated in the wake of curricular reform or entered into voluntarily by teachers seeking to improve elements of their professional practice – they have, in recent decades, attracted considerable criticism (GoI, 1995; INTO, 1993; Sugrue et al, 2001; Sugrue, 2002; Teaching Council, 2009). Whilst acknowledging that "some very good work" was taking place in the field of teachers' CPD nationwide, the Government of Ireland (1995, p. 136) lamented both the voluntary nature of participation and the fragmented nature of provision. The INTO (1993), meanwhile, declared the paucity of incentives to teachers voluntarily participating in CPD to be a "source of considerable frustration, disillusionment and resentment" (p. 66). However even when national spending on CPD was increased, it was

cautioned that the arena was often poorly conceptualised, and suggested that its limited

impact on classroom pedagogies rendered provision inadequate (Sugrue et al, 2001).

Criticisms such as these are not unique to the Irish context but instead reflect wider

international concerns about teachers' professional development, with a number of notable

scholars suggesting that traditional models of CPD – including the model of in-service

utilised here in implementing various curricular reforms – have failed to deliver and require

re-examination and revision (Borko, 2004; Fullan, 2006; Lysaght, 2012; Smith, 2012). Indeed

Borko (2004), reflecting on the fragmented and "intellectually superficial" nature of CPD

provision, declared the professional learning opportunities available to educators to be

"woefully inadequate" (p. 3). More than a decade ago, speaking specifically about the

national context, Sugrue, Morgan, Devine, and Raftery (2001) asserted that "Teacher

Professional Development needs to be planned systematically to give current fragmentation

coherence" and further urged that CPD reform "balance personal needs and professional with

system-wide goals" (p. 12). National attention was again drawn to teachers' professional

development when Coolahan (2007) declared that sustained professional learning should be

considered "a central matter in national development planning" (p. iii). The publication of

Cosán goes some way toward answering the recurrent calls – uttered by economic

organisations, teachers' representatives, and academics alike (Coolahan, 2013; INTO, 1993;

2014; OECD, 1991; Sugrue et al, 2001) – for a coherent national framework for teachers'

professional development.

Defining professional learning.

Through *Cosán* the Teaching Council seeks to nurture a "culture of powerful

professional learning based on teachers' active engagement in their own learning, for their

benefit and that of their students" (p. 2). Within the document, the terms professional learning

and CPD are used interchangeably, and refer to teachers' lifelong learning, encompassing "the

full range of educational experiences designed to enrich teachers' professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities throughout their careers" (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 4). At the heart of *Cosán* is the depiction of teachers as autonomous professionals intrinsically motivated to engage in CPD and take ownership of their continued professional learning. Indeed so central is this concept that prior to the development of *Cosán* the Council engaged teachers in a comprehensive consultation process, inviting both their views and experiences of CPD (Teaching Council, 2016). Emerging from this consultation, and from a review of relevant literature, is a view of professional learning which acknowledges equally: both formal and informal modes of CPD; the personal and professional dimensions of teachers' learning; the importance of collaborative and individual learning opportunities; and the value of both school-based and external CPD (Teaching Council, 2016).

This broad perspective of teachers' professional learning reflects the transition in national discourse from "in-service" – a term which carries connotations of prescription and suggests that professional learning is occasional and episodic (Sugrue et al, 2001) – to "CPD" and "lifelong learning". Furthermore, it is a perspective of professional learning which embraces the range of learning processes Irish teachers reported to value (Teaching Council, 2016), and encompasses a variety of learning activities across the spectrum of CPD models identified by Kennedy (2005).

Models of CPD.

Following a review of pertinent literature in the growing field of research into teachers' professional learning, Kennedy (2005) identified nine models of CPD which she conceives as lying on a continuum from transmission to transformative. The positioning of a model on this continuum is determined by its underlying purpose: does it serve to equip teachers with the requisite skills to implement reforms or does it seek to equip teachers with the skills to contribute to, and shape, education policy and practice (Kennedy, 2005)?

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CPD which seeks to prepare teachers to implement reforms – such as the modes of professional development utilised in Ireland following the introduction of both the '71 and '99 curricula – support a transmission view of teachers' professional learning. From such a perspective, "the goal of teacher learning initiatives is to make teachers more faithful implementers of received knowledge and curriculum" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2). Kennedy (2005) has identified four models of CPD which align with this transmission agenda: the *award-bearing model*, which emphasises the completion of award-bearing programmes of study; the *deficit model*, designed to address a perceived shortfall in teacher performance; the *cascade model*, which relies upon an individual disseminating information garnered at training events to their colleagues; and *training model*, in which teachers update their skills. Traditionally, programmes of professional development offered in the national context – including the nationwide in-service provided by the DES to facilitate curriculum implementation – have been closely aligned with the "training model". Ireland, however, is not unique in this regard, for Kennedy (2005) has declared the training model to be both universally recognisable and the dominant form of CPD traditionally made available to teachers. Within this model of professional development, teachers assume a passive role as not alone is information typically "delivered" to them by an expert, but the agenda itself is determined by the facilitators (Kennedy, 2005, p. 237). While the training model is acknowledged by Kennedy (2005) to be an effective means of introducing new knowledge to members of the teaching profession, it has been critiqued for both its perpetuation of power structures within education and its failure to impact upon the manner in which this new knowledge is subsequently used in the context of practice.

Rather than prescribe specific professional development activities with which teachers must engage, *Cosán* – informed by international research literature on CPD in which teachers are both conceived of and presented as being actively involved in their own professional

learning (Lieberman, 1995; Villiegas-Reimers, 2003) – will allow teachers "to exercise autonomy in identifying, and engaging in, the types of professional learning opportunities that benefit them and their students most" (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 6). It is a declared aspiration of *Cosán* that CPD should enhance teachers' professional autonomy (Teaching Council, 2016). Consequently, throughout the document, the Council places greater emphasis on models of CPD which Kennedy (2005) identifies as transitional or transformational, particularly: the *coaching/mentoring model*, characterised by the one-one relationship between teachers at its core; the *community of practice model*, which is built upon a social theory of learning and is described as "a powerful site for the creation of new knowledge" (p. 244); and the *action research model*, which – undertaken either collaboratively or by the individual – encourages teachers to ask critical questions of their practice, and has the capacity for "transformative practice and professional autonomy" (p. 246). CPD which is transformative in nature supports teachers not in merely implementing educational reform, but in developing the capacity to critique, evaluate, and debate that reform; in enhancing their professional autonomy; and in enabling them to both contribute to and shape educational policy and practice (Kennedy, 2005).

Nationally and internationally there has been a strong emphasis on collaboration as coaching, mentoring, communities of practice, and action research have emerged as dominant features of current discourse on teachers' professional learning (INTO, 2014). Indeed the impact of collaborative professional development on teaching and learning was the focus of a review conducted by the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) Centre. Its systematic review of the relevant research literature led the authors to conclude that sustained collaborative CPD was linked with improvements to both teaching and learning: many of which could be described as "substantial" (Cordingley, Bell, Thomason & Firth, 2005, p. 61). While teachers were reported to demonstrate enhanced professional confidence; increased

self-efficacy; a greater willingness to try new things; and a heightened commitment to changing their classroom practice, the positive outcomes for children revolved predominantly around their academic performance and enhanced motivation (Cordingley et al, 2005). Crucially, however, the professional development programmes which brought about such changes were reported by the authors to take as their point of departure the expressed learning needs of teachers (Cordingley et al, 2005). In the national context, teachers have similarly highlighted that professional development must be relevant to their learning needs: *Cosán* therefore provides flexibility for teachers themselves to determine the focus of their professional learning (Teaching Council, 2016). Other key features of current discourse on CPD, including enquiry-based learning, evidence-based practice, participation in professional conversation and debate, shared practice, networking, and accreditation are also engrained in *Cosán*. Central to the Council's vision for teachers' professional development however, and underpinning each of the aforementioned modes of professional learning, is the concept of reflective practice (Teaching Council, 2016).

The teacher as a reflective practitioner.

While professional development courses traditionally offered to Irish educators have placed little to no emphasis on facilitating teachers' critical reflection upon newly acquired skills and knowledge (Smith, 2012), supporting the reflective practitioner is central to in-career learning as it is envisioned in *Cosán*. Increasingly, reflective practice is identified as an essential component of effective teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kinsella, 2007; Loughran, 2002; Smith, 2012). Although this is a concept which has gained considerable currency in the past decade – a concept of import and significance in this era of intensified focus on teacher professional development – it is a concept which originated more than a century ago.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Dewey (1904) identified the integration of teachers' professional observations into their evolving theories of teaching and learning as having the capacity to enrich classroom practice. This is an idea which has had time to germinate, to evolve, and from which subsequent views of the teacher as a reflective, deliberative professional emanated.

Taking as his point of departure a Deweyan perspective that sought to integrate thought and action, theory and practice, Schön's seminal work, *The Reflective Practitioner* (2009), challenged the dominance of "technical rationality". This prevalent view of professional knowledge reduces professional activity to "rigorously technical problem solving based on specialized scientific knowledge" (Schön, 2009, p. 22), and aspires to what Dunne (2011) terms a "practitioner-proof mode of practice" (p. 8). Schön (2009) – disillusioned with the model of technical rationality, and appreciative of the artistry and wisdom implicit in competent professional practice – emphasised the significant importance of reflective practice.

Reflective practice, Schön (1992) posited, comprises three components: *knowing-in-action*; *reflection-in-action*; and *reflective conversation with the situation*. The workday life of a practitioner is dependent on the first of these elements: their tacit knowing-in-action (Schön, 2009). This tacit knowledge is simultaneously built into and made manifest in the performance of routine daily activities: in the actions carried out instinctively, spontaneously, automatically; in the numerous judgements of quality for which a practitioner cannot articulate the precise criteria; in the familiar tasks undertaken without thought (Schön 1992; 2009). Indeed Schön (2009) contends that even when a practitioner consciously employs research-based theories and techniques they are dependent on this knowing-in-action: "on tacit recognitions, judgements, and skilful performances" (p. 50).

While it is possible that tacit knowledge can go unexamined, Schön (1992) asserts that practitioners can learn to observe, reflect on, and describe their knowing-in-action. Indeed when confronted by the unanticipated in their professional life it is the second element of reflective practice – the practitioner's reflection-in-action – that enables them to improvise, to draw from past experience, to make sense of the situation and respond smoothly through on-the-spot experimentation (Schön, 1992). Reflection-in-action, Schön (1992) asserts, "is an ephemeral episode of inquiry that arises momentarily in the midst of a flow of action and then disappears, giving way to some new event, leaving in its wake, perhaps, a more stable view of the situation" (p. 125). When a practitioner reflects-in-action they become "a researcher in the practice context", constructing new theories where established theory, technique, and technical knowledge is insufficient (Schön, 2009, p. 68). This reflection, referred to informally as "thinking on your feet", is "centrally important to the artistry of competent practitioners" (Schön, 1992, p. 125).

Conscious reflection upon that unanticipated situation, and indeed upon one's thinking about and acting on it, constitutes the third component of reflective practice: reflective conversation with the situation (Schön, 1992). Reflective conversation with the situation – a version of reflection-in-action – is a term Schön (1992) uses to describe a practitioner's conversation-like transaction with the situation at hand, particularly in moments of uncertainty. When a practitioner encounters something that unexpectedly disrupts action, they can, in conversation with the situation, transform that situation in a manner that negates the uncertainty (Schön, 1992). Akin to a conversation, the practitioner is in a situation and influenced by their understanding of it, but is simultaneously shaping it through their thoughts and actions (Schön, 1992).

Through reflective practice, a practitioner can surface and critique the tacit understandings which have developed around the repetitive experiences of professional

practice (Schön, 1992). Furthermore, by becoming a reflective practitioner one can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness experienced in their professional life, thus generating new knowledge (Schön, 1992). It is therefore unsurprising that since the publication of *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 2009) reflection continues to emerge as a recommended means of helping practitioners develop a deeper understanding of what they know and do (Loughran, 2002; Kinsella, 2007). Reflective practice – which places an emphasis on learning through questioning and investigation in the development of new understanding (Loughran, 2002) – enables a practitioner to develop their knowledge of practice as they continually examine, evaluate, and re-evaluate what they learn in practice.

Schön's (1992; 2009) advocacy of reflective practice does not discard research-based professional knowledge, rather it challenges "conflated views of its practical significance" (Kinsella, 2007, p. 102). Teachers who engage in reflective practice become, in Schön's words, "on-the-spot researchers" (1992, p. 134) capable of generating valuable professional knowledge. He has consequently urged university-based educational researchers to "join in collaborative studies aimed at helping teachers reflect on their own teaching and learning, seeking to stimulate teachers' inquiry into their own work" (Schön, 1992, p. 134).

Similarly disillusioned with the hierarchical separation of university-based educational research and research generated in the context of practice are two of today's leading scholars in the field of teacher education: Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle. Echoing the sentiments of Dewey and Schön, these authors assert that "practitioners are deliberative intellectuals who constantly theorize practice as part of practice itself" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 2). Indeed for Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993; 2009) inquiry – by which they mean learning from teaching – is integral to the activity of teaching and the basis from which decisions about professional practice are made. For these authors, the goal of teachers' professional learning is the creation of local knowledge, the examination of commonly held

assumptions, and the attentive critique of the usefulness of educational research generated by others (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Their advocacy of inquiry-as-stance and practitioner research seeks to remedy the treatment of teachers, and their work, as the subjects of study in educational research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; 2009). They argue that the exclusion of practitioner-generated knowledge has had a number of ramifications, including teachers' ambivalence toward academic research and a dearth of information about classroom life from an emic perspective (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Not alone can practitioner research contribute to the knowledge base in education, but Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) emphasise that research by teachers about their own classroom practice "can function as a powerful means of professional development" (p. 85). This is a stance replicated in *Cosán* with the advocacy of practitioner research – undertaken individually or collaboratively – as a valuable form of professional learning. Similarly, their suggestion that the wider involvement of practitioners could be encouraged with the cultivation of communities that support teacher research – whereby teachers might come together to discuss their work, learn from one another, exchange ideas, and reflect on their teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) – are echoed in *Cosán*'s emphasis on professional collaboration and the advancement of professional learning communities (PLCs).

Professional learning communities.

In recent decades the intensified focus on teachers' professional learning, and the critique of its failure to bring about sustained changes to classroom practice, has coincided with a heightened interest in the potential of PLCs. This increased interest has arisen, in part, from research literature which suggests that collaborative professional development – such as that which occurs within a PLC – can be more effective than individually undertaken CPD (Bolam & Weindling, 2006; Cordingley et al, 2005). In the developing field of PLC literature there exists no common definition of a professional learning community, however there does

exist broad consensus that it consists of a group of professionals who – in seeking to enhance their effectiveness as professionals – share and critically reflect upon their professional practice in a sustained, inclusive, collaborative, learning-oriented manner (Stoll, Bolan, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006). While traditional CPD efforts have been characterised as episodic and removed from the context of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Kennedy, 2005; Sugrue et al, 2001), teachers' professional learning within a PLC is related to their specific context of practice, is sustained over a period of time, and involves their active participation (Thompson & Wiliam, 2007): factors which Bolam and Weindling (2006) have emphasised as underpinning effective CPD. Consequently, Thompson and Wiliam (2007) have asserted that PLCs "embody critical process elements needed for professional development to result in actual changes in teacher practice" (p. 15). They are not alone in this assertion, for recurrent throughout the literature is the conviction that PLCs "hold real promise for improving the learning of both students and educators, and for encouraging continued innovation and improvement" (Kaagan & Headley, 2010, p. xiii).

The characteristics of a professional learning community.

While the scholarship of PLCs is vast and varied, there does appear to be some consensus around the key components of an effective PLC. However perhaps the clearest delineation of these components is offered by Kruse, Seashore Louis, and Bryk (1994) who identify five critical elements which constitute the foundation of effective PLCs: reflective dialogue; the de-privatisation of practice; a collective focus on pupils' learning; collaboration; and shared norms and values.

Within an effective PLC, members have the opportunity to speak about their unique situation and the specific challenges which confront them (Kruse et al, 1995). For Kaagan and Headley (2010), this dialogue constitutes both "the backbone and the lifeblood" of professional learning communities (p. 4). When members exchange classroom stories, seek

advice, share ideas, and trade opinions about issues in their specific context, and indeed the larger educational arena, they "create and sustain the interpersonal relationships necessary for the larger project of the joint construction of knowledge" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 94). Furthermore, these discussions provide members with the opportunity to critique themselves, their professional practice, and the institution in which they work (Kruse et al, 1994). According to Kruse, Seashore Louis, and Bryk (1994) such reflective critique can venture down a number of avenues: members "can focus on subject matter and how to present it to students, … on generic teaching strategies, on student learning and development, on the social conditions of schooling, and issues of equity and justice" (p. 160). Feiman-Nemser (2001), however, is careful to draw a distinction between the generic teacher small-talk prevalent in staffrooms worldwide and reflective professional dialogue, asserting that "professional discourse involves rich descriptions of practice, attention to evidence, examination of alternative interpretations and possibilities" (p. 1043). Interwoven in the fabric of such reflective, professional conversation is the de-privatisation of practice.

Sharing professional knowledge has been identified by Bolam and Weindling (2006) as a key feature of an effective PLC. When PLC members share practice publicly – when they discuss one another's teaching methods and philosophies – not alone do they learn new ways in which they can discuss what they do (Kruse et al, 1994), but the inherent isolation of teaching as a profession is somewhat tempered. Indeed Cochran-Smith (2012) has defined the de-privatisation of practice as, simply, "the interruption of teaching as a private act" (p. 112). This de-privatisation of practice was central to Thompson and Wiliam's (2007) sustained teacher professional development program, *Keeping Learning on Track*, which sought to build teachers' capacity to embed formative assessment in their classroom practice. The following vignette captures the crucial role played by both reflective dialogue and the de-privatisation of practice in their learning communities:

…teachers can hear real-life stories from colleagues that show the benefits of adopting these techniques in situations similar to their own. These stories provide "existence proofs" that these kinds of changes are feasible with the exact kinds of students that a teacher has in his or her classroom… Without that kind of local reassurance, there is little chance teachers will risk upsetting the prevailing "classroom contract"… As teachers adjust their practice, they are risking both disorder and less-than-accomplished performance on the part of their students and themselves. Being a member of a community of teacher-learners engaged together in a change process provides support that teachers need to take such risks. (p. 19)

Similarly highlighted in this extract is the third component identified as underpinning effective PLCs: a focus on pupils' learning (Kruse et al, 1994). This belief is reiterated throughout the literature, with scholars emphasising that the central purpose of learning communities is enhancing teacher effectiveness with the ultimate intention of improving pupils' learning (DuFour, 2004; Kaagan & Headley, 2010; Kruse et al, 1994; Stoll et al, 2006). Within a strong PLC the focus on pupils' learning is not externally imposed upon members, but is rather "a mutually felt obligation" (Kruse et al, 1994, p. 160).

An effective PLC also fosters a spirit of collaboration among its members (DuFour, 2004; Kruse et al, 1994; Stoll et al, 2006). Teachers within a PLC are encouraged to work together, not alone so that they might develop shared understandings of classroom practice, but in the production of materials and activities that might improve instruction, curriculum, and assessment for their pupils (Kruse et al, 1994). As Newmann and Wehlage (1995) phrased it, "When teachers collaborate productively, they participate in reflective dialogue to learn more about professional issues; they observe and react to one another's teaching, curriculum, and assessment practices... By enriching teachers' technical and social resources, collaboration can make teaching more effective" (p. 31). Indeed in emphasising the appeal of

PLCs as a vehicle for teachers' professional development, Smith (2010) highlights that collaboration such as this is seldom realised in the forms of CPD traditionally offered to Irish teachers. Furthermore, the establishment of a collaborative community of learners can create a non-threatening venue in which teachers are allowed to notice and acknowledge their weaknesses and can seek assistance from peers (Thompson & Wiliam, 2007). Literature in the field of PLC scholarship has linked collaborative professional activity such as that described here to the achievement of shared purpose within a learning community (Stoll et al, 2006).

The final element of effective PLCs identified by Kruse and her colleagues (1994) is the presence of shared norms and values among participating teachers. In fact the central importance of shared values, vision, and sense of purpose has been reaffirmed in the literature (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; DuFour, 2004; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Stoll et al, 2006) as, through collective reinforcement, the success of participating teachers might be maximised (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Professional learning communities: a note of caution.

It has been asserted that effective PLCs have the potential to foster lasting collaborative cultures (Fullan, 2006) and "provide support for the sustained, reflective practice that marks the learning of experts" (Thompson & Wiliam, 2007, p. 17). It is therefore unsurprising that they are being pursued as a mechanism for teachers' professional development (DuFour, 2007; Fullan, 2006). Fullan (2006) however, though an advocate of PLCs, has expressed a number of concerns regarding their proliferation.

Lamenting the fact that the term travels faster than the concept – a concern shared by DuFour (2007) – Fullan (2006) highlights the potential for the development of "superficial PLCs" which neither enable deep learning nor recognise its absence. He similarly cautions that the widespread treatment of PLCs as the "latest innovation" in education indicates that

learning communities can be summarily discarded when subsequent innovations inevitably arise (Fullan, 2006). Furthermore, this perception of PLCs as yet another innovation to be implemented has the potential to eclipse their deeper, more enduring objective of establishing collaborative cultures (Fullan, 2006). Collaborative cultures, Fullan (2006) declares, "focus on building the capacity for continuous improvement and are intended to be a new way of working and learning. They are meant to be enduring capacities, not just another program innovation" (p. 10).

Fullan's (2006) concerns – though raised over a decade ago – are legitimised in the Irish context with the publication of *Cosán*, for although this national framework for teachers' professional development seeks to promote the advancement of PLCs, neither their theoretical base nor the practicalities of their creation and development are elucidated. Establishing an effective community of teacher-learners – a PLC underpinned by reflective dialogue, the de-privatisation of practice, a collective focus on pupils' learning, collaboration, and shared norms and values (Kruse et al, 1994) – is no doubt a challenging process, however Stoll and her colleagues (2006) declare it to be "worth the considerable effort put in to creating and developing them" (p. 247).

Professional Learning in the Arts

While *Cosán* presents a flexible framework for teachers' professional learning – facilitating individual learning priorities with regard to both the content and mode of CPD a teacher wishes to engage in – it is a document which simultaneously endorses the existing hierarchy of subjects in identifying literacy and numeracy as one of the six "learning areas" into which CPD is categorised. This, of course, is done "in keeping with national priorities" (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 18). Similarly, the "mandatory modules" of professional development devised by Fine Gael (2016) propose to address the curricular areas of numeracy and Gaeilge, as well as special educational needs and the use of digital technologies.

Although it is unsurprising, given the continued dismissal of lingering cries for sustained professional development in the arts disciplines (Benson, 1979; DES, 2005; INTO, 2010; NCCA, 2005), it is disappointing that arts education is considered a priority by neither political parties nor the professional standards body for teaching in Ireland.

For the majority of Irish educators, the completion of ITE terminates their engagement with professional education in the arts disciplines. Indeed for all Irish educators, the completion of ITE terminates their mandatory engagement with professional education in the arts disciplines. Since the foundation of the state, the only financed professional development delivered to all of the nation's primary school teachers which focused on the arts disciplines was that provided in the wake of curricular reform. This professional development took the form of one-off workshops and short modular courses: an approach which the literature suggests doesn't always translate into pedagogical change (MacNeil, 2004; Smith, 2010), which both the NCCA (2005) and Inspectorate (2005) indicate did not result in wholly successful curriculum implementation, and which Irish teachers maintain was insufficient (INTO, 2010). Teachers who participated in the INTO's *Consultative Conference on Education* (2009) reiterated repeated requests for ongoing professional development in the arts for the nation's primary school teachers, and among their suggestions for CPD was the development of professional learning communities (INTO, 2010).

While by no means widespread, the concept of utilising a PLC to enhance teaching and learning in the arts is not new. The aforementioned *AAA* programme – which sought to increase the incorporation of drama, music, the visual arts, and other art forms into the core curriculum as a means of increasing overall academic achievement – utilised PLCs in supporting teachers' professional development (Seashore, Anderson & Riedel, 2003). Within the context of *AAA* use of the term "professional learning community" was, according to the authors, very deliberate:

By using the term *professional learning community* we signify our interest not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes. (Seashore et al, 2003, p. 3)

While a variety of professional development models were employed throughout the programme, the authors report that the most powerful professional learning happened in those collaborative learning communities comprised of teachers and arts specialists (Ingram & Seashore, 2003). Furthermore, analysis of data generated throughout the study suggests that teachers' involvement in a PLC did indeed play a role in embedding the arts more centrally in the curriculum and in changing classroom practice, however it is cautioned that "its effects are less than those suggested by some previous studies" (Seashore et al, 2003, p. 12).

While developing practitioner capacity in the arts is neither conceived of nor presented as a national priority, each year teachers across the country elect to participate in unfunded CPD programmes focused on the arts disciplines. These are teachers dedicated to improving their professional practice, to enhancing their repertoire of lesson ideas, and to high-quality arts provision for primary school pupils. There is no doubt but that there are some wonderful things happening in the field of arts education in Irish classrooms: were teachers provided with the opportunity to discuss their teaching, enabled to critically examine and reflect upon their practice in a supportive environment, energised to experiment with new approaches and "risk upsetting the prevailing classroom contract" (Thompson & Wiliam, 2007), then perhaps these wonderful things could become more widespread. Within the Irish context, whereby the "professional insulation and isolation" of teachers is commonplace (Hogan, Brosnan, de Róiste, MacAlister, Malone, Quirke-Bolt, & Smith, 2007, p. 34), the development of PLCs could prove a powerful vehicle for enhancing teaching and learning in the arts.

Chapter Summary

Through its discussion of the arts and their invaluable contribution to the individual, to education, and to society, through its historical overview of primary arts education in Ireland, and through its examination of recent developments in the field of teachers' professional learning, this review of the literature has sought to ground the current study in substantive theory.

Not alone has the literature documented incontrovertible benefits of high-quality arts provision, but it has, frustratingly, highlighted in the national context a near-persistent apathy towards enhancing teachers' capacities to deliver such provision. Frustration with educational policy, with top-down initiatives, and with the hierarchy of subjects is found amongst educators worldwide, and is perhaps best captured and characterised by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) who note:

> Many educators still believe that deep and significant changes in practice can only be brought about by those closest to the day-to-day work of teaching and learning. And across myriad contexts, practitioner research initiatives are proliferating, often "pushing back" against constraining policies and mandated practices and opening up spaces for practitioners to articulate and enact deep beliefs about the fundamental purposes of education. (p. 6)

Consequently, in seeking to address the near-complete dismissal of teachers from the only recent arts policy in the field of education, in seeking to respond to teachers' repeated requests for CPD in this domain, and inspired by a suggestion offered by teachers themselves, this study sought to generate knowledge of practice through practice, and map a potential future trajectory for the arts in primary education. This was research that was influenced, informed, and inspired to action by the proposal to introduce ARIS, by both historical and recent policy developments pertaining to the arts in Irish education, by Cochran-Smith and

Lytle's (1993; 2009) advocacy of practitioner research, and by the reported capacity of PLCs to empower teachers in transforming their pedagogical practice. Within an action research model of professional development, a small PLC was established whereby teachers were encouraged to approach practice systematically and apply critical analysis and reflection to the results of their practice efforts. A complete exposition of the methodology will be provided in the subsequent chapter.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Zora Neale Hurston, American anthropologist, novelist, and folklorist, once wrote that "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose" (1991, p. 43). While research may be described simply as the search for answers to questions, Gibaldi (1995) has likened research to an adventure: an intellectual exploration akin to solving a mystery. To conduct a piece of research is to embark upon an academic journey – from that initial curiosity about an aspect of the educational world, to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data – all of which seeks to provide academics and practitioners alike with valid, useful information (Open University, 2001).

Cognisant of such considerations, and conceived in response to current educational policy, this research sought to speak to the problem – observed in systems of public education worldwide – of the marginalisation of the arts. However, this is a piece of research which is situated at the confluence of three distinct but related issues in primary education: the aforementioned peripheral status of the arts; the dearth of sustained professional development opportunities offered to Irish teachers in this curricular domain; and their exclusion from the only DES-issued policy with an exclusive arts focus. The aspiration that schools will be formally acknowledged for placing the arts centrally in education is beautiful in policy, but what will it look like in practice? In the translation from policy to practice – in realising successful educational change – teachers play a critical role (van der Heijden, Geldens, Beijaard, & Popeijus, 2015). Consequently, this research sought to work with primary school teachers to explore the potential for arts-rich education, and to empower the transformation of pedagogical practice, in the primary classroom. Through an investigation of those factors which promote or militate against effective arts provision and arts-infusion in Irish primary

classrooms, it was the aim of this research to map teaching in and through the arts in a manner which would enable teachers and researchers to see that terrain more clearly, and to offer a range of pragmatic visions and potential trajectories – grounded in real classrooms within the real opportunities and limits of primary education – for the future of arts education.

Presented in this chapter is a comprehensive discussion of the research undertaken: an articulation of the conceptual framework which supported and informed the research; the overarching questions which gave impetus to the study; a rationale for addressing these questions with action research; a description of the methods of data collection; ethical considerations; and the overall trustworthiness of the study.

Construction of a Conceptual Framework

If conducting a piece of research can be considered analogous to embarking upon a journey, then the conceptual framework underpinning it is best conceived of as the map which guides navigation (Dewey, 1938). This framework – described by Maxwell (2005) as "the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs the research" (p. 33) – provides a skeletal structure of justification whereby the theories adopted by the researcher serve as guides directing the collection, analysis, and explanation of data (Eisenhart, 1991).

The conceptual framework presented in this discussion was constructed from the researcher's experiential knowledge, existing theory and research in the fields of arts education and professional learning, and a review of Irish education policy (Figure 3). Throughout the following exposition, attention is drawn to the contextual issues from which the research topic emerged, the underlying theories and guiding concepts derived from the literature review, the paradigmatic stance of the research, and the questions driving the study.

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

CONSTRUCTING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Experiential Knowledge
This is a study born from my experiences as an educator. The problems of both the marginalisation and devaluing of the arts first became apparent to me in the context of practice. This study is therefore anchored in teaching and learning as it occurs in real Irish classrooms.

Arts Education Literature
Peripheral status of the arts (Bamford, 2009; Robinson, 1999; 2011; 2015; Winner et al, 2013)

Impact of arts education (Bamford, 2009; Catterall, 2009; Eisner, 2002; Hetland et al, 2013; Winner et al, 2013)

Arts-rich education (Brustein, 2016; Catterall, 2009; McCarthy et al, 2004; Seashore et al, 2003; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005)

Irish Educational Policy
Curricular reform and implementation (1900 - 1999)

Literacy & Numeracy... (2011)

Arts-in-Education Charter (2013)

CPD Literature
Cosán (2016)

Reflective practice and teacher-generated knowledge (Cochran-smith & Lytle, 1993; 2009; Schön, 1992; 2009)

Collaborative CPD and PLCs (Cordingley et al, 2005; Fullan, 2006; Kruse et al, 1994; Stoll et al, 2006; Thompson & Wiliam, 2007)
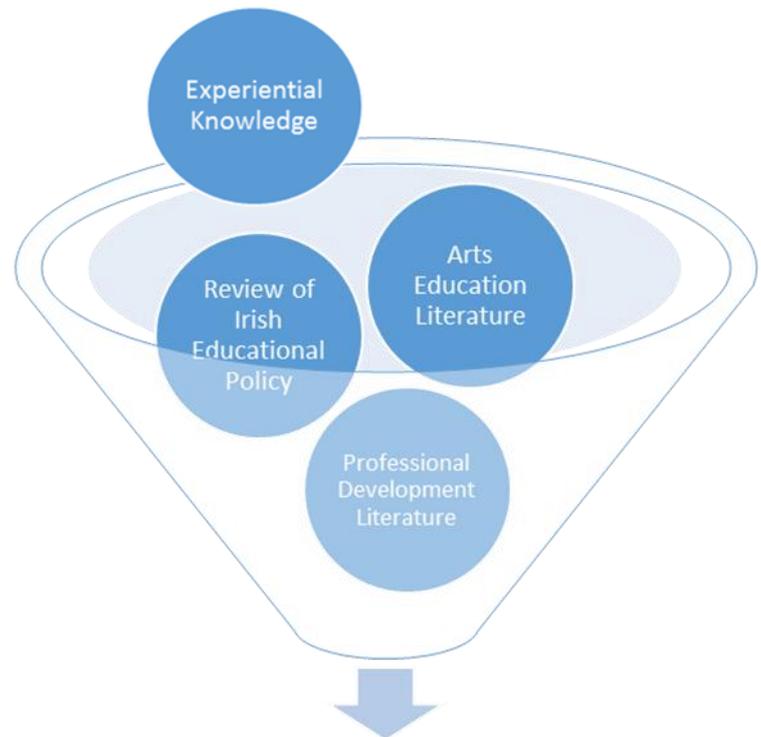
Experiential Knowledge

Review of Irish Educational Policy

Arts Education Literature

Professional Development Literature

How might primary school teachers be empowered to create an arts-rich classroom, and what are the characteristics of such a learning environment?

Critical Educational Research

Research with a practical intent (Cohen et al, 2011), which seeks not alone to understand an aspect of the educational world, but to critique and transform it (Cohen et al, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1998)

Action Research

Experiential Knowledge of the Researcher

While traditionally regarded as something to be eliminated from academic research, the explicit incorporation of a researcher's identity and experience into their study has gained widespread theoretical and philosophical support (Maxwell, 2005). To conceive of one's background as a "bias" to be eradicated from their study – to separate one's research from the aspects of their life which initially prompted interest therein – is to isolate that research from a significant source of insight, understanding, and validity checks (Maxwell, 2005). Indeed Maxwell (2005) suggests that a researcher's experiential knowledge is a valuable source with which to scaffold the conceptual framework. It is with cognisance of such perspectives that I offer a brief synopsis of my interest in the arts.

As a child what amazed me utterly were the entire worlds that had been created from the imagination of others: that Middle Earth – its geography, diversity of languages, and plethora of creatures – was the invention of Tolkien; that Narnia sprung from the imagination of Lewis; Wonderland from the musings of Carroll; and Hogwarts from ingenuity of Rowling is something that amazes me still. While memories of my own primary education are now somewhat hazy, I have a distinct recollection of writing and illustrating what I then believed to be a wonderful adventure mystery – a rival to those of Enid Blyton – entitled *Our Three Week Vacation*. In my enthusiasm I evidently overlooked the Americanism in the title, however it is to this enthusiasm I refer because it is something I have witnessed throughout my teaching career. I speak now of those pupils with a voracious appetite for literature, pupils who come alive in drama, pupils who thrive on the creative elements of the curriculum, the pupil whose highlight of the academic year is their solo performance in the school concert, pupils whose experiences and imaginings are given expression in the visual, musical, dramatic, and language arts: to these pupils, indeed to all pupils, the arts matter.

While some of the most publicly revered figures in the 21st century are actors, musicians, and writers, in education the arts disciplines remain very much on the periphery of education. I have met parents who disregard their child's learning in the arts as trivial, parents more interested in the results of their child's standardised tests than in their ability to craft an engaging narrative, I have encountered children who considered themselves "stupid" because they judged themselves against one narrow measure of ability, and I have met teachers desperate to change the system – its unapologetic prioritisation of some intelligences over others – in pursuit of a truly holistic education for their pupils. It was from such teachers that this research emerged, and to such teachers that this research speaks.

Theories Emergent in the Literature Review

In constructing the conceptual framework for a study, existing theory and research constitute an essential building block (Maxwell, 2005; Hatch, 2002). Indeed Hatch (2002) asserts that when undertaking a piece of research "it is necessary for researchers of any ilk to provide a conceptual frame of reference that includes an exposition of substantive theory" (p. 39). Such an exposition is crucial for it provides a frame of reference for the research, situating it firmly in relation to theory which has already been generated in the field (Hatch, 2002). While the literature review presented in Chapter Two offered a solid foundation in the substantive and theoretical literature related to this research, what follows is a brief delineation of those theories and concepts formative in the development of the conceptual framework for this study.

Arts education literature.

Throughout *The Arts in Schools* report (Gulbenkian Foundation, 2008) arguments for the inclusion of arts education in national curricula are presented on the following grounds: the child's aesthetic development; cultural development; creative exploration and growth; and the promotion of a richer understanding of intelligence. These arguments are echoed and

affirmed in the literature, with research indicating the positive impact of high-quality arts education on: pupils' cognitive development (Eisner, 2002; Hetland et al, 2013); pupils' academic achievement (Catterall, 2009; Ewing, 2013; Ingram & Seashore, 2003); pupil, parent, and community perceptions of the school (Bamford & Wimmer, 2012); the social climate of the school (Bamford & Wimmer, 2012; Ingram & Seashore, 2003; Fiske, 1999); the development of pupils' social and cultural understanding (Bamford, 2009); and pupils' attitudes toward school (Bamford, 2009).

While the social, cultural, aesthetic, and economic benefits of high-quality arts education have been well-documented, the arts disciplines occupy only a peripheral position in education. This marginalisation of arts education is problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which is that the education system itself becomes unwittingly complicit in cultural exclusion (Barnard, 2010). Indeed Looney cautions that when we allow arts experiences be pushed to the fringes of the child's education we ensure that they become a pursuit almost exclusive to the elite (Barnard, 2010). The legitimacy of her concerns has been made evident in Smyth's (2016) recent analysis of GUI data, which revealed that among the nation's children, participation in cultural activities varies considerably between those of high and low socioeconomic status.

Although the *Arts-in-Education Charter* signals a real commitment to the position of the arts in primary education, it has been critiqued by many as "vague" and "aspirational" (Halpin, 2013; Jordan, 2013). Indeed one noteworthy criticism which emerged from the education sector was the manner in which the policy utterly discounted the role of the teacher (Ó Sé et al, 2013). Not alone has the significant importance of the teacher as mediator of the child's arts experiences been emphasised in the national context (Barnard, 2010), but Bamford (2009) has emphasised the need "for more training for key providers at the coalface of the delivery-chain" (p. 11). When surveyed about their views and practices regarding the

arts in primary education, teachers stressed the need for sustained professional development (INTO, 2010): not alone has this dearth of CPD not been addressed, but the need to profile good teaching in the arts in an Irish context has since been noted (Barnard, 2010). Conscious of the intrinsic benefits of high-quality arts education, it was from these concerns that this research arose.

Professional learning literature.

There has arisen broad consensus in the field of education – among practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers – that teachers are "critical to the success of all efforts to improve education" and therefore the key to effective educational reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p, 1). This recognition of teachers as "the linchpin of educational reform" has resulted in an increased emphasis upon teachers' professional learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 1).

Though conceived more than a century ago, Dewey's (1904) emphasis on the integration of teachers' professional observations into their evolving theories of teaching and learning – a precursor to Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner (1983) – resonates profoundly with contemporary views of teachers' professional learning, and with the academic advocacy of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; 1999; 2009). In the Irish context not alone has the publication of *Cosán* emphasised reflective practice and acknowledged the value of practitioner-generated knowledge, but it was recently declared by the NCCA's Sarah FitzPatrick that "learning from classroom experiences and experimentation has become key to the curriculum development and improvement process" (FitzPatrick & Walshe, 2015, p. 290).

Learning from classroom experience, however, is not a linear process. Nor is it something that practitioners must do in isolation. Rather, teachers' professional learning is most effective "when they generate local knowledge of practice by working within the

contexts of inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). Central to this concept of professional development is the role of serious, sustained professional conversation (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Feiman-Nemser (2001) asserts that "by engaging in professional discourse with like-minded colleagues grounded in the content and tasks of teaching and learning, teachers can deepen their knowledge of subject matter and curriculum, refine their instructional repertoire, hone their inquiry skills and become critical colleagues" (p. 1042).

Robinson (2013) has declared teaching to be an art – a profession with an inherently creative dimension – and in this era of technical rationality, intensified accountability, and increased standardisation, his message to educators is one of empowerment: teachers have some freedom to innovate and should not hesitate in doing so. While recent Irish education policy has focused more on the amplification of teacher accountabilities than on the development of teacher expertise, creativity, and innovation (Conway & Murphy, 2013), this research sought to collaborate with a community of teachers to find a more promising approach to the development of professional knowledge and practice in arts education.

Paradigmatic Stance of the Research

In elucidating the conceptual framework underpinning an investigation, Maxwell (2005) urges that the researcher make explicit the paradigm – defined as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 195) – within which the research is situated. These paradigms – lenses through which we interpret the world and our place therein – are human constructions, none of which can be "incontrovertibly right" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 202). Adopting a clear paradigmatic stance, however, smooths the investigator's navigation through the research, informing decisions pertaining to design and methodology (Cresswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2005). Situating oneself within a

paradigm is not, Maxwell (2005) cautions, simply a matter of random selection: when embarking upon an investigation, a researcher has already made numerous assumptions about the world, the topic they propose to investigate, how it might be investigated, and how new knowledge might be constructed. Heedful of such concerns, the subsequent articulation of the researcher's paradigmatic stance is presented.

Critical educational research – a paradigm described by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) as "an emerging approach to educational research" – seeks not alone to understand an aspect of the educational world, but to critique and transform it (Cohen et al, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). It is a paradigm within which the values of the researcher are formative (Guba & Lincoln, 1998), research becomes "a transformative endeavour" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 264), and advocacy is a key concept (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). While "traditional researchers cling to the guard rail of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 264). As an arts advocate, as an educator who believes fervently in the value of the arts disciplines, this is a paradigm which resonated strongly with the observations and concerns which gave impetus to this study.

Those situated in the paradigm of critical educational research espouse an ontological stance termed by Guba and Lincoln (1998) as *historical realism*. This ontology holds that the world in which we live – our reality – has been shaped by a collection of social, political, cultural, and economic factors (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). The material world is therefore constructed from historically situated structures, accepted and perceived as natural and immutable, that have a real impact on the lives and life chances of individuals (Hatch, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Within such a worldview, knowledge is in turn "subjective and inherently political" (Hatch, 2002, p. 16). Such an epistemological position regards all knowledge as being *value mediated* (Hatch, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1998): the researcher and

that they are researching "are assumed to be interactively linked, with the values of the investigator inevitably influencing the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206). Within the paradigm of critical educational research, the philosophies and values of the researcher "are seen as integral rather than antithetical to the research process" (Hatch, 2002, p. 17).

Research embarked upon from a critical perspective is research with a practical intent (Cohen et al, 2011): research which provides a stimulus to action (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Positioned firmly within the paradigm of critical educational research, and arising from a critique of primary education in Ireland – its mercantile transformation (O' Sullivan, 2009) and GERM-oriented policy (Conway & Murphy, 2013) – this research is best conceived of as a bottom-up change effort which sought to empower practitioners to embed the arts in classroom practice and to present a range of possibilities for the future of arts education in primary schools.

Questions Guiding the Research

Within the domain of primary arts education, this research sought to work within a community of practitioners to address the following overarching question:

- How might primary school teachers be empowered to create an arts-rich classroom, and what are the characteristics of such a learning environment?

Arising from this central guiding question were the following subquestions:

- Does sustained collaborative professional development, focused on enhancing both professional knowledge and practice in the arts, have an impact on teaching and learning?

- (If so) How is this impact manifested in practice?

- What does teaching look like in an arts-rich classroom?

- What does learning look like in an arts-rich classroom?

- What arts-infusion strategies can be used to enrich other areas of the curriculum?

- What can teachers' experiences within a PLC contribute to our understanding of arts-rich education?

The Research Design

The educational world is rich and complex, it is multifaceted and "not easily susceptible to the atomization process inherent in much numerical research" (Cohen et al, 2011, p.219). When there is an issue in the educational world that needs to be explored; when a complex, detailed understanding of that issue is sought; when we seek to understand the contexts within which that issue is addressed; when we aim to empower individuals to share their stories; when we seek to hear marginalised voices, a qualitative approach to research is more appropriate (Cresswell, 2013). While there exist many definitions of qualitative research across the expansive landscape of qualitative inquiry, that forwarded by Denzin and Lincoln (2011) affirms the impact of such research: "Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world" (p. 3).

To address the aims of the proposed research, the inclination toward qualitative methodology was predicated on the need to establish a rich, descriptive knowledge-base about arts-rich education as it is played out within the real opportunities and limits of Irish schools. In seeking to answer the questions which guided the research, in seeking to illuminate the field of primary arts education – and teachers' professional learning therein – in all its complexities, a collaborative action research study was designed. This study sought to vocalise the lived-experiences of teachers in a PLC seeking to provide an arts-rich education for their pupils.

Rationale for the use of Action Research

While the landscape of educational research continues to sprawl exponentially, an enduring criticism is the perceived failure of research to impact upon or improve practice on the ground (eg Cohen et al, 2011). Indeed West (2011) asserts that this "divide between research and practice has posed a problem for education since the 1930s" (p. 93). Atweh and Heirdsfield (2003) argue that teachers often perceive the questions driving educational research as irrelevant to their professional needs and concerns, and assert that the findings of such research endeavours are often inaccessible to teachers. They argue that the interests of teachers are served when they themselves become active in the research process (Atweh & Heirdsfield, 2003). Not alone does this involvement ensure that educational research is of greater relevance to practice on the ground – contributing to both professional practice and to a theory of education accessible to other teachers – but it demystifies research for practitioners (Atweh & Heirdsfield, 2003; Cohen et al, 2011). "This fusion of knowledge generation and application, of action and reflection, of theory and practice, lies at the heart of action research… Through action research, teachers become active participants in the generation of their own knowledge about teaching" (Atweh & Heirdsfield, 2003, p. 58).

Described as "a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level" (Cohen et al, 2011, p. 344), action research has a rich tradition in the field of education (Hatch, 2002). In deconstructing the term, McNiff and Whitehead (2009) assert that action research is undertaken for two principal purposes: to contribute to new practices in education and to contribute to educational theory. While the former constitutes the action focus of the study, the latter comprises its research focus (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Undertaken with the explicit intention of investigating educational practice and improving that practice through professional reflection and learning, action research focuses on issues which are problematic yet within our power to address (Hatch, 2002; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Within the field

of arts education, West (2011) argues that "systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers could offer rich information about real-life issues facing today's arts programs and deserves the attention of stakeholders in higher education" (p. 93). In seeking to explore the terrain of arts education in Ireland, in seeking to work collaboratively with practitioners to investigate the potential for arts-rich education in primary schools, action research was the most apt approach.

For Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) action research can be used as a means of "powerful professional development" for it is, at its best, a collaborative social process of learning (p. 22). It is an approach to research which offers an opportunity to create a forum in which practitioners can work collaboratively to conduct research in their classrooms with the intent of informing and improving their practice (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Emphasising action research as a collaborative process, Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) argue that the spiral of self-reflection central to action research (Figure 4) – combining the systematic diagnosis, action, and reflection upon a problem in education – is best undertaken collaboratively by co-participants in the research process.
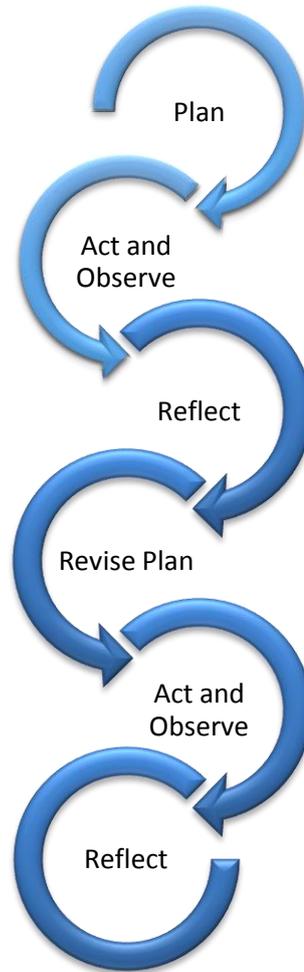
Figure 4. The self-reflective spiral (Adapted from Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998)

Action research seeks to improve education by changing it, and reflecting upon that change – its processes and consequences – within a cyclical framework (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998).While this spiral of self-reflection has become the dominant feature of action research in its many incarnations, Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) highlight additional key features which they deem equally important:

- it is a *social process* which explores the relationship between the realms of the individual and the social, how people are formed and re-formed as individuals and in relation to one another, as occurs when teachers work together to improve teaching and learning in their own classrooms;

- as people are actively engaged in examining their knowledge, understandings, skills, and values, action research is *participatory*;

- in engaging people in the examination of their practice – the practice which links them with others – action research is both *practical and collaborative*;

- action research is *critical*: it problematises established assumptions, approaches, routines, and conventions which underlie and inform practice, presenting alternatives to the traditional ways of acting and knowing;

- and in empowering participants to take control of the process of improving their own professional practice, and their knowledge of practice, it is *emancipatory*. (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998; Atweh & Heirdsfield, 2003)

Working within a PLC for a period of 10 months, participants in this action research study were active in shaping the process of change: determining both the focus of community meetings and the specific actions to be undertaken in their individual context. At the heart of this learning community was a collective self-reflection, which enabled innovation, practical improvement, and a greater understanding of participants' own pedagogical practice. Therefore, not alone was this a model of professional development which embodied factors identified in the research literature as being central to effective CPD – namely involving teachers in the identification of learning needs; incorporating active experimentation in the context of practice; providing opportunities for practice, research, and reflection; and supporting structured professional dialogue (Bolam & Weindling, 2006; Cordingley et al, 2005) – but this was a model of professional development entirely consistent with the Teaching Council's vision for teachers' in-career learning as it is conceptualised and presented in *Cosán*.

Participants

In qualitative inquiry, non-probability, purposeful samples that can provide information-rich cases for study are typically selected by the researcher (Cresswell, 2013). The extent to which these participants are representative of the wider population is irrelevant, for qualitative research seeks only to explore the particular group under study (Cohen et al, 2011). However, one consequence of qualitative researchers' propensity toward purposeful sampling is that there are no clear rules on the size of the sample in qualitative inquiry, rather this is determined by "fitness for purpose" (Cohen et al, 2011). In the field of action research however, Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) advise that researchers work with a small group.

Cognisant of such considerations, the five participants involved in this action research study were recruited through a DES-approved CPD summer course, provided by the researcher, entitled *Creating an Arts-Rich Learning Environment*. This course, which was limited to 15 places, was advertised through Drumcondra Education Centre and open to all interested teachers. Places were allocated on a first-come, first-served basis and filled within a week. Of those to successfully secure a place, 14 were female while only one was male.

As participation in this research required a considerable time-commitment from participants it was deemed unsuitable for teachers undergoing their probation year. Similarly, due to the nature of the research, only mainstream teachers could participate. These requirements excluded a significant number of course participants, so an invitation to participate in the research was issued not alone to the teachers in attendance, but to those who had expressed interest in the course but were unable to attend. These teachers were included as, through their inquiries, they demonstrated the same interest in both arts education and their own professional development as those in attendance: consequently, the PLC which was formed comprised five female members, two of whom had attended the summer course and three who had not.

These five participants, each working in different schools with a different class level, joined the study in the belief that the arts disciplines form an integral aspect of primary education, and that through a collaborative cyclical process of self-reflection, planning, and action their pedagogical knowledge might be enhanced, their teaching might become more innovative, and their practices might be improved.

Data Collection Tools

McNiff and Whitehead (2009) assert that in action research studies the researcher is searching primarily for episodes of practice which illuminate the developing educational influence of participants' learning, and for episodes of practice which illustrate their educational influence in the learning of their co-participants. The data collection tools employed in such projects must yield pertinent data, for, as Maxwell (2005) asserts, these tools "are the means to answering your research questions" (p. 92).

Cognisant of Hatch's (2002) cautions that "the fewer the number of participants, the more important it is to include multiple data sources" (p. 50), and aware of the wide variety of data collection tools advocated within the field of action research (eg. McNiff & Whitehead, 2009), the methods of data collection incorporated in this study were selected for their potential to yield data that would contribute to the aims of the study and enable triangulation – assuring not alone a more holistic view of primary arts education, but strengthening the credibility of the research. Consequently, between September 2015 and June 2016, data were gathered from: participants' interactions within the PLC; participants' reflective journals; visual artefacts; classroom observations; and individual interviews.

Professional learning community interactions.

The PLC met on a monthly basis from September 2015 until April 2016. Focusing on a democratically pre-determined element of arts education each month, these meetings – which lasted approximately 90 minutes – comprised what Kemmis and McTaggart (1992)

refer to as supportive work-in-progress discussions for the action research group. Akin to a group interview or focus groups – though more participant led – the collaborative, collegial dynamic of these meetings allowed discussions among participants to develop and flourish. Indeed Watts and Ebbutt (1987) declare such interviews beneficial in instances whereby a group are working collaboratively with a common purpose, for these discussions can generate a wider range of responses and insights than individual interviews. Further, Frey and Fontana (1991) assert that such group interactions, underutilised in the social sciences, can stimulate participants' recall and opinion elaboration and can also serve to encourage participants to question or re-evaluate previously held opinions. In these meetings participants heard one another's contributions, individual experiences, ideas, and insights, enabling them to compare their beliefs and practices to those of their co-participants which could, in turn, lead to new understanding. Having the opportunity to interact with co-participants on a monthly basis allowed for the emergence of a rich dialogue which contributed greatly to participants' professional learning and the methodologies subsequently incorporated in their teaching.

While both the content and location of these meetings varied from month to month – each focusing on a different element of arts education and occurring in the classroom of a different participant, offering teachers the opportunity to both showcase their work environment and "get a feel" for the work environments of their co-participants – the format of these multifaceted meetings remained constant. Influenced by the work of Thompson and Wiliam (2007), these meetings each began and concluded with two recurring counter-balanced activities. The initial "How's it going?" segment offered each participant time to both report and ask for feedback on their most recent teaching experiences in the arts disciplines: what they had tried, what they had observed, their reaction to the new approaches incorporated into their teaching, and how these might be refined. That participants are expected to report on their most recent efforts can, Thompson and Wiliam (2007) maintain, be

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a helpful spur to action. The concluding segment, devoted to personal action planning, allowed participants time to reflect upon the content of the meeting and decide upon the subsequent actions and techniques to be implemented in their specific context. Thompson and Wiliam (2007) assert that the expectation conveyed in this concluding segment is that between meetings participants will experiment with the ideas, techniques, and strategies explored in their own classrooms.

In addition to these consistent opening and concluding activities, each meeting included an element of professional development. Participants were invited to share examples of their practice, examine pupils' work samples, and debate professional readings. In these sessions – each of which was audio-recorded – the researcher and participants worked together to discover what could work in the Irish context. Between sessions, participants were invited to contact the community via e-mail and WhatsApp, to share resources, articles, ideas, or ask for support. This continuous cycle of discussion, support, analysis, planning, and evaluation ensured that participants adopted inquiry-as-stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in the domain of arts education.

Reflective journal.

A method of data collection frequently advocated within the field of action research is participant journaling (eg. Atweh & Heirdsfield, 2003; Hatch, 2002; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999). Reflective writing features in many action research studies for "the act of writing things down encourages individuals to process and reflect on experiences in different ways than thinking about them or discussing them with others" (Hatch, 2002, p. 140). Hatch (2002) suggests, however, that one danger with employing journals as a method of data collection is that participants, "if asked to write about anything, will likely write about nothing" (p. 142), and so urges researchers to provide clear direction about journal topics.

Participants in this study were each asked to maintain a reflective journal, in which they recorded their notes during the personal action plan segment of community meetings. Additionally, as encouraged by McNiff and Whitehead (2009), participants used these journals to keep a record of the actions subsequently undertaken in their classroom, their reflections upon that action, and the professional learning which arose from it. Participants were also invited to record any observations they deemed noteworthy, including, but not limited to: curricular time spent on arts disciplines; pupils' engagement, behaviour, and motivation during arts activities; observations from colleagues.

These journals, which provided "a direct path into the insights of participants" (Hatch, 2002, p. 141) containing information about what participants were thinking about and doing at a particular time, captured participant learning at an individual level in situ.

Visual data.

"Photographs have a central place in educational research… they carry meaning that words alone, be they written or spoken, cannot" (Cohen et al, 2011, p. 529). The use of photography enjoys long tradition in qualitative research (Flick, 2010), indeed Banks makes the case that visual data "are distinctive, are valuable, and should be considered by the social researcher whatever the project" (2008, p. 4). Increasingly popular as a method of data collection in action research (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1999), photographs – capable of producing rich, contextualised data (Flick, 2010) – were captured by participants and used to support and supplement data generated through PLC meetings, participants' reflective journals, and interviews.

In the context of this collaborative action research study photographs were produced by participants, enabling the researcher, and indeed their co-participants, to see the world through their eyes (Flick, 2010; Banks, 2008). Such photographs could capture the mood, atmosphere, and energy of classroom life as it unfolded in different learning contexts (Cohen

et al, 2011). In the context of this study, photography allowed participants to capture the reality of life in their classrooms, bringing the intricacies of their professional lives closer to both the researcher and their co-participants. Photography similarly allowed participants to share their pupils' efforts in the arts disciplines: whether works in progress or completed pieces, photography allowed teachers to capture the impact of their pedagogical practice on pupils' learning. Indeed in the context of this study – whereby participants were unable to simply "pop in" to one another's classrooms to check-in – visual data served to bridge the physical barrier separating co-participants. Loizos (2000) maintains that photography "offers restricted but powerful records of real-world, real-time actions and events" (p. 93). However Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) caution that "it is perhaps wiser to regard visual images as telling a story – a discourse – rather than being a singular objective reality" (p. 529). Just as observations can be selective in their focus, so too can photographs (Cohen et al, 2011).

Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1995), though advocates of photography as a data collection tool in action research, assert that images are "most valuable" when used in conjunction with other sources of data (p. 99). This is a sentiment shared by Hopkins (2003), who further highlights that in the context of classroom research, photographs can facilitate feedback from fellow practitioners, from those outside the classroom. In this study, visual data served the dual purpose of supporting data gathered via other methods and stimulating conversation. As noted by Koshy (2005), visual data have the potential to generate considerable dialogue. Rose (2012) further argues that because photographs carry a great deal of information, allowing research participants to explain and elaborate upon that information provides an opportunity to gain not just more but different insights into their world. Consequently, photographs taken by participants were frequently presented as illustrative data during PLC meetings, facilitating and supporting discussion about their recent teaching experiences. Similarly, while this research was focused more on empowering teachers, pupil-

generated artefacts such as artwork and compositions – presented by participants as a discussion piece for PLC meetings – provided illustrative data on participants' teaching in the arts disciplines and so were used to supplement data gleaned through other methods.

Observation.

Observation, though central to qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), was used only as a supplementary data source in the context of this collaborative action research study. The principal data sources – audio-recordings of PLC meetings and participants' reflective journals – each relied exclusively on participants' self-reports, which the literature suggests may sometimes be unreliable (eg Koziol & Burns, 1986). Although the shortfall of self-reporting was counteracted by both the collaborative, experimental nature of the PLC, and the sustained communication between the co-participants, observations were conducted in the classroom of each participant. Observation offers the educational researcher a unique way of collecting data, for it relies on neither what participants say they do, nor what they say they think (Denscombe, 2010). Rather, observation "draws on the direct evidence of the eye to witness events at first hand" (Denscombe, 2010, p. 196), and affords the researcher an opportunity to gather "live" data from naturally occurring social situations (Cohen et al, 2011). Observations, which fall on a continuum from structured to unstructured, enable the researcher to gather data on: the physical environment and its organisation; the human setting, referring to the organisation and characteristics of the people under observation; or the programme setting, referring to the resources and their organisation, the pedagogic styles of the participant, and curriculum implementation (Cohen et al, 2011).

The observations undertaken in this study, which were triangulated with data from other sources, were semi-structured in nature and focused predominantly on the programme setting: the resources – including classroom displays – employed by the participant; the entry-points and pedagogical approaches utilised in their teaching; whether emphasis was placed

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more heavily on learning processes or the products in which they resulted; and the manner in which they implemented observed facets of the curriculum. In an attempt to capture accounts representative of participants' pedagogical practice, each observation lasted for the duration of the school-day. To limit these observations to an hour or two-hour period, or indeed to a specific subject, would not provide an accurate picture of participants' educational practice across the board. Similarly, as the purpose of these observations was to capture naturally occurring classroom activity, the researcher was inclined toward the observational end of the observer-participant continuum and adopted the role of observer-as-participant (Cohen et al, 2011; Hatch, 2002). According to Gold (1958), this is a role frequently adopted by researchers in studies which incorporate only one visit to a particular social setting. In adopting the role of observer-as-participant, the researcher seeks to minimise their influence on the social situation under investigation, and is focused more on observing that situation than participating in it (Baker, 2006). While the observer-as-participant aims to play a neutral role within the social context they have entered, they are similarly enabled to interact with those they are observing: in the context of this study, whereby the pupils of participants would be encountering the researcher for the first and only time during that day-long observation, such flexibility was essential.

Within the context of this research observational data were used to gain insight into the manner in which participants incorporated new knowledge and new theories of education into their day-to-day practice, and to compare participants' reports of their pedagogical practice with their practice in the classroom. The role of observer-as-participant was therefore deemed most appropriate for these observations.

Cohen and his colleagues (2011), however, caution that within qualitative research role conflict and ambiguity are to be expected. Although the role of observer-as-participant was adopted for these classroom observations, throughout the course of this research, and

within the PLC itself, the researcher was involved in a constant negotiation and re-negotiation of identities. Becoming both participant and observer – being both a member of this learning community and studying it – was a complex path, carefully navigated with critical reflection upon the research process and researcher reflexivity.

Interview.

Conversation is a fundamental means of human interaction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and interviewing, therefore, a basic mode of inquiry (Seidman, 1998). As a mode of data collection, interviewing is entirely consistent with this innate desire to symbolise our existence – and indeed make meaning – through language (Seidman, 1998). The qualitative research interview seeks to understand the world from another's perspective, to reveal the meaning ascribed to their experiences, and to unveil their world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

"The adequacy of a research method depends on the purpose of the research and the questions being asked" (Seidman, 1998, p. 5). It was heedful of this caution that multiple methods of data collection were employed to address specific aspects of the research undertaken: audio-recordings of PLC meetings provided insight not alone into participants' individual beliefs and experiences, but into the co-construction of new knowledge in relation to arts-rich education; participants' journals documented episodes of experimentation in, and reflection upon, their teaching; visual data provided evidence of participants' educational practice and pupils' learning; observations allowed the researcher to explore the relationship between participants' self-reports and their classroom practice and to document the physical characteristics of an arts-rich classroom; and interviews enabled the researcher to explore participants' individual experience of participation in the PLC.

Following an initial in-the-field analysis of the audio recordings of PLC meetings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant between May and June 2016.

These interviews were immediately preceded – and indeed partially informed – by the day-long observation conducted in the classroom of each participant. While interviews conducted within an action research study are generally no more than informal discussions (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1999), these interviews, which sought to explore participants' opinions on their own learning and probe their individual experiences within the PLC, were semi-structured in nature. While there were specific topics to be addressed with each participant, the semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed for flexibility not alone in the order in which topics were addressed, but in allowing participants to develop their ideas and elaborate on points of interest to them (Denscombe, 2010). These interviews were conducted in the spirit of Seidman's (1998) assertions that at the heart of interviewing "is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of their experience" (p. 3). Rigidly structured, pre-determined questions would, therefore, not have been appropriate, rather it was important to ask open-ended questions and encourage participants to reconstruct their experience within this collaborative action research study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are woven into the very fabric of qualitative investigation, permeating each stage of the research process (Cresswell, 2013). Ethical issues arise, and must be addressed, during each phase of the study: from initial academic approval, through local site approval and data collection, to subsequent analysis and reporting (Cresswell, 2013). In undertaking this collaborative action research study, the researcher – adopting the stance of Cresswell (2013) – diligently observed the code of ethics of St. Patrick's College, embarking upon the project only after written consent had been received from her supervisory team on behalf of the College Ethics Committee.

Bell (2010) asserts that ethical research involves attaining the informed consent of those a researcher intends to interview, observe, or study. Further, ethical research "involves

reaching agreements about the uses of this data, and how its analysis will be reported and disseminated. And it is about keeping to such agreements when they have been reached" (Bell, 2010, p. 47). The issue of informed consent was attended to as all participants were presented with a letter detailing the purpose and nature of the intended study (Appendix B). This letter outlined clearly the professional development opportunities afforded by membership of the PLC, and the time-commitments of participation in the research. It was also made abundantly clear that participants were free to leave at any point during the research. In attending to the issue of confidentiality –"a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form" (Bell, 2010, p. 49) – participants' names, the names of their schools, and other identifying characteristics were withheld. Ethics surrounding photographic data of pupils' learning was negotiated with participants' schools on an individual basis dependent on their in-house policies, however in each school written consent was sought from parents and guardians for the use of photographs in which a pupil's face is clearly visible (Appendix C). Furthermore, photographs which were sent via WhatsApp were subsequently deleted from participants' phones and stored on the password-protected laptop of the researcher.

Consistent with the democratic nature of collaborative action research, throughout the processes of data collection and analysis the development of the work was made visible to, and open to suggestions from, the participants. Furthermore, in ensuring that the study was conducted in an ethically defensible manner, the researcher avoided what Robson (1993, as cited in Cohen et al, 2011, p. 89) terms the "ten questionable practices in social research":

1. Involving people without their knowledge or consent

2. Coercing people to participate

3. Withholding information about the true nature of the research

4. Deceiving participants

5. Inducing participants to commit acts diminishing their self-esteem

6. Violating rights of self-determination

7. Exposing participants to physical or mental stress

8. Invading the privacy of participants

9. Withholding benefits from some participants

10. Not treating participants fairly, or with consideration, or with respect.

Trustworthiness of the Research

Within qualitative research, the trustworthiness of a study is dependent on the trustworthiness of both the data itself, and the analysis of that data. In the context of this collaborative action research study the authenticity or trustworthiness of the data was ensured in the following ways:

- Prolonged engagement with research participants (Cresswell, 2013; Cohen et al, 2011)

- Triangulation of data (Cohen et al, 2011)

- Member-checks (Cohen et al, 2011)

- Debriefing with research supervisors (Shenton, 2004)

- Rich, thick description (Cohen et al, 2011)

- Researcher reflexivity (Rossman & Rallis, 2012)

As this collaborative action research study was conducted over a 10 month period – with frequent communication among all involved – prolonged engagement with the research participants was enabled (Cresswell, 2013). Similarly, the use of multiple methods of data collection enabled triangulation. In the field of action research, Winter (1996) advises that the triangulation of data requires the comparison of at least three methods of data collection: "corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Cresswell, 2013, p. 251). Member checking – considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility in qualitative research – was a constant

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feature of this study. Participants were routinely provided with an opportunity to review and respond to the transcripts of PLC meetings, likewise following individual interviews. Regular meetings with the supervision team overseeing the study were beneficial in inspiring critical reflection on the part of the researcher. As Shenton (2004) asserts, "Through discussion, the vision of the investigator may be widened as others bring to bear their experiences and perceptions" (p. 67). Similarly, the creation of rich, thick descriptions enables the consumers of research to make decisions regarding the transferability of findings (Cresswell, 2013).

In assuring the trustworthiness of the data analysis, the following strategies were employed:

- Audit-trail (Cohen et al, 2011)

- Member-checks regarding emerging theories (Shenton, 2004)

- Peer-scrutiny of the research project (Shenton, 2004)

Throughout the duration of this study a systematic and detailed audit trail of the activities of the research – including details of PLC meetings, resources compiled and shared among PLC members, and field notes – was maintained. Similarly, as data were analysed and interpretations drawn, the emerging theories of the researcher were shared with participants. Participants were thus invited to take a directing as well as acting role in the research undertaken (Cresswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

A defining characteristic of qualitative research is the inductive approach to data analysis it engenders (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997). Consequently the multiple forms of data generated during this inquiry were not grouped according to predetermined categories for examination, rather – as emphasised by Maykut and Morehouse (1997) – what became important to analyse emerged from the data itself.

Once the data were prepared for in-depth post-field analysis – once journals had been photocopied, audio-recordings of PLC meetings and interviews transcribed, e-mails and messages printed, and the photographs assembled – an inductive analysis was conducted utilising the constant comparative method (Figure 5). This method, as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1997), combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. Consequently, the first task undertaken by the researcher was to identify the units of meaning evident in the data by carefully reading the wealth of information amassed. The second task was to establish provisional coding categories, derived from a broad familiarity with the accumulated data. Subsequently, as each new unit of meaning was selected for analysis it was compared to all existing units of meaning and grouped with those it shared similarities. If a unit of meaning held no similarities with those already categorised a new coding category was created. Throughout this emergent process – which allowed for the continuous refinement of categories – the researcher sought to provide "a reasonable reconstruction" of the data accumulated (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997, p. 134).
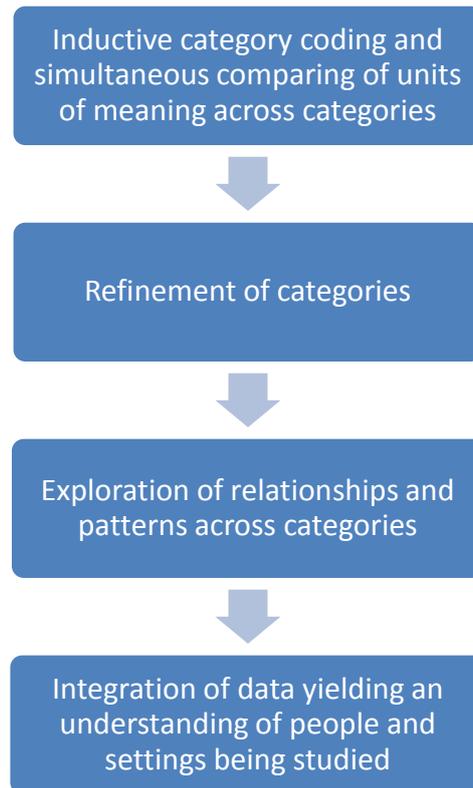
Figure 5. The constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997, p. 135)

Once the data had been grouped into these provisional categories the units of meaning ascribed to each category were carefully read and reread. This close and repeated examination of the data allowed the researcher to adjust and refine the provisional categories, eliminating overlap and ambiguity while ensuring that units of meaning within each category were demonstrably similar. The salient relationships and patterns across each of these refined categories were then explored before the researcher entered into the process of "writing-up" the research, an activity which Maykut and Morehouse (1997) conceive of as an integral component of the analytic process. A fulsome delineation of this process – and a clear description of the emergent themes, together with their interconnected subthemes – is presented in Chapter Four.

Conclusion

As indicated at the outset, this chapter sought to present a comprehensive articulation of the research undertaken. Consequently, presented in this chapter was a thorough exposition of the researcher's experiential knowledge which sparked that initial curiosity in the domain of arts-rich education, a brief discussion of pertinent literature in the fields of both arts education and teachers' professional learning, and a description of the paradigmatic stance of the researcher: all elements of the conceptual framework underpinning this study. Tracing the link between the conceptual framework and methodology employed, a rationale for approaching this study with collaborative action research was presented and subsequently followed with a description of data collection tools utilised. Towards the close of this chapter, issues pertaining to ethics and trustworthiness were raised in preparation for the analysis of data presented in the next chapter.

ANALYSIS

Introduction

Data analysis has been hailed as the most exciting phase of a research project (Open University, 2001). It is the culmination of the research process, through which order is brought to the accumulated data (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992; Murray & Lawrence, 2000). In their raw form these data do not speak for themselves, rather, as Robson (2002) emphasises, their meaning is often obfuscated; distillation demands careful deliberation on the part of the researcher (Eisner, 1991). Data analysis can therefore be conceived of as a phase of transformation, whereby the voluminous collection of data – carefully garnered throughout the research project – is, through analytic procedures, translated into a coherent, comprehensible, and trustworthy analysis (Brown & Dowling, 1998; Gibbs, 2008). It is through the analysis of data that patterns and meanings, which could form the basis of explanations, new hypotheses, or new theories, emerge (Open University, 2001).

It is through language that we each create our world, it is through language that we explain, defend, and hide ourselves, and it is through words that we might come to comprehend our place within the world (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It is the task of the qualitative researcher to explore and examine the words of their participants, to find patterns within their words, and to present these patterns – all the while remaining faithful to the construction of the world as participants experienced it – to the wider educational community for inspection (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It is unsurprising, therefore, that within the research community attention has been drawn to the importance of the quality of the analyst (Robson, 2002); as Fetterman (1989) has asserted, analysis is, first and foremost, "a test of the ability to think – to process information in a meaningful and useful manner" (p. 88). Indeed

TS Eliot's *Little Gidding* (1971) – though far removed from the world of educational research – speaks to the arduous but worthwhile task of the qualitative researcher:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. (p. 59)

For the qualitative researcher, analysis involves the systematic organisation, exploration, examination, and reflection upon the accumulated data so that they might come to understand the reality they seek to represent (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Johnson, 2002): so that they might come to "know the place for the first time". In seeking to present their findings to others – in illuminating those themes and recurrent messages construed from the data – the qualitative researcher undertakes to craft a coherent narrative (Eisner, 1991; Koshy, 2007). Theirs, according to Eisner (1991), becomes "the task of storytelling" as they seek to compose a faithful portrayal of that which they have studied (p. 189).

While it is in the analysis of data that researchers may move from "the rambling pages of description" to the product of their research project (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 153), many scholars emphasise that, in the field of qualitative inquiry, drawing a distinction between the phases of data collection and data analysis is unwarranted (eg Anderson & Arsenault, 2000; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Gibbs, 2008). Rather, these elements of the research project are merged and run concurrently. Indeed Coffey and Atkinson (1996) assert that "the process of analysis should not be seen as a distinct stage of research; rather, it is a reflexive activity that should inform data collection, writing, further data collection, and so forth" (p. 6). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) similarly advise that "data analysis is best conducted as an early and ongoing research activity" (p. 123).

Mindful of such perspectives, preliminary analysis of the data began in the field with a more in-depth post-field analysis taking place once data collection had ceased, and – as advocated by Anderson and Arsenault (2000) – sufficient time had passed to allow for

distance from, and a fresh perspective on, that data. What is presented in this chapter is the product of this process; an exposition of the emergent themes in which interpretation is interwoven with verbatim excerpts from the data, not alone so that this might provide a richer story to the reader, but so that it is an account faithful to the world of the participants. Like any narrative, this is one replete with characters and a plot – a sequence of interrelated events – and so the analysis will commence with a fulsome portrait of the study in action.

The Study in Action

At 4pm on an innocuous Thursday towards the close of September, 2015 – in a classroom much like any other – six primary teachers came together for the first time, embarking on a journey of collaborative professional learning which would last for the duration of the school year. This was the inaugural meeting of our PLC, chaired by the researcher and attended by five participating teachers: Amelia; Elizabeth; Emma; Katie; and Grace (Table 1). While their names have naturally been fictionalised, these are very real women whose dedication and commitment to learning – both their own and that of their pupils – was made manifest throughout the year in their attendance at monthly meetings (all scheduled outside school hours), the willingness, energy, and honesty with which they participated in these meetings, and the numerous entries kept in their reflective journals. Although these teachers have had varying experiences of the arts in their personal lives, they each entered this PLC with the belief that within education, the arts matter.

Amelia – whose childhood and adolescence were characterised by a passion for instrumental music and a love of literature – had just returned to Ireland following career-break, and spent the year teaching first class boys in an infant school in Dublin's inner city. A passionate teacher with a keen interest in social justice and educational disadvantage, Amelia has always held the firm belief that arts education is particularly important for her pupils. It is

through education that some of them first encounter the rich world of story, the breadth and variety of musical styles, the wonder of structured dramatic play, and the joys of participating in the visual arts. While she believes there are valuable learning opportunities inherent within each of the arts disciplines, Amelia's own interests and experiences meant that she has traditionally been more confident teaching lessons in music and the language arts.

Elizabeth – who as a teenager performed at numerous choral festivals and whose adoration of literature has continued into adulthood – had been newly employed in a school outside the capital where she spent the year working with a mixed fifth class. A meticulous and diligent teacher from her first day with the profession, Elizabeth's lessons were always planned in great detail, and she routinely created and updated classroom displays showcasing pupils' work. However this practice meant that, in the visual arts at least, Elizabeth came to inadvertently emphasise the product of pupils' learning over the learning inherent in the process of creating. Indeed Elizabeth has also professed that, throughout her career, her conceptualisation of the arts had been rigid and narrow: to her, primary arts education had comprised music, the visual arts, and drama. She has declared of her teaching that, in hindsight, she neither considered nor treated dance, literature, creative writing, or poetry as arts disciplines.

Emma – whose infectious love of song and dance has naturally led her to the world of amateur musical theatre – spent the year teaching a mixed junior infant class in a junior school in the Dublin suburbs. While the earliest years of Emma's teaching career were characterised by what she described as "interesting and stimulating lessons", particularly in the domains of music and drama, in her own estimation the quality of her teaching had deteriorated over time. She reported, quite openly, that her enthusiasm had been dampened by a combination of factors including time-constraints, depleted energy, and a dearth of lesson ideas, and that her teaching in general had become "boring and prescriptive".

For Katie – whose 11 years teaching made her the most experienced member of the community – a love of the visual arts, fostered both by her family and through formal education, began in childhood. Indeed the visual arts remained a source of great enjoyment in her life as a teacher. Without her realising it however, the intensified demands which have been placed upon teachers throughout the course of her career – "the pressure to produce results or tick certain boxes" – had, in Katie's own estimation, negatively influenced her teaching, resulting not alone in her prioritisation of product over process, but in her neglecting to consider how best her pupils would learn. Katie further reports that her approach to arts education had become very unbalanced as she had come to emphasise the creation of artwork over the cultivation of pupils' appreciative capacities, and developed the tendency to allocate shorter periods of time to the arts disciplines with which she was less comfortable. She spent the year working with second class in a senior boys' school in another Dublin suburb.

Finally Grace, who was then a newly-probated teacher in only her second year with the profession, rediscovered her enjoyment of participation in the visual arts during ITE. The procedures and criteria for probation however – including its strong emphasis on comprehensive paperwork – led Grace to not alone intensify her focus on the core subjects of English, Irish, and mathematics, but to view the subjects of the *Primary School Curriculum* as separate and distinct entities. Her year was spent teaching a mixed fourth class in a senior school in North County Dublin.

Pseudonym	Experience	School type	Class	Interests
Amelia	7 years	Infant boys' school (DEIS Band 1)	First Class	Instrumental music Literature
Elizabeth	7 years	Mixed vertical school (DEIS Band 2)	Fifth Class	Literature Singing
Emma	9 years	Mixed junior school	Junior Infants	Dance Drama Musical Theatre
Katie	11 years	Senior boys' school	Second Class	Visual Arts
Grace	2 years	Mixed senior school	Fourth Class	Visual Arts

Table 1. Participant profile

Once a month, from September to March, these early-career professionals met to examine an element of arts education pre-determined by participants according to identified gaps in their professional knowledge or perceived weaknesses in their teaching. These meetings offered teachers the opportunity to first discuss their practice – to share experiences and reflect aloud upon their own teaching over the preceding weeks – before engaging in collaborative professional learning (Appendix D). A multifaceted approach was taken to this professional learning which included: the provision of professional reading materials; the provision of teaching and planning resources to aid the implementation of new methodologies; the observation of lesson demonstrations; and professional conversation and critique revolving around same. That first PLC meeting however had a dual focus: action research and arts-infusion. Subsequent meetings, hosted by a different teacher each month, focused on: enabling the creative process; composing; the arts in the approach to festive occasions; poetry; drama; and creative dance (Appendix E).

The intervening period between PLC meetings is best conceived of as an action research cycle, whereby each participant sought to utilise their learning to enact change in

their own context, seeking to enhance classroom practice and place high-quality arts experiences more centrally in the education of the child. During these recurring cycles of planning, action, observation, and evaluation, these five teachers each documented their experiences in a reflective journal. That continuous cycle, from planning to evaluation and back again, ensured that teachers adopted what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) have termed inquiry-as-stance: appraising the impact of changes to professional practice on pupils' learning, motivation, and engagement. Their experiences and observations then formed the basis of introductory discussions at subsequent meetings.

Communication between these teachers was not, however, limited to such discussion during formal meeting times. On Elizabeth's suggestion, and with the agreement of all participants, a WhatsApp group – entitled The ARC Project – was created at the close of our inaugural meeting. The use of this medium not alone facilitated the relatively effortless distribution of visual and audio resources, but enabled teachers to share lesson ideas and photographs of pupils' learning with ease. Furthermore, the frequent, friendly interaction among participants on this thread helped to expedite the establishment of a collaborative and collegial working relationship within the PLC. Indeed, while formal PLC meetings concluded with the close of the second term, communication on this WhatsApp thread continued unabated.

In the final term of the school year, despite the fact that their initial commitment regarding PLC meetings had been honoured, on Amelia's suggestion all available participants passed a sunny afternoon in the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, examining artwork and honing their VTS skills. Similarly in that final term a day was spent in the classroom of each participant, affording the researcher an opportunity to meet the pupils whose learning had been discussed at length, and offering each teacher the opportunity to vocalise their unique experiences of, and their personal reflections upon, the year as it had unfolded in their

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particular context (Appendix F). It was after these classroom visits that teachers' reflective journals were gathered.

These journals – alongside the transcripts of PLC meetings and individual interviews, photographs of pupils' learning, and messages sent via WhatsApp – were scrutinised, thoroughly and repeatedly, during the post-field analysis. What follows is a comprehensive discussion of the prominent themes to emerge during that analysis.

Emergent Themes

As participating teachers strove to place high-quality arts experiences more centrally in their pupils' education, there were recurring observations, comments, attitudes, and behaviours which were seen to arise. Though working in different contexts, these teachers were each working toward a shared goal, and there were patterns which emerged across their individual and collective experiences. Presented in Figure 6 are the four themes – together with their constituent interconnected subthemes – which emerged prominently from, and consistently across, the multiple sources of data gathered throughout the year.

Support and Collaboration

- De-privatisation of professional practice
- Vulnerability, reassurance, and emotional support
- Renewed professional energy and enthusiasm
- Sharing of ideas: assisting the practical classroom application of professional learning
- School-based support: the support, or lack thereof, that teachers sensed in their own school

Change in Professional Practice

- Enhanced risk-taking and experimentation
- Reflection upon professional practice
- Growth in confidence
- Emerging critique of observed practice, ITE, and the DES
- Time for change to become embedded
- Benefits to pupils' learning

Pupils' Learning

- Pupils' engagement and enthusiasm
- Pupils' behaviour
- Pupils' confidence
- Enhanced learning outcomes

Satistfaction, Fulfilment, and Pride

- Pupil satisfaction: the sense of pride that pupils demonstrated in their own learning
- Pride participating teachers demonstrated with the learning of their pupils
- Professional fulfilment and pride: teachers' satisfaction with their own professional practice

Figure 6. Emergent themes and subthemes

This was a piece of research which employed multiple data collection tools, each of which made a valuable contribution to the identification and realisation of these themes and subthemes. While evidence for each of these themes was found across the accumulated data, Figures 7 to 10 present – in descending order of importance – the data collection tools which contributed principally to the emergence of each constituent subtheme.
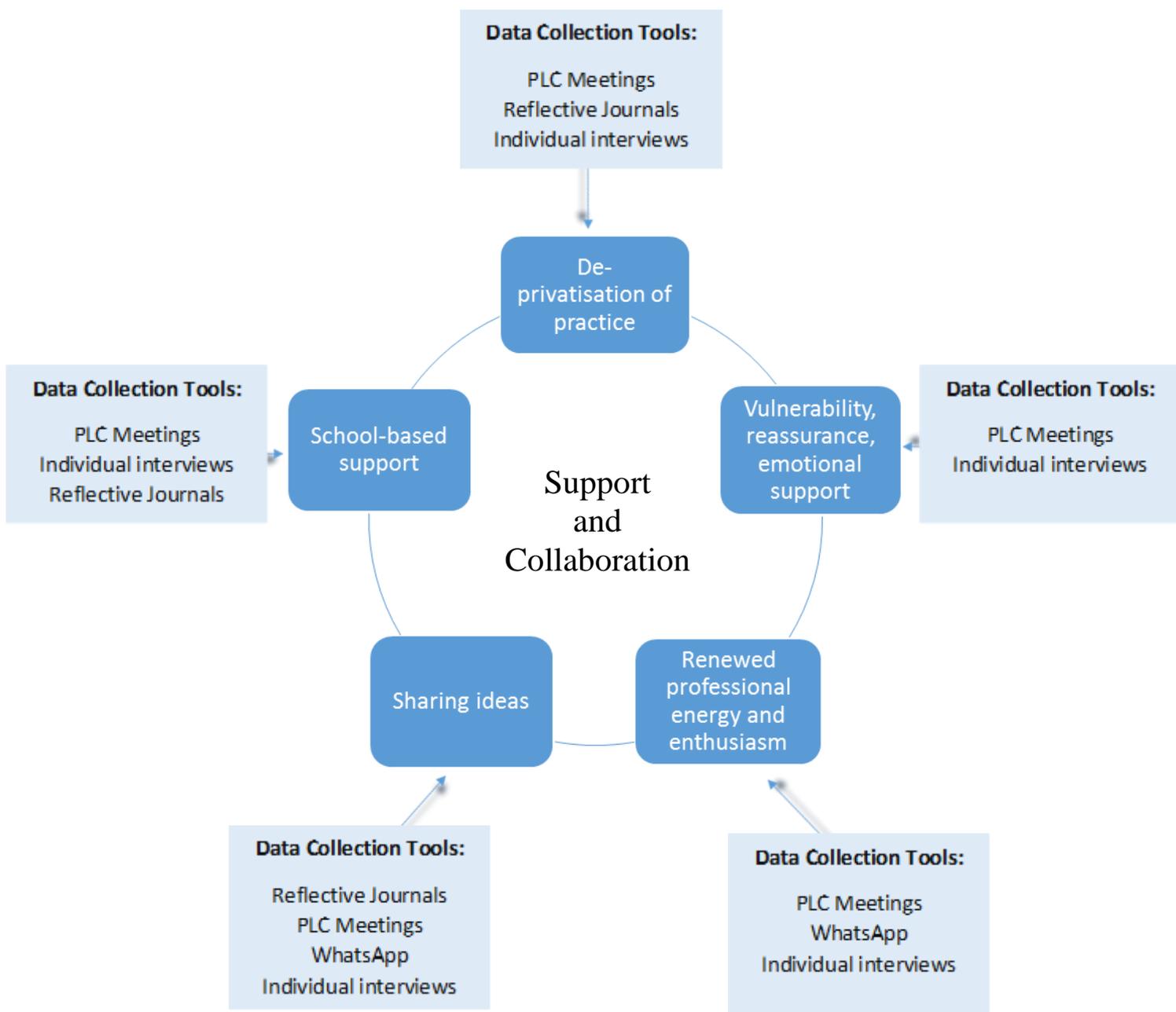
Figure 7. Support and collaboration

Data Collection Tools:

PLC Meetings
Reflective Journals
Individual interviews

Data Collection Tools:

PLC Meetings
Reflective Journals
Individual interviews

Data Collection Tools:

Individual interviews
Reflective Journals
PLC Meetings

Risk-taking and experimentation

Benefits to pupils' learning

Reflection upon professional practice

Change in Professional Practice

Data Collection Tools:

PLC Meetings
Individual interviews
Observation

Time for change to become embedded

Growth in confidence

Data Collection Tools:

PLC Meetings
Reflective Journals
Individual interviews

Emerging critique

Data Collection Tools:

PLC Meetings
Individual interviews

Figure 8. Change in professional practice
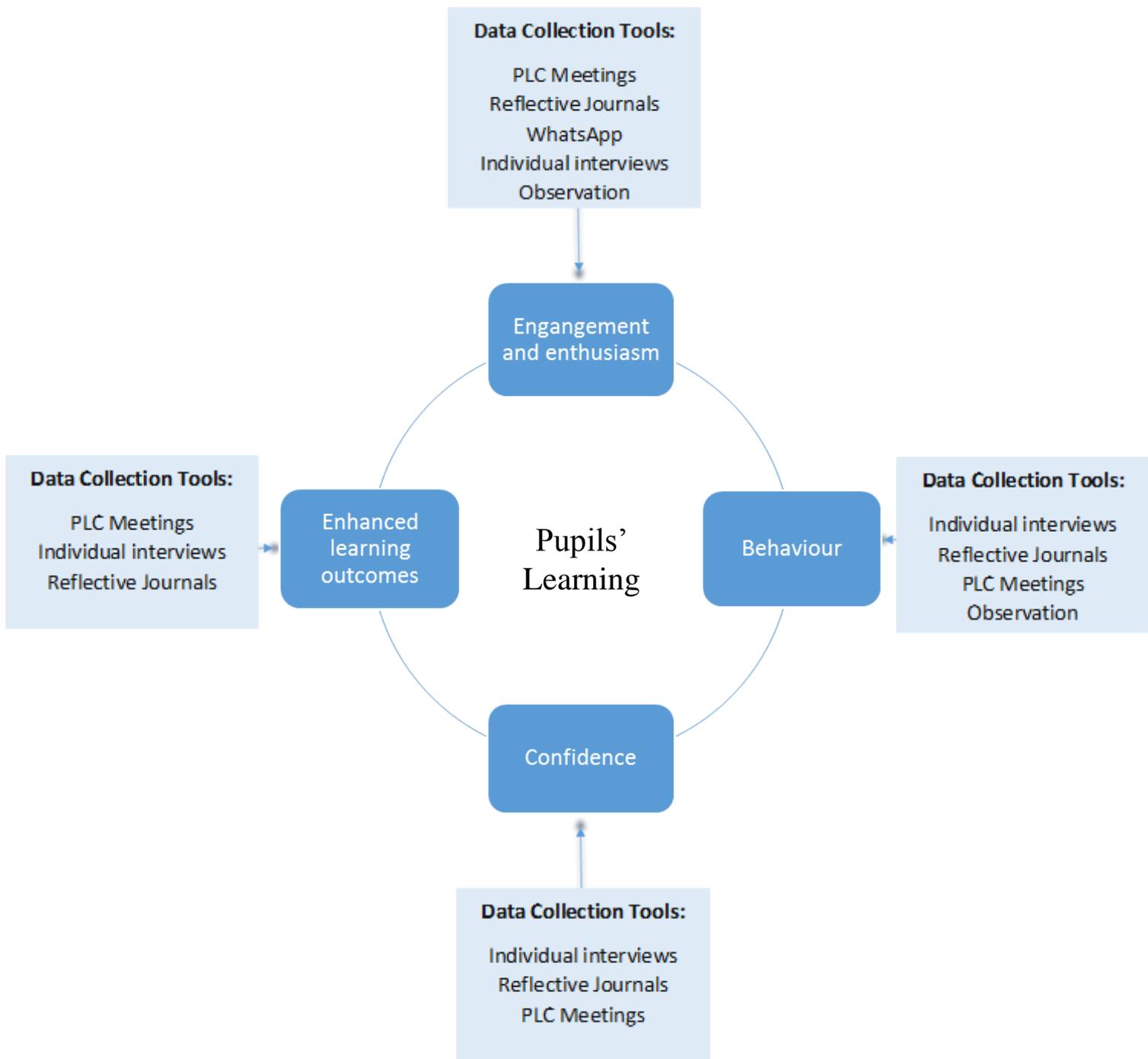
Figure 9. Pupils' learning
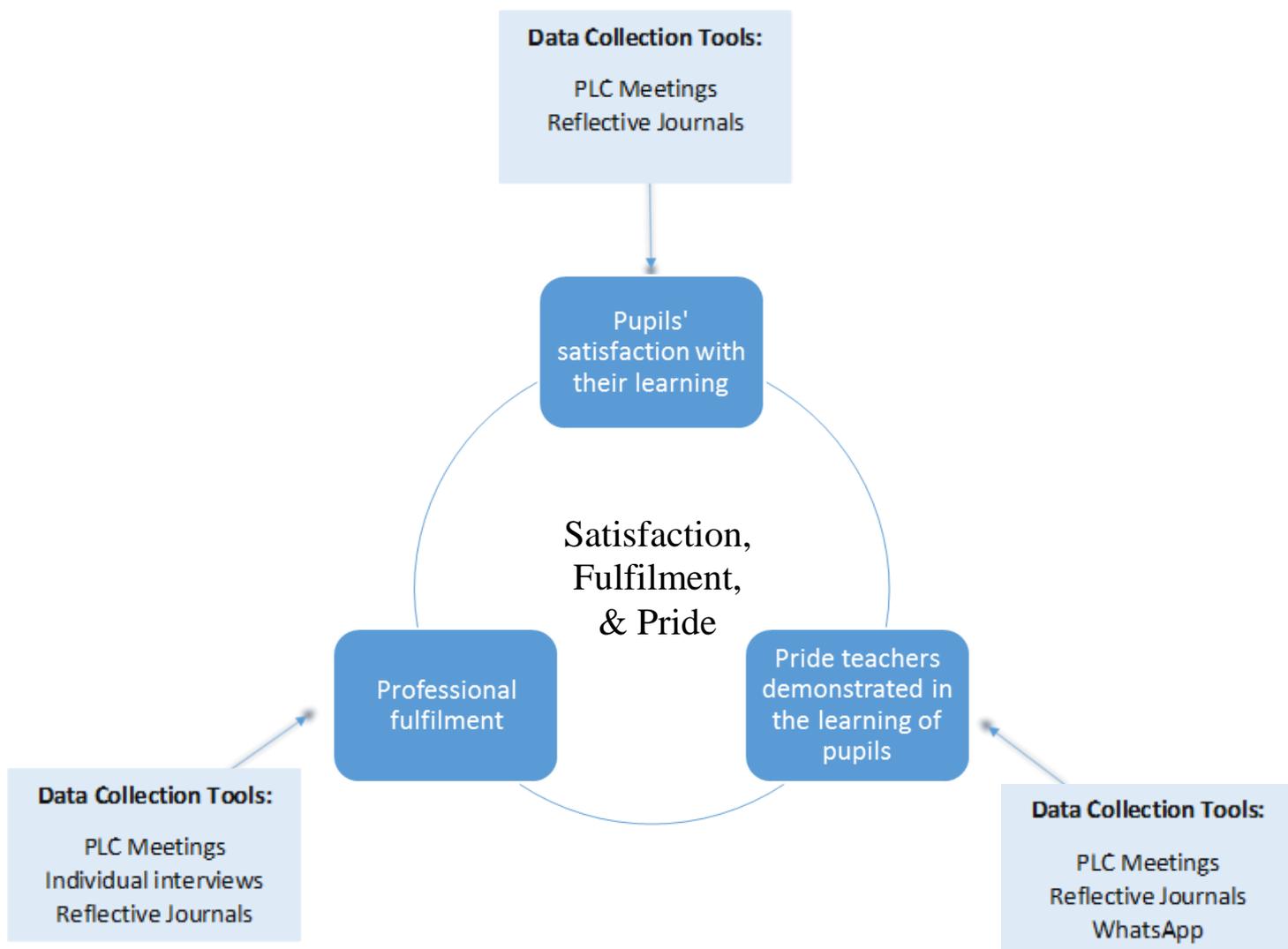
Figure 10. Satisfaction, fulfilment, and pride

In seeking to present a clear and coherent account of these themes, together with their interconnected subthemes, illustrative excerpts from the data are interwoven with interpretation and presented alongside relevant research literature.

Support and Collaboration

A recurring rhetoric in the domain of teachers' professional practice and their ongoing in-career learning is that of teacher isolation (Glazier, Boyd, Bell Hughes, Able, & Mallous, 2016; Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Horn, 2012; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989). Indeed almost three decades ago, Rosenholtz (1989) – critical of the segregated working conditions which remain commonplace in the vast majority of schools – asserted that the resultant professional isolation proves a considerable impediment to teachers' professional learning. In the absence of collaboration with colleagues, in the absence of meaningful communication on instructional or pedagogical matters, and in the absence of professional advice or assistance, teachers must rely instead upon "trial-and-error learning" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 430). While Rosenholtz (1989) was writing of the American context as it stood more than 25 years ago, her criticisms and concerns are relevant to the Irish education system, whereby the "professional insulation and isolation" of teachers remains commonplace (Hogan et al, 2007, p. 34). Indeed this isolation – and the tension that exists between working alongside colleagues within a school while simultaneously working alone behind a closed door – was referred to by Amelia as simply "the nature of teaching" whereby "you are all kind of working together, but you're not *really*" (Interview: May, 2016).

Increasingly, in both the national and international contexts, concerted efforts are being made to move from cultures of teacher isolation to those of collaboration. Indeed Barbara Ischinger – during her tenure as the OECD's Director for Education – professed teacher collaboration to be "an essential feature of professional practice" (2012, p. 3). Consequently, recent decades have borne witness to the proliferation of PLCs within the educational domain, as numerous reform initiatives seek to simultaneously develop practitioners' professional knowledge and practice, and to dissipate the isolated cultures in which these practitioners predominantly operate (Chow, 2016; Glazier et al, 2016;

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Hargreaves, 2001). Collaborative cultures among teachers are widely regarded as a powerful vehicle for professional development (Sjoer & Meirink, 2015). Indeed as Hargreaves (2001) has highlighted, cooperation and collaboration among practitioners not alone has the potential to nurture moral support and provide teachers with access to new ideas for their professional practice, but can simultaneously arouse their own creative energy. Throughout the course of the year, these gains – identified by Hargreaves (2001) and reiterated throughout the research literature (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Kruse et al, 1994) – were made apparent in the actions of, and interactions between, the five participating teachers.

The de-privatisation of professional practice and resultant vulnerability.

The supportive, collaborative culture which permeated all PLC interactions was underpinned by, and in turn further promoted, teachers' willingness to de-privatise their professional practice. This de-privatisation of practice – which the research literature has repeatedly hailed as an essential component of an effective PLC (eg Kruse et al, 1994; Mulford, 2006; Thompson & Wiliam, 2007) – was evident from that inaugural meeting in September, whereby teachers' readiness to share classroom stories and anecdotes created a space for open, collaborative, and reflective dialogue. In de-privatising their professional practice these teachers – when exposing and discussing deficiencies in their professional knowledge, and vocalising concerns about their pedagogical practice – entered a position of vulnerability. Such vulnerability was poignantly illustrated in the candour with which Emma discussed her anxiety at the prospect of a year with infants: "I don't know what I'm doing with junior infants full stop. Full stop, regardless. I don't know how… I don't know what's in the curriculum books, I don't know how to teach them. I'm completely at sea..." (PLC Meeting: September, 2015). On occasions such as these – whereby a participating teacher made statements which alluded to feelings of professional inadequacy – the support of the group was made manifest in encouraging remarks, empathetic observations, actionable

suggestions, and often the reassurance that they themselves felt similarly. Indeed, as noted by Katie:

> ...everybody was so open and honest: when things didn't work, they all said "Oh, that didn't work for me", or if somebody had a difficult month, they said they had a difficult month. This is a very caring profession but we need to mind ourselves, and even just having a group of teachers to go to where you could go, "This month wasn't great, I didn't get anything done" and for everybody to understand and go "Oh don't worry, I had that last month", you know? It made a huge difference. (Interview: June, 2016)

The importance of such admissions was similarly acknowledged by Amelia, who – having returned from career break to a particularly challenging class – found support in the realisation that others, too, frequently encountered considerable classroom challenges. As she facetiously quipped, "It was the support of going and realising other people were having crap times. And sometimes worse than you... Someone else had a worse day than me? Great! I didn't get a fire extinguisher thrown at me, perfect!" (Interview: May, 2016).

For Stoll and her colleagues (2006) an effective PLC is characterised, at least in part, by the mutual trust, respect, and support that exists among its members. The supportive and collaborative culture which thrived among this group of teachers – engendered through open discussion, mutual support, and reflective dialogue – was, at times, a crutch upon which teachers could lean. Indeed Emma, whose disquiet was palpable at that initial meeting, later documented:

> I don't think I'd have gotten through junior infants if it wasn't for this group. So supportive and motivating. Last few years have felt I'm not a great teacher and not trying my best – this year I feel like I know what I'm doing and am actually doing it well. (Reflective Journal: May, 2016)

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She was not alone in these sentiments, for Amelia similarly professed "this PLC has helped me through the most difficult year I've had as a teacher... I will really, really miss meeting up with these wonderful teachers and being inspired and fired up about teaching again. It's been wonderful" (Reflective Journal: June, 2016).

Renewed professional energy and enthusiasm.

Amelia's concluding remarks speak to a renewed enthusiasm for teaching which emerged as a result of: conversation with fellow teachers about their professional practice; hearing the experiences and reflections of others; and exploring new possibilities for classroom practice, in what Elizabeth referred to as a supportive and non-judgmental forum (Interview: May, 2016). From the outset a distinction was drawn between the reflective professional dialogue required of a community of teacher-learners and the conversation which too frequently dominates teachers' interactions with one another:

Amelia:

...it is something I'm actually looking forward to about this... Because usually, like, if I talk to any of my friends who are teachers, or people that I work with, I'm usually complaining.

(laughter from PLC members)

I usually find myself sitting down and saying, "Oh my God they did *this* today and bla, bla, bla", "They're this, they're that, they're horrible" and *I rant*. And, whereas with this I'm looking forward to actually going, "Oh ok, that's something I can try–"

Emma:

Yea because you very often forget the good stuff you do.

(sounds of agreement from the group)

Amelia:

Exactly. So to highlight what we're doing but also the sharing ideas... even if it flops on its face at least I got something, a different idea that I probably wouldn't have thought of. (PLC Meeting: September, 2015)

The renewed professional motivation which arose from mutually supportive professional interactions within the group resonates powerfully with the literature on teachers' CPD. Cordingley and her colleagues (2005), for example, have reported that collaborative professional development has a positive impact on teachers' motivation and enthusiasm for enhancing their professional practice, while Bolam and Weindling's (2006) synthesis of the research literature indicates that motivation and morale are typically high in effective PLCs. In the context of this study, the enhanced professional motivation experienced by participants was demonstrated in Amelia's assertion that involvement in the PLC succeeded in "making me excited about teaching when I wasn't excited about my class" (Interview: May, 2016). Indeed this phenomenon was further illustrated by Katie's declaration that the year spent within this PLC was "one of my most enjoyable years teaching... as a teacher I feel it has refreshed my teaching, I feel it has motivated me, I feel I enjoy teaching again" (Interview: June, 2016). "It was a huge influence on me", she continued, "I hope we will meet up again... I think there is such a quality to the teachers involved in the group, they have so much to offer and I have learned a huge amount" (Interview: June, 2016).

Sharing ideas.

A common, indeed consistent, pattern found in teachers' reflective journals were the rushed and hurried scribbles – often no more than a word or two – hastily written as they took note of lesson ideas inspired by the experiences, pedagogical practice, and reports of fellow participants. Indeed in many ways the introductory discussions at each PLC meeting became a forum in which teachers could pool practical ideas. These were ideas which would not alone

facilitate the realisation of curriculum objectives across a variety of subject areas, but which would aid participants in their attempts to place meaningful high-quality arts experiences more centrally in their classrooms.

In de-privatising their professional practice participating teachers willingly relinquished ownership of lesson ideas: sharing their professional experiences (both positive and negative) and encouraging fellow teachers to adapt particular lessons, resources, and strategies to their own unique context. The open, unguarded dissemination of ideas which took place within the PLC was, for some, inconsistent with their professional experiences in the workplace. Amelia, reflecting upon the supportive, collaborative culture that existed within the group, spoke of school cultures whereby "people are nearly trademarking their ideas. It's like 'These are mine and how *dare* anybody else...'" (Interview: May, 2016). Teachers, she declared, "are not always naturally collaborative. However, given the opportunity to share ideas the possibilities are limitless" (E-mail: April, 2016). Amelia was not alone in her belief that sharing ideas – discussing examples of good pedagogical practice with fellow practitioners – has immense potential for educational change. While discussing her experiences within the PLC, Emma professed that with regard to "my own professional development, the only way I have progressed as a teacher is from getting new ideas and trying them..." (Interview: May, 2016). Indeed arising from her involvement with the PLC, Emma suggested that "sharing ideas is something we should *all* do, *all* the time, no matter what we're doing. Even just with colleagues on the corridor because you just get so caught up in what *you're* doing you forget that other people might have a different way of doing it... getting all of these ideas in our meetings refocused and motivated me" (Interview: May, 2016).

The exchange of lesson ideas, which began at that first meeting in September and was zealously pursued in subsequent meetings, was something that participants found to be professionally motivating. Indeed reflecting upon that inaugural gathering Amelia noted:

> I found it to be a positive experience of sharing ideas and looking at new possibilities... I was inspired by what others were doing as opposed to threatened. I felt excited about trying out their ideas... I'm looking forward to trying out as much as I can. (Reflective Journal: September, 2015)

With a shared goal – that of exploring the potential for arts-rich education in the primary classroom – the fact that none of these teachers were working with the same year group became irrelevant. Ideas, as Elizabeth emphasised, can be adapted: tailored to suit the needs of a particular group of children.

> You got loads of ideas from the others. Even though there was a junior infant teacher in the group, you would think, "Well I'm not going to get *anything* from what she does because she has infants and I have fifth class", but surprisingly I did! I got loads of ideas which shows that it doesn't matter whether you have an infant class or a sixth class... you can adapt it so that the children get something from it. (Interview: May, 2016)

Indeed as the year progressed there were poems, songs, drama experiences, and visual arts lessons that were seen to travel from school to school, classroom to classroom. While exploring sound during a scheme of work based on energy and forces, Elizabeth's fifth class pupils wrote poems inspired by the sounds they heard in the school yard – an idea which Amelia later utilised in her classroom:

When we said we were doing sound as our Science Week topic in first class I was like,

"Well we're *definitely* doing sound poems. I can't *not* do sound poems..." It was such

a good idea when Elizabeth was saying she did them. (Interview: May, 2016)

Similarly, paper worlds constructed in response to Coelho's *If all the World were Paper*

(2013) – originally created by Amelia's first class pupils (Figure 11) – were subsequently

designed and fashioned by infant, fourth, and fifth classes alike.
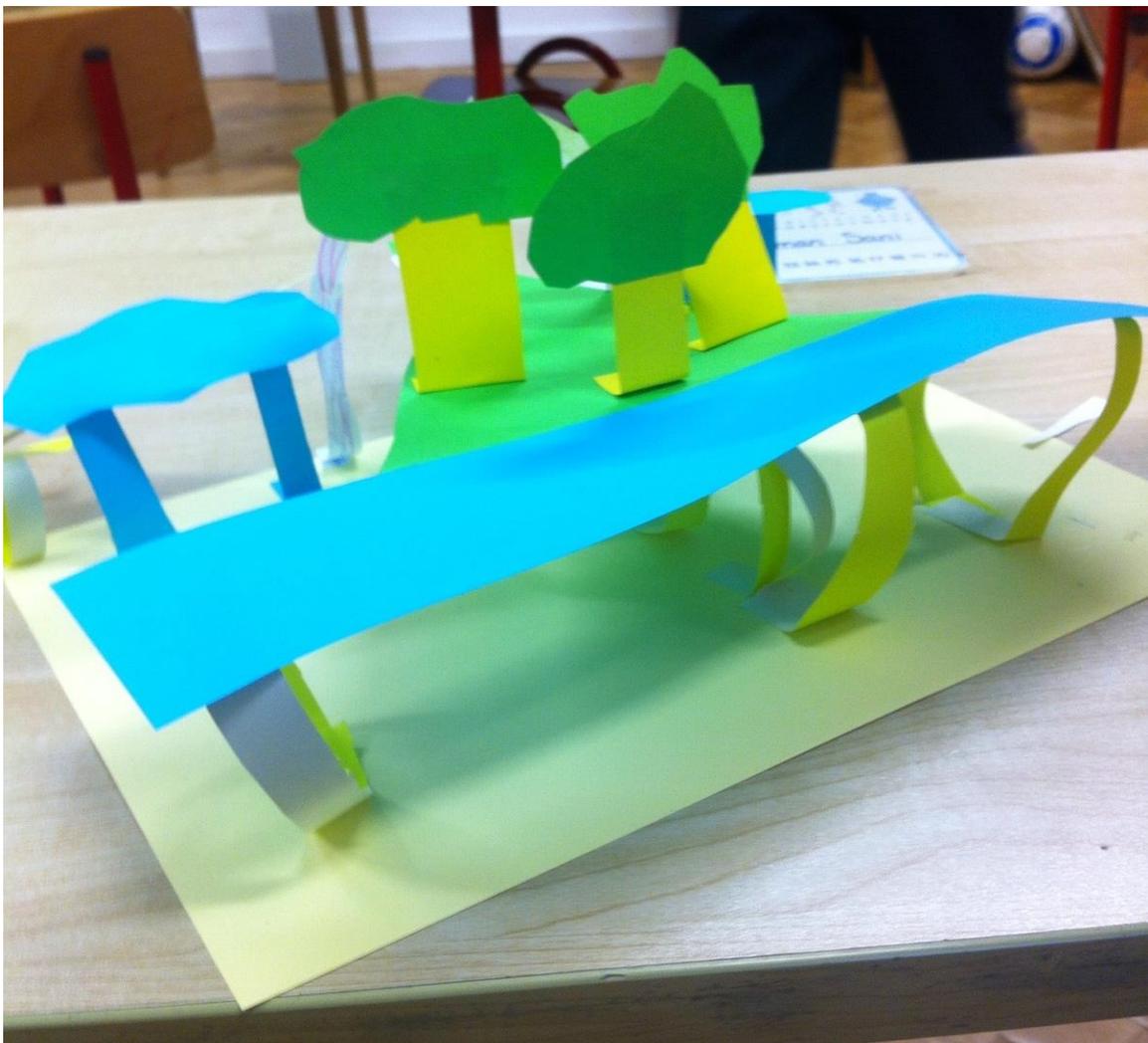
Figure 11. "My Paper World", constructed by a first class pupil

This exchange of lesson ideas, however, was not limited to discussions at PLC meetings, but was similarly pursued via WhatsApp. Indeed when Emma sent photographs of her infant pupils fashioning paper collages of spring flowers from observation (Figures 12–14), others were immediately inspired:

Amelia:

Love the flowers and that they had choice too. I might do something similar and get them to create a flower as they've covered the usual flowers in junior and senior infants. Thanks Emma! (WhatsApp: 24/02/2016)

Image removed from digital copy

Image removed from digital copy
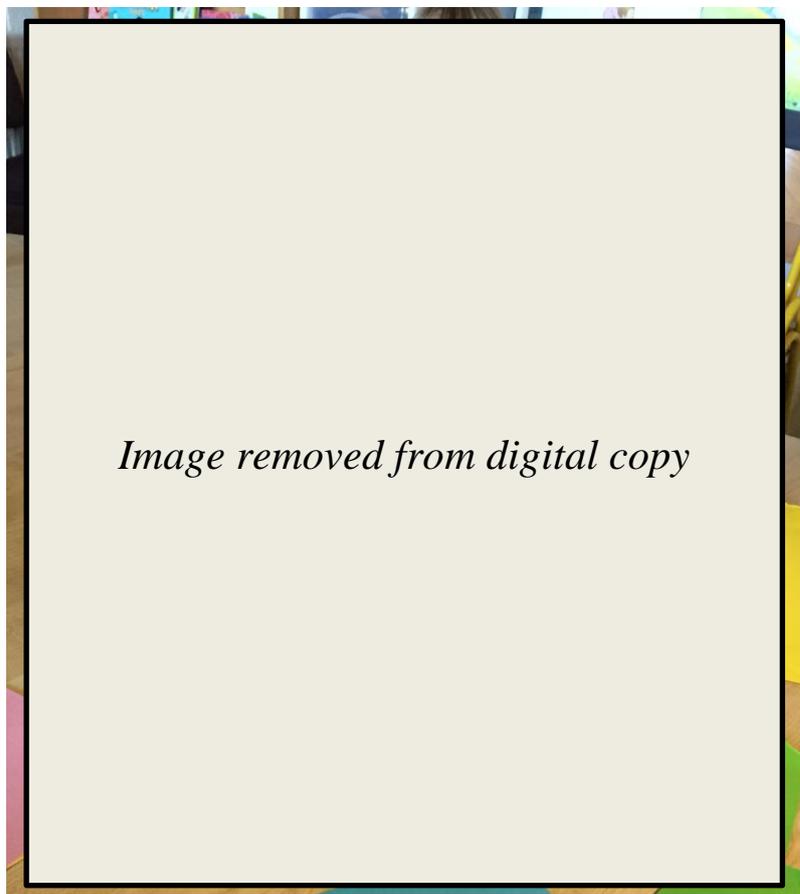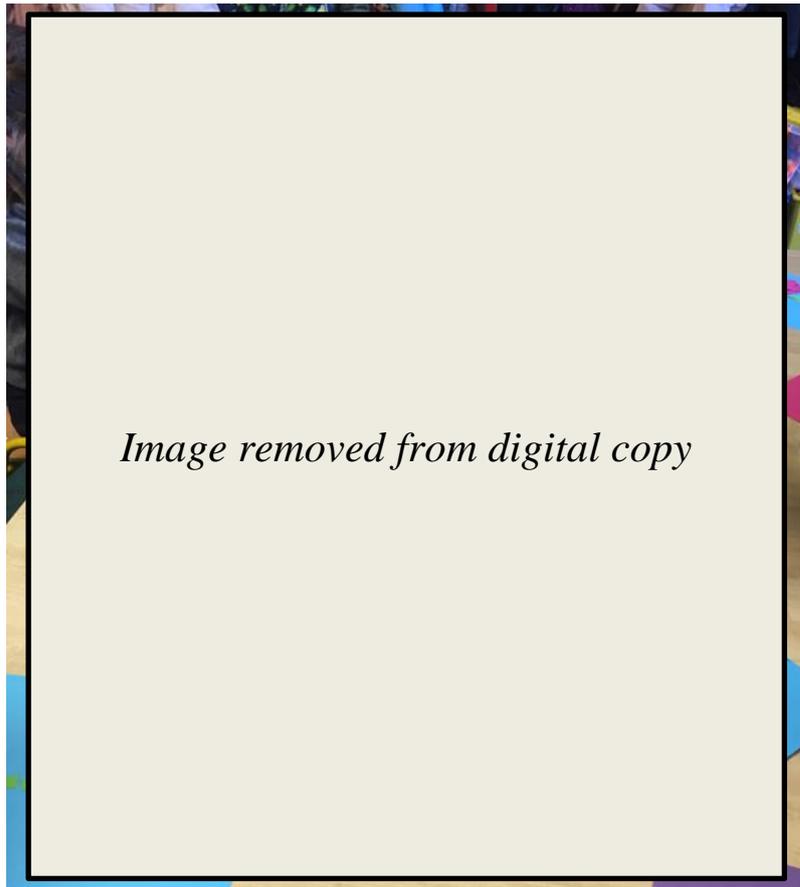
Figures 12 & 13. Junior infant pupils create images of hyacinths from observation
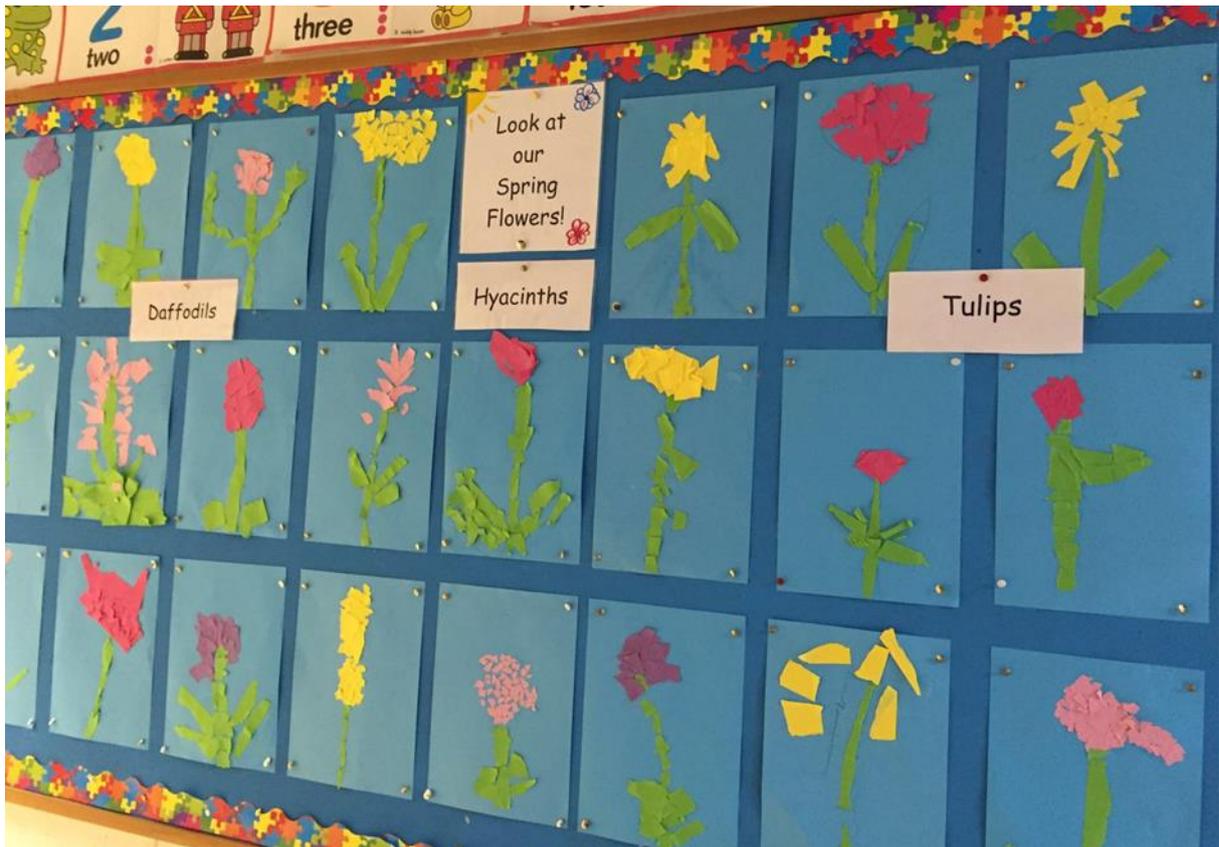
Figure 14. Spring Flowers, a class display by junior infants

Later that week, there was more activity on the WhatsApp thread as Amelia sent images of the imaginary flowers designed and created by her pupils (Figures 15 & 16):

Amelia:

Took your idea and ran with it Emma! They designed a flower that had never been seen before by anyone else. They discovered it in a forest. They drew it then made it out of paper.

Katie:

This is a great idea!! I may rob it too and use it for Mother's Day cards! (WhatsApp, 26/02/2016)

Figure 15. "Halloween Flower": collage and drawing by a first class pupil

Figure 16. "The Shredder": drawing and collage by a first class pupil

In adapting this activity to the needs of a particularly capable second class cohort, Katie utilised Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant* – exposing her pupils to high-quality literature – in order to stimulate discussion on a wondrous garden where "here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars" (2006, p. 15). Using a variety of materials her pupils also created imaginary flowers which they later presented to the significant women in their lives for Mother's Day.

Figure 17. Mother's Day cards created by second class pupils

The tale of these wayfaring flowers – just one of many travelling lesson ideas – provides insight into the nature of the frequent exchanges which took place among participating teachers between formal meetings. While exchanges such as these became commonplace – whereby teachers drew inspiration from one another, borrowing and adapting ideas they believed would work in their classroom – the WhatsApp thread also became a forum in which they could ask for assistance in formulating meaningful, worthwhile arts activities for their pupils. Whether designing lesson activities for the arts disciplines

themselves, or infusing the arts into other subject areas, participating teachers often turned to the group for advice, as illustrated in the following exchange:

Emma:

I've no idea what to do for art this week. I'm doing old and new toys in history, day and night in geography and light in science. Or obviously could do an unrelated art lesson but I'm so bad at thinking of things! Any ideas?

Katie:

Could they create and design their own toy? Look at that artist (sorry forgot his name) who made sculptures out of his kids old toys? I'm the same can never think of anything!

Amelia:

Could you go with a winter theme and look at Kandinsky (with the coloured snow) and paint *If snow fell in colour...*? I know we talked about it before Christmas but it's still winter ❄

Katie:

I'm doing weather this month so we looked at Kandinsky... They really enjoyed it... Does anyone know of any nice winter or general weather poems? Looking for some inspiration for a weather themed art lesson!

Amelia:

Did a great poem this week '*It's Raining in my Bedroom'* I'll send it on.

Katie:

Love it!!!! That's a super one thanks a mill! (WhatsApp: 13/01/2016)

Arising from this brief discussion, Emma's junior infant class subsequently designed toys of the future, while Katie's second class designed, coloured, and later "flooded" their bedrooms (Figures 18 & 19).

Figure 18. "Danger in my Bedroom!": drawing by a second class pupil

Figure 19. "It's Been Raining in my Bedroom": drawing by a second class pupil

While social media proved an invaluable tool to participating teachers between formal meetings, it was at PLC meetings that conversations regarding ideas for and about teaching could take place with an immediacy and fluidity inaccessible over the phone. Ideas grew organically as teachers partook in a back-and-forth: building on the suggestions of one another; offering alternate perspectives, approaches, stimuli, or entry points; and teasing out the practicalities of enactment in their own unique context. The importance of such discussions – whereby the practical classroom application of their professional learning was thrashed out – was affirmed by Emma's assertion that "we were meeting and we were getting proper ideas and then I was going out the next day and using them in my classroom" (Interview: May, 2016). Indeed reflecting upon the build-up to Christmas – whereby, within their school, each participant felt there was a greater emphasis on the product of pupils' learning than on the learning itself – Amelia noted: "I was really buoyed by the last meeting about all the interesting ways to approach a holiday like Christmas without resorting to template art and the same old stories and songs" (Reflective Journal: December, 2015). These were sentiments shared by Emma, who avowed that "last month's ideas saved me" (Reflective Journal: December, 2015). Indeed while discussing her teaching at the subsequent meeting, Emma professed: "I can only say December was hectic and *thank God* we had our meeting when we did, and we got the ideas that we did, because otherwise I wouldn't have got anything done" (PLC Meeting: January, 2016).

Robinson has repeatedly declared teaching to be an inherently creative profession (2011; 2015), and for participants these monthly PLC meetings became a forum in which ideas for and about teaching could be shared, debated, and developed. Not alone did PLC meetings provide a forum in which teachers could listen to the ideas of fellow professionals, but, significantly, where they could vocalise and refine their own ideas. A culture was fostered whereby everybody felt they could have ideas, and that those ideas were both

valuable and valued. This was particularly important to Grace, the least experienced teacher of the community, who claimed "You kind of forget about yourself as a professional. I went into this thinking 'They have so many years' experience', I was so impressed by everybody straight away... Then I realised, 'Well *I* have ideas as well'" (Interview: May, 2016). Indeed for Grace having "a group to bounce ideas off" acted as a catalyst to creative thinking: "You might say something or someone else would say something and it would send a brainwave and you would think, 'Oh Jesus, I have *another* idea!'" (Interview: May, 2016). These remarks, and the experiences from which they arose, are reminiscent of the assertion of famed novelist John Steinbeck that "Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple, learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen".

That this culture of sharing – and the resultant accumulation of practical ideas and resources – was important to participants was made evident on numerous occasions throughout the year, though is perhaps most poignantly illustrated by the fact that they each requested that, once analysed, their reflective journals be returned to them. Indeed as the year progressed these reflective journals became an important planning tool for participants, as indicated by Katie's assertion that while writing her fortnightly plan "I will bring my book with me, just to flick through it because I jotted down so many wonderful ideas that everybody had" (Interview: June, 2016).

Furthermore, the importance that teachers placed on these practical lesson ideas resonates profoundly with the assertion of Fullan and Miles (1992) that what teachers hope to gain through engagement with CPD are specific, concrete, practical ideas that are directly related to classroom practice. Indeed Guskey (2002) has cautioned that CPD which fails to address this requirement is unlikely to succeed. Within the national context the importance that participants ascribed to practical ideas echoes the findings of the aforementioned INTO survey into arts education, whereby respondents – when asked to suggest ways in which it

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would be made easier to implement the aspects of arts education with which they experienced difficulty – cited, alongside regular CPD and greater availability of resources, the provision of practical ideas (INTO, 2010). Those same Irish educators similarly highlighted a lack of ideas as impeding the full implementation of both the visual arts and drama curricula (INTO, 2010). Contemplating the status of the arts in primary education Katie, from her years of experience and observation, speculated that perhaps "people just don't know what to do" (Interview: June, 2016). Reflecting upon her experiences within the PLC, and upon the newfound enthusiasm with which she approaches poetry, Katie highlighted practical ideas as an essential component of her increased self-efficacy and job-satisfaction: "I've done way more poetry this year. Before I found it so daunting and I would just think, 'I don't know how to approach this'. Whereas now, a few simple ideas have made it so much more worthwhile and enjoyable" (Interview: June, 2016).

School-based support.

An important manifestation of school-based support that was emphasised by those teachers participating in Stevenson and Deasy's *Third Space* (2005) was the freedom they were afforded by school authorities. These were professionals who had freedom to innovate, to experiment, and to be creative in their teaching. According to the researchers, they "were treated as artists who had something uniquely important to contribute within and beyond the curriculum content that they deliver" (p. 79). While the five teachers participating in this study were treated as autonomous professionals, free to innovate within the parameters of the *Primary School Curriculum* – something which could be regarded as an affirmation of their value as professionals – they each felt varying levels of support within their schools.

Grace spoke with enthusiasm of the "snowball effect" that her participation in the project had on colleagues (Interview: May, 2016). Not alone did members of staff show an interest in her learning and the impact it had on her professional practice, but they also made

inquiries about her pedagogical approach to various topics and, in some cases, even adapted her lesson ideas to suit their own pupils (WhatsApp: 28/01/2016). Katie similarly declared that colleagues demonstrated an active interest in her involvement in the project, and reported that those co-workers within the same year group had tried out a number of her art and poetry lessons. Amelia – having experienced the free flow of ideas and resources within the PLC – decided that in spite of the competitive cultures in her workplace she would share "her lightning bolt of inspiration" with colleagues (Reflective Journal: March, 2016). In the build-up to the centenary celebrations of the 1916 Rising she created a drama scheme which took emphasis away from violence and warfare and focused instead on the human aspects of the time: the disrupted lives of those living in Dublin's tenements. She noted that "People were really positive. I don't know how many people used the lessons, but ... the feedback was very positive and supportive" (Reflective Journal: March, 2016). Indeed as the year progressed Amelia noticed that her pedagogical practice was beginning to positively influence a co-worker whose lessons in the visual arts had, at the start of the year, exhibited an over-reliance on templates (PLC Meeting: March, 2016). Discussing a recent year-group planning-meeting she enthusiastically professed, "I'm hearing my own words back to me!" (PLC Meeting: March, 2016).

While Grace, Katie, and Amelia each referred to positive interactions within their schools during the course of the year, they did not make any explicit reference to support received from school authorities. Neither principals nor Boards of Management – though having consented to teachers and pupils participating in this study – were mentioned as supporting, or indeed exhibiting an interest in, participants' teaching within the arts disciplines. Indeed for Emma and Elizabeth there were occasions during the year whereby they were left feeling deflated when members of staff, including school principals, failed to recognise the valuable learning that had taken place in the arts. While articulating this

disappointment Emma referenced the isolated nature of teaching, and expressed frustration at the fact that "nobody really knows what you are doing in your classroom other than what you hang *outside* your classroom" (PLC Meeting: January, 2016). These were sentiments shared by Elizabeth, whose December plans were knocked awry with the news that her class were expected to perform a 40-minute play with only a fortnight's notice. Determined to make this as educationally beneficial an experience as possible, determined to take a process-oriented approach, Elizabeth facilitated her pupils in: determining the content of their production; writing the script; selecting appropriate music; creating simple dance routines; designing the set; and creating costumes. While she witnessed first-hand the valuable learning that had taken place, reflecting on the experience of performing for the school community she lamented:

> ...it has made me think a lot more about arts education and how sometimes the things that are most admired are the things that are teacher dictated and led. I was very proud of what we created and I was really proud of the children. And what I found frustrating was other teachers' comments. I'm sure they didn't mean them but it was very much like "Oh that was lovely, but did you *see* so-and-so's production". And the productions that everyone seemed to enjoy the most and the productions that everybody seemed to talk about and comment on were the productions where the teacher had decided everything and dictated everything. I just felt it was an awful pity that sometimes people can't see that when children are given a lot of independence in the creative process... that in itself isn't acknowledged... (PLC Meeting: January, 2016)

Indeed the principal's failure to give any meaningful recognition to this production was not alone a source of dejection for Elizabeth, but also for her pupils. Thoroughly satisfied with both the creation and performance of their play, her pupils' enjoyment of the show was

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subsequently tempered when an evaluative dimension entered the equation. Elizabeth noted that the principal, having watched all performances which comprised the school's annual show, "chose one class to perform their show at the Arts Centre in town. The children were frustrated when another class who did not write their own play, nor create their own dances, were picked to represent the school" (Reflective Journal: December, 2015).

Later that year, when specifically asked what teachers might require in facilitating meaningful arts experiences for their pupils, Elizabeth asserted that "you definitely need the management of the school to understand the importance of the arts, and the benefits of the arts across all subjects when used correctly" (Interview: May, 2016). She further declared that "unless you receive a bit of support... your practices aren't going to change" (Interview: May, 2016), and it is to such change in pedagogical practice that our attention now turns.

Change in Professional Practice

The Teaching Council has stated unequivocally that sustaining and improving the quality of their professional practice is the personal responsibility of teachers themselves (2012). Their *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2012) suggests that in seeking to improve their professional practice teachers ought to: actively maintain their professional knowledge and understanding; reflect upon, and critically evaluate, their own professional practice; and avail of CPD opportunities.

The sentiments evident in this publication – and indeed in other national publications which address teachers' professional learning and development (Department of Education, 1995; INTO, 2014; Sugrue et al, 2001) – reverberate profoundly with the assertions of Dylan Wiliam (2011) who declared:

Teaching is such a complex craft that one lifetime is not enough to master it, but by rigorously focusing on their classroom practice teachers can continue to improve

throughout their career. From teachers, therefore, we need ... a career-long

commitment to the continuous improvement of classroom practice. (p. 12)

Subsequently, engrained and embedded in *Cosán* is a recognition of teachers as professionals

dedicated to growing and developing *as* professionals. Indeed for both Ó Gríofa and Ó Ruairc

(2016) teachers' dedication to in-career learning – upon which they assert sustained

professional practice is dependent – has become "the hallmark of the teaching profession".

Similarly, for those involved in this research, in-career learning was unanimously

conceived of as a professional responsibility of educators nationwide. For these teachers the

assertion that participation in CPD is a professional necessity arose from concerns about: ITE;

inadequate pedagogical content knowledge (PCK); the rapid change which characterises 21st

century life; the potential to fall into uninspired habits or monotonous routines of practice;

near-constant evolution of concepts of "best practice"; and how best to maximise pupils'

learning.

Discussing the professional imperative for teachers to engage in CPD, Amelia

professed ITE to be inadequate in preparing teachers for a lifetime of service. Not alone

because she perceived both the duration and content of the course to be insufficient, but

because those in ITE have not yet experienced the daily challenges that arise in the classroom

(Interview: May, 2015). Teaching practice – though an enormously important component of

ITE – is, in Amelia's estimation, somewhat superficial, as there is "no real connection"

between the student teacher and the class, and ultimate responsibility for that class remains

with their teacher (Interview: May, 2015). Similarly – referring to the necessarily rushed

delivery of curricular modules in ITE and the inevitable deficiencies in teachers' PCK –

Emma surmised that, as the colleges of education "have done their bit", "it should be

compulsory that we have to go out and improve and expand on that knowledge... We can

never be experts in all of it, but we do need to be well-rounded" (Interview: May, 2016).

Katie meanwhile – reflecting upon the importance of teachers' in-career learning – referred to the enormous changes she had witnessed in education during more than a decade in the workforce, and emphasised the importance of remaining abreast of such developments (Interview: June, 2016). She similarly vocalised concerns – concerns shared by Elizabeth and Grace (Interviews: May, 2016) – about entering a teaching comfort zone, so to speak, whereby she might routinely come to rely upon tried-and-tested approaches to delivering and assessing academic content. As Elizabeth professed, "Sometimes, as a teacher, you find something that works and you stick with it and you might not realise it but you are getting stuck in a bit of a rut" (Interview: May, 2016). While falling into such routines might enable the smooth and predictable operation of a classroom, it is unlikely to consistently maximise educational outcomes for pupils. Even more dangerous, however, is the potential for these routines to become perfunctory, unthinking, and uncritical: as Grace mused, "it's very easy, I'd say, to get into a rut of just doing the bare minimum and getting by day to day. If you get into that kind of mind frame, you really are not of much benefit to the class you are in at all" (Interview: May, 2016).

Risk-taking and experimentation.

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene has declared that "imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of their students, in part because teachers incapable of thinking imaginatively ... are probably also unable to communicate to the young what the use of imagination signifies" (1995, p. 36). Fisher (2002) has similarly argued that to cultivate creativity in learners, schools must support creativity in teachers. Creative teaching – "teaching that is not trapped in defensive or routine thinking, but teaching that is innovative" (Fisher, 2002) – flourishes in an environment which values creativity and affords teachers the freedom to express that creativity. However freedom alone is insufficient. Oreck (2004) – in his examination of the role between CPD and teaching practices in the arts – asserted that

learning to use any new, creative approaches to teaching first requires both personal

motivation and a willingness to take risks. This willingness to take risks is, according to

Cordingley (2005), enhanced by teachers' involvement in collaborative professional

development. For those participating in this study, a personal drive to enhance their

pedagogical practice in the arts was made evident not alone in their electing to participate in

the research, or in their sustained engagement with the research, but in their active

involvement in reflective professional conversation and their subsequent enactment of arts-

based pedagogies.

Not alone did participants' professional learning occur in the group context – whether

debating the research literature or discussing professional practice – but their own classrooms

also became powerful contexts for professional learning. This, the combination of discussion

and reflection about practice with active experimentation in the classroom, has emerged in the

research literature as a key component of effective CPD (Bolam & Weindling, 2006). In the

context of this study it was in their own classrooms that teachers: took the opportunity to

explore, in a practical way, the theories of arts education; were willing to experiment; were

ready to take chances; and were prepared to risk disrupting what Thompson and Wiliam

(2008) refer to as "the prevailing classroom contract" (p. 15). Indeed for Grace, upsetting this

classroom contract was, initially, a source of some concern. Reflecting on what she

determined to be positive changes to her professional practice, Grace acknowledged that

"there is that hesitancy to let go and put the onus onto them... I think letting go of the control

is very difficult and that was one of the things I found most difficult" (Interview: May, 2016).

Leahy and Wiliam (2012) emphasise that changes to professional practice, if they are

to be lasting, must be integrated into teachers' existing classroom routines. Consequently, just

as every journey begins with a single step, changes to participants' pedagogical practice were

incremental. From that initial meeting in September – during which the theory and potential

of arts-infusion were discussed – teachers were encouraged to consider their practice and modify their lessons, or indeed elements of their lessons, in light of PLC deliberations. This spirit – not of radical overhaul but of purposeful, deliberative modification – is perhaps best captured by Amelia's declaration: "I said to myself, 'Right, what are the things I am actually going to do this month?' and make it small and realistic" (PLC Meeting: November, 2015). Initially, those "small and realistic" changes appeared in various guises: in Katie's utilisation of mime and still images in revising and consolidating pupils' knowledge of new vocabulary encountered across the curriculum; in Amelia's use of story – into which she also infused drama strategies – in developing pupils' geographical concepts; in Emma's use of song to explore everything from phonics to number; in Elizabeth's emphasis on the arts as an element of culture in her pupils' investigation of people in other lands; and the manner in which Grace utilised her desktop background to expose her class to numerous high quality works of art.

While there were changes to professional practice which integrated seamlessly into teachers' existing routines – such as Amelia's use of VTS in developing pupils' oral language and critical thinking skills (a strategy subsequently adopted by all participants), Katie's introduction of *The Artist's Chair* (whereby children were invited to showcase and discuss their artwork), or the manner in which all participants used lesson transitions to expose pupils to high-quality pieces of instrumental music – there were others that participants found daunting. Whether due to an unfamiliarity with a particular subject area, a perceived deficit in their PCK, or a lack of confidence, there were strategies teachers employed during the year that constituted, for them, a considerable risk. Not alone were teachers risking disorder in the classroom, but there was the very real possibility that adjusting their professional practice would result in a clumsy, less-than-accomplished performance (Thompson & Wiliam, 2007). Thompson and Wiliam (2007), however, have stressed that being a member of a PLC with a collective focus on educational change has the potential to provide teachers with the support

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they need to take such risks. Indeed although the fear that a lesson would "fall flat on its face" afflicted all participants at one point or another (Amelia, Interview: May, 2016), the supportive culture that thrived among this group of teachers was instrumental in encouraging them to take these risks and experiment with their teaching.

Though felt to various degrees by all participants, the initial apprehension and subsequent excitement that teachers experienced in changing their professional practice is perhaps best illustrated through a focus on a single participant: Katie. While reflecting upon her experiences within the group, Katie declared that participation in the research "had a great impact on my teaching. It made me step out of the comfort zone I had built around me over the past 11 years. I feel it motivated me and I enjoyed teaching more" (E-mail: July, 2016). Indeed there were, throughout the year, numerous occasions whereby she pushed herself out of this self-proclaimed "comfort zone" in seeking to place the arts more centrally in her classroom:

> Music is one of the subjects I feel least confident teaching and if I'm honest I often shy away from teaching it. I found it a little overwhelming at the beginning and was unsure of how to start... I decided to begin with listening and responding... I really enjoyed these music lessons and how they allowed children to be creative and express themselves. (Reflective Journal: November, 2015)

> I enjoyed focusing on poetry and intend to use it more often in my classroom. I have to admit it has been something I have shied away from in the past but once you use it regularly you begin to realise it is a great tool to be used throughout several subject areas. (Reflective Journal: January, 2016)

> ...even in the staffroom when I said, "I'm going to do drama now", they were like "Oh God, I haven't done drama..." The amount of people who say it, "I haven't done drama", and I'm one of those people too. I haven't done drama in so long. It's like the

poetry, once you have started you're like, "This is so doable and actually very enjoyable" (PLC Meeting: March, 2016)

Indeed this climate of experimentation that was cultivated and supported within the PLC was replicated in Emma's infant classroom, as is evidenced in her declaration that "We were all just having a go and sure we are all only starting school and we are all just trying our best. Then they saw that no matter what they did it was appreciated and we all just had a go" (Interview: May, 2016). While discussing her teaching as it had evolved throughout the year she professed:

> I suppose because we have done it, it doesn't seem that daunting to me because it's only a little couple of changes really in the grand scheme of things and it's more the change in mentality and you kind of just turn it on and go "Right, I need to just be more mindful of this and more aware of incorporating certain things". (Interview: May, 2016)

Emma's use of the words "mindful" and "aware" is noteworthy in that it poignantly illustrates the importance of conscious, deliberative thought. The change in participants' pedagogical practice wasn't brought about through risk-taking and experimentation alone. Rather, having taken a risk, having stepped outside their tried-and-tested approaches to teaching, participants stood back and asked deliberate questions of themselves and their practice. This reflection – central to action research – would subsequently inform participants' professional practice.

Reflection upon professional practice.

Action research is frequently hailed as a powerful vehicle for the professional development of teachers (eg Kennedy, 2005; Somekh, 1995; Teaching Council, 2016; Villiegas-Reimers, 2003) – not alone in enabling teachers to generate knowledge of practice through practice – but in improving their disposition towards professional reflection (Noffke & Zeichner, 1987). Indeed for those involved in this collaborative action research study,

though not something they considered an automatic or intrinsic element of their professional practice, this inclination to reflect upon their teaching intensified as the year progressed. As Katie attested, "I feel that I have grown professionally and I feel it's making me look at how I teach and what I teach a lot more" (Interview: June, 2016). Emma similarly acknowledged, "Up until this year I would have spent very little time asking, 'Am I doing this properly?' or 'Am I doing this the best way I can?'" (Interview: May, 2016). In fact, when asked whether she believed teachers routinely asked such questions of themselves and their practice, Amelia declared:

> No. I think it should be... I think the first thing you should ever do is stand back and go "What could I have done differently there?"
>
> I don't think all teachers do. We are all guilty of it. You blame the kids or you blame this or it's all "It was a brilliant lesson, I don't know *why* the kids didn't respond well to it"... So I don't think it's automatic. I think it becomes automatic the more you do it. (Interview: May, 2016)

In the national context (Teaching Council, 2016) as well as in international research literature (Bolam & Weindling, 2006; Stoll et al, 2006) reflection and reflective practice are presented as critical components of effective CPD. Throughout the year there were numerous occasions whereby participants in this research, having reflected on their lessons and asked questions of themselves and their practice, recognised and lamented missed opportunities to infuse the arts into their teaching. As Katie noted, "the biggest challenge for me is to be more creative myself. I don't spot the opportunities to use this process until after I have taught something. It's then it occurs to me that I should have done this or that" (Reflective Journal: November, 2015). Indeed Grace, having completed and reflected upon a history scheme of work revolving around the Romans, realised she could have utilised drama pedagogies to

enhance her pupils' learning and encourage them to consider the human element of historical events. She made the following entry in her reflective journal:

> After completing lessons on Pompeii I think drama could have been used to begin the topic using a different teaching / learning style:
>
> Hot seat – lady / child / market person on the day of the eruption
>
> Freeze frame – moment of the 1st eruption / 2nd eruption
>
> Conscience alley – one side to leave straight away / other side saying reasons to stay (November, 2015)

There were also times throughout the year whereby reflecting upon their professional practice led participants to identify adjustments and modifications they would make in improving their lessons in the arts disciplines themselves. Reflecting on the construction lesson whereby her pupils created the aforementioned paper worlds Amelia noted:

> We talked about all the actions you can do with/ to paper first and then set out. In hindsight I would have done a preliminary exploration session allowing them to do some more experimentation with the paper and sticking it down to create abstract pieces before going ahead with the lesson as many kids were frustrated at first and didn't grasp the 3D concept of the paper world. (Reflective Journal: January, 2016)

Similarly Katie, reflecting upon a visual arts lesson in which her pupils' created string prints of snowflakes – a lesson she declared to be one of her "favourite art lessons to teach" – wrote:

> Looking back, I think I would like to spend more time at the start looking at the photos Wilson Bentley took of snowflakes. Also I would try to integrate with music perhaps either using a soundscape or listening and responding to "The Snowman". Or both! (Reflective Journal: December, 2015)

Such reflection was instrumental in facilitating, and indeed driving, a change in participants' pedagogical practice. Central to this reflection, and to the action which preceded it, was the desire to place the arts more centrally in the classroom. As Emma succinctly phrased it, "For everything I did this year it was, 'Well is there a way of working the arts into what I am doing here?' or, 'Is there a way of teaching this through drama or music or whatever?' And there is, there always is" (Interview: May, 2016). In fact the considerable change to participants' pedagogical practice – brought about through experimentation and reflection alike – is perhaps best illustrated in Grace's declaration that, regarding her long-term plans, "I kind of found at one point I just scrapped them" (Interview: May, 2016).

In electing to partake in this study, participants demonstrated both an interest in and appreciation of the role of the arts within primary education: a stance strengthened through reflection upon their professional practice. As soon as she began to reflect meaningfully on her teaching Emma was pleasantly surprised to realise how central music was to her classroom practice, but recognised also that centralising the position of the other arts disciplines would require a concerted effort on her part (Reflective Journal: October, 2015). Similarly Amelia – though firm in her belief in the value of the arts within education – caught herself diminishing the role of drawing in a response-to-reading activity being completed by her pupils:

> ...with the Australian story "Boomerang" the boys responded by writing about the story and then drawing a picture. Some boys prefer to draw the picture first and then write about it. At first my instinct was to stop them "wasting time" on the drawing instead of writing. But I reflected and realised that ... obviously they are more visual and prefer to see what they are writing about. They create their image of the story and then respond to it as opposed to using words to conjure the image and then draw it.
>
> (Reflective Journal: October, 2015)

Not alone did her reflection-in-action prevent her from intervening when her pupils prioritised drawing over writing, but while reflecting upon subsequent lessons which incorporated Dalí's *Swans Reflecting Elephants* and Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals* Amelia found herself taken aback by the arts' inherent capacity to express and evoke emotion. "The potential for using music and images to discuss feelings really struck me", she noted (Reflective Journal: November, 2015). This capacity – and indeed the capacity of the arts to promote curiosity, questioning, and divergent thinking – was similarly highlighted by Grace, who acknowledged that while it would require less effort and preparation to ask children to take out a book, approaching a topic through a relevant art form is something truly worthwhile:

> ...when you are looking at a photo or you are looking at a poem or you are listening to a piece of music it just opens up so much more ... there is so much potential that it's only when your eyes are opened up to it that you really realise how easy it is to integrate it. (Interview: May, 2016)

Katie, once more capturing the mood of the group, and demonstrating how reflecting upon their professional practice merely strengthened participants' commitment to centralising the position of the arts in primary education, declared:

> I know this year, because I was part of this, I probably did reflect a lot more but I also think that once I used the arts within my teaching in different subject areas and saw how successful it was, that made me go "Oh hang on, why haven't I...?" you know? Like why haven't I been using this the whole time? (Interview: June, 2016)

Growth in confidence and an emerging critique of observed practice, ITE, and DES.

Just as respondents to that aforementioned INTO survey into primary arts education emphasised the dearth of practical lesson ideas as an impediment to full curricular implementation, so too was their lack of confidence cited as a militating factor (INTO, 2010).

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Similarly – as has been alluded to in the discussion of teachers' risk-taking – a lack of confidence led those participating in this study to traditionally "shy away" from certain elements of arts education. Indeed Grace's expressed discomfort with both composing and drama perhaps sheds light on the manner in which certain aspects of arts education have come to be neglected in Irish classrooms:

> One of the things I did find this month about music is that I'm not particularly confident in that area... So I found myself, if I was hesitant towards doing it or if I was hesitant toward the plan or the lesson and how it was going to go, I would be less inclined to do it. I would think, "Oh I'll be better prepared tomorrow. I'll have more questions. I'll have thought about it more and I will be prepared for the lesson..." (PLC Meeting: December, 2015)

> I think sometimes the reason why I wouldn't be jumping to do drama – process drama – is because I am self-conscious myself and I'm not confident in my ability to take them where they want to go. (PLC Meeting: February, 2016)

Oreck (2006) has asserted that building teacher confidence must be considered an integral aspect of successful professional development, and as the year progressed – as participants pushed the boundaries; experimented with their teaching; successfully utilised new strategies, methodologies, and approaches; and reflected meaningfully on these changes – they gradually became more confident in their teaching. Such enhanced professional confidence is emphasised in the research literature as an outcome of effective CPD (Bolam & Weindling, 2006; Cordingley et al, 2005). By the time PLC meetings had ceased, each participant demonstrated greater confidence in their own professional competence within the domain of arts education. Just as Amelia professed that becoming part of the PLC "made me more proficient in areas I was nervous about teaching" (Reflective Journal: May, 2016), Emma

emphasised the impact that participation in this study had on her attitude towards the visual arts:

> I don't feel I'm good at it so I always kind of shied away from it. I actually quite enjoy it now. I used to dread it because it can be such a huge workload. It can be really daunting to have 28 or 30 or 32 kids doing something that can go absolutely bananas if you're not prepared for it. And I have done some stuff in here that could possibly have gone bananas but it never does because they're engaged and it's set up in such a way that they're engaged ... I feel that I got so many great ideas that I just came in thinking, "Yeah, I can do this". (Emma, Interview: May, 2016)

In fact not alone did teachers report feeling more adept in areas they had previously been anxious about teaching, but also in those they had always been comfortable with. Katie, reflecting on the considerable change in her professional practice, declared:

> I have used poetry to teach history, I've used poetry more alone in my English because I feel less daunted by it. I have used musical instruments. We have responded more to music. I've used drama in English, in Irish, in history. I have used conscience alleys. I feel even my art lessons, and I have always really enjoyed teaching art, but even my art lessons now are child-led rather than product-led. That's been a huge influence for me this year and the results have been excellent. I have used soundscapes of course, in English, in history, in geography. I've used, gosh I'm trying to think now, I've just used the arts more to teach. (Interview: June, 2016)

This growth in professional confidence, which occurred gradually but consistently as the year progressed, coincided with an emerging critique of practices that participants witnessed in their own schools. This critique arose initially in the build-up to Christmas as participants strove to balance meaningful and worthwhile arts activities with the perceived

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demand to produce something tangible to mark the festive season. The frustration participants felt at the restrictions this demand can place on arts education is perhaps best captured in Elizabeth's remarks about the aforementioned Christmas production:

> Arts education is about opening that window so that the children can look at history or geography or science or maths in a different light and recognise all the different aspects there are to a topic and it's very hard to do that when you have tunnel vision towards an end product of the show. (PLC Meeting: December, 2015)

Amelia, meanwhile, found herself exasperated at the curtailment of children's creativity that accompanied product-led lessons in the visual arts:

> I can see so many teachers in the school doing the same cards they do every year and the same handprint Rudolphs and Christmas trees. ... It's really enraging to see the kids' potential for expression and individuality snuffed out or suppressed. Deep breaths!! (Reflective Journal: December, 2015)

"Those bloody handprint Rudolphs", as Amelia later referred to them (PLC Meeting: January, 2016), and their paper plate counterparts observed by both Elizabeth and Emma in their respective schools, perhaps inspired such critique as participants were actively exploring process-oriented avenues toward festive artwork that would also allow for the development of pupils' artistic skill and creative expression. Emma's junior infants, for example, created snowflake prints (Figure 20), drawings illustrating Christmas Day as it is spent in their home (Figures 21–13), and chalk drawings inspired by Jack Frost. At the subsequent PLC meeting Elizabeth lamented the fact that "the art that everyone was commenting on was all the Rudolphs and they *all* had red noses and they *all* had antlers..." (PLC Meeting: January, 2016). This was a viewpoint reinforced by Emma:

But just to actually comment on what Elizabeth was saying about people noticing things, my snowflakes were on the notice board and ... my Principal walked past one day and said, "Oh, they're lovely" and that was it. I was like, "Did you *see* what everyone else is doing?? Look what I'm doing!" (PLC Meeting: January, 2016)
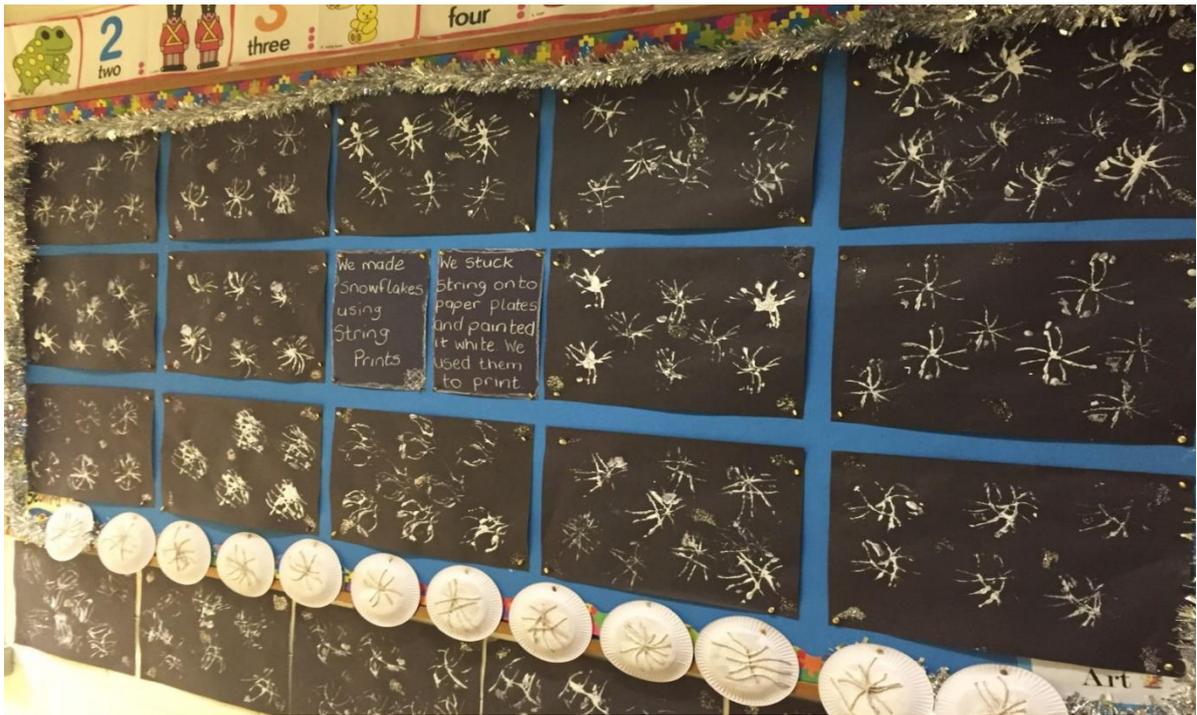
Figure 20. Snowflakes, a class display by junior infants

Figure 21. "My first Christmas in School": decorative baubles by junior infants

Figures 22 & 23. "My first Christmas in School": decorative baubles by junior infant pupils

As the months passed – as participating teachers came to routinely experiment with, reflect upon, and appraise their own practice – this critique extended beyond the content of individual lessons and spoke instead to schoolwide practices which were at best tolerated by, and at worst perpetuated by, school management. Elizabeth, reflecting on what she considered her failure to fully implement all of the arts disciplines encapsulated in the *Primary School Curriculum,* declared:

> What I have noticed is that there are certain aspects of the arts that have been neglected, because when I tried to teach them to this class they were totally unresponsive and embarrassed, for example dance. They point blank refused... To them it wasn't... They hadn't done it since they were in infants. It wasn't part of the PE curriculum. I was *inflicting* something on them. (Interview: May, 2016)

This resistance towards dance as an element of PE – and the inconsistent curriculum implementation which it implies – was similarly noted by Amelia:

> The boys love to dance but funnily enough were disappointed it was being done at PE time. (They just want to play football, it's very irritating. The fact that they ask every week if we are playing football in the hall shows that other teachers obviously just let them do that a lot for PE). (Reflective Journal: March, 2016)

While contemplating the status of the arts within her school – and the inconsistency with which the arts disciplines are approached – Katie declared, "I feel we have all lost our way ... people are so busy and are under so much pressure that often what falls by the wayside are the arts. I feel like they're valued, but I feel we can do more" (Interview: June, 2016). Emma, meanwhile, professed that in her school "the arts would be emphasised, but in a performance and product based kind of way" (Interview: May, 2016). Elaborating on the manner in which this product and performance-oriented emphasis manifests itself, she said of the school's

numerous noticeboards, "there has to be stuff up, but it *has* to look good" (Interview: May, 2016). This pressure, Emma asserted, "comes from the top", and despite the fact that teachers are "not explicitly told" the work they display must be of a certain standard, the implication is there (Interview: May, 2016). Consequently, according to Emma, "the vast majority of stuff you see on the corridors and walls are the perfect ones or the templates... there is no risk involved. I would say there is very little examination involved" (Interview: May, 2016). Similarly this "perfect" artwork adorning the hallways became a source of considerable exasperation for Elizabeth who avowed, "I'm finding it extremely frustrating whereas I wouldn't have noticed last year" (Interview: May, 2016). Speaking about the prevalence of teacher-directed art in her school, and indeed the professional growth which enabled her to identify it, Elizabeth lamented:

> I would often hear teachers complimenting each other on their work and on their artwork and I would look at it from a different viewpoint now where I would say, "Well it *looks* effective..." I would look at it with different eyes and say "Yes, it's striking and it looks effective", but in my head it's not art because the children have all been given the same colours, the same size sheet, they have all been told to do it in landscape. They have all been told literally every single step so there is no room for individuality. (Interview: May, 2016)

While each participant witnessed, in their school, practices in the arts that they came to regard as educationally mediocre or even inadequate, it is important to note that their criticism was of practice rather than fellow practitioners. This sentiment is best captured in Elizabeth's assertion that, "The teachers here are incredibly hard-working and want to do the best for their class, like most teachers out there. So I think it's a lack of understanding, a lack of knowledge..." (Elizabeth, Interview: May, 2016). Reflecting on the year as it had unfolded in her context, Elizabeth asserted that involvement in the PLC was instrumental in bringing

about what she considered positive changes to her professional practice, and affirmed that it would be unfair to expect others to do similarly without guidance or CPD opportunities (Interview: May, 2016). Elizabeth declared, quite simply, that "you can't expect people to change their practice when they don't know what to change it to" (Interview: May, 2015).

Just as participants' growth in professional confidence coincided with an emerging critique of practices observed in their respective schools, so too did their professional development lead to considerable criticisms of both ITE and the DES. As has perhaps been made evident in vignettes illustrating participants' reluctance to teach certain elements of arts education, not one of the teachers involved in this study believed that ITE prepared them sufficiently for implementing the arts curricula. Amelia – who proclaimed that visual arts "was taught terribly" in the college of education she attended – asserted that due to the structure and grading of the course "college actually made me feel worse about teaching art" (Interview: May, 2016). Elizabeth, meanwhile, was critical of what she perceived to be a disproportionate focus on early years education: "we didn't get any ideas on how to do dance with the senior classes. It was all taught for juniors. A lot of the material for the more difficult topics within the arts for seniors are ignored or it's kind of brushed over" (Interview: May, 2016). Emma, though also critical of both visual arts and drama education, echoed Elizabeth's concerns about the teaching of dance within ITE: "I remember I had to spend a *weekend* doing a dance thing in college. I don't think it was actually covered in PE class. We had to give up a weekend if we wanted to do dance" (Interview: May, 2016). These criticisms echo the assertion of INTO delegates attending the *Consultative Conference on Education* (2009) who believed that while ITE had given them some opportunity to develop their own artistic skills, they received little practical advice on how to develop these skills in their pupils (INTO, 2010). Grace – who, upon graduation, felt thoroughly unprepared to teach either music or drama – cited the insufficient length of these courses in ITE, particularly for those

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with no prior knowledge or experience within these domains (Interview: May, 2016). Furthermore, while reflecting on their experiences of arts education at third level, these teachers lamented what they came to regard as the rigid compartmentalisation of the arts disciplines within ITE: as both Emma and Elizabeth emphasised, opportunities to infuse the arts into other subject areas were never highlighted (Interview: May, 2015). However, while critical of ITE, these teachers acknowledged that each of the aforementioned courses were attended prior to their gaining any meaningful classroom experience. Katie, echoing the musings of her co-participants, acknowledged, "Now I have been in a classroom and have the experience of a classroom I relate to it a lot more" (Interview: June, 2016).

Emerging from what participants deemed to be insufficient preparation within ITE to enable the full implementation of the arts curricula, and from the prevalence of questionable practice within the arts disciplines they each witnessed in their own schools, participating teachers became increasingly critical of the DES. While they each conceived of in-career learning as the professional responsibility of educators nationwide, participants were adamant that such CPD should be financed, at least partially, by the DES. As Emma asserted, "it's their responsibility really that the work force is well trained and prepared to teach all of the subjects up to a certain level" (Interview: May, 2016). Like Emma, Elizabeth declared that funding for teachers' CPD should come from the DES. However, for her, the Department's failure to recognise the dedication, commitment, and ongoing learning of those in the teaching profession was also a source of considerable frustration:

> So much of the CPD out there for teachers that teachers engage in, they pay for it themselves. The pay for this themselves to further their learning, update their skills and what they get from it is of huge benefit to the children in their classrooms and I don't feel that's recognised at the moment. (Interview: May, 2016)

However, in light of recent policy developments – notably *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* – and cognisant of the hype surrounding coding and digital learning, participants questioned whether professional development within the arts disciplines would ever be a priority for the DES. Elizabeth, articulating cogently the concerns shared by co-participants, declared:

> ...if it were left to the Department it would forever be IT, English, Irish, maths. I think even within English they would be very much looking at procedural writing, report writing and so on and so forth. ... Even if you look now at the summer courses that are online, there are always free ones available every year. For the last three years all the free courses have been IT because that's what's trying to be pushed at the moment. It's just IT and there's no room for anything else really. (Interview: May, 2016)

The concerns vocalised by Elizabeth resonate profoundly with the lamentations of notable scholars in the field of arts education: that the arts remain on the periphery of schooling, at the bottom of the hierarchy of subjects, where they are conceived of as something nice, but ultimately unnecessary (eg Eisner, 2002; Robinson: 2011). Emma came to find the apathy, at an official level, toward arts education rather disheartening and stated, "there's only so much you can do by having people on the ground doing it. You kind of feel like banging your head against a wall" (Interview: May, 2016). For Amelia, however, this apathy highlighted the importance of bottom-up change efforts, of grassroots movements:

> So when you are talking about the arts and everything you are going to be, "Yea, I'm going to stand up and do this. I'm going to talk to my staff about it", or, "I'm going to turn around to people who I am pally with and say 'No, that's not art'", because there are already people who are receptive to it.

...the more you show the value, and ... make what's going on in your classroom

visible, I think the more people will be like, "Oh, I love what's going on in that class.

God, I'm going to try that!" (Interview: May, 2016)

Time for change to become embedded.

Guskey (2002) has emphasised that, for teachers, change is often a gradual, difficult

process. Developing proficiency in previously unexplored approaches to teaching and

learning is something which requires both time and effort (Guskey, 2002). Cognisant of such

assertions, Thompson and Wiliam (2008) – in explaining their utilisation of PLCs in a reform

initiative focused on embedding formative assessment in teachers' daily routines – declared

that changes to teachers' pedagogical practice require support which is sustained over time.

Particularly if the practices teachers seek to change are entrenched within their daily routine

(Thompson & Wiliam, 2008). These authors further asserted that the support offered to

teachers must embed their learning "within the realities of day-to-day teaching in their own

schools and classrooms and allow for repeated cycles of learning, practice, reflection, and

adjustment within their native context" (Thompson & Wiliam, 2008, p. 12). Consequently, for

those involved in this research the supportive and collaborative culture engendered by the

PLC – through interactions which occurred both in person and via social media – was

sustained over the period of one year. During this time, the de-privatisation of professional

practice, coupled with an open climate of experimentation, allowed for changes to

participants' professional practice to occur gradually. Not alone did this continued support

allow for the incremental change to participants' professional practice – something which

Thompson and Wiliam (2008) assert increases the likelihood of these changes being sustained

over time – but through experimentation in the classroom teachers' learning was rooted firmly

within their context of practice.

Reflecting on the experience of trying to place meaningful arts experiences more centrally in her classroom Katie acknowledged that, alongside the support of fellow participants, time was a significantly important factor: "It wasn't something that I was just able to do quickly. I have needed this year and I have needed the group of teachers I have been working with" (Interview: June, 2016). Contemplating the process of change, Katie further professed:

> I feel like I'm only starting. ... I feel they have been exposed to a lot more art. They have been exposed to a lot more poetry than my previous class would have. They have been exposed to more music than my previous classes have been – stories, fables. I feel they have been exposed to a lot more but I need to make it more routine again because I feel the more I implement it in my weekly routine the easier it gets and the more the kids will get out of it. So I was doing it this year but I feel I was trying to understand it myself so it has taken me the year to really get a handle on it. (Interview: June, 2016)

In the national context it has been acknowledged that achieving deep and lasting educational change takes time: time for teachers to grapple with their fundamental beliefs, to critically examine their classroom routines, and to modify their professional practice on the basis of experience (NCCA, 2009b). Katie's experience of the change process – which she emphasised required both time and perseverance – echoes not alone the wealth of literature focused on teacher change, but also the experiences of her fellow participants. Recalling the considerable and concerted effort required of her in the earliest phases of the research Grace emphasised, "I think the initial stages of it are very time-consuming and challenging and you really have to believe in them and want them to work for them to work" (Interview: May, 2016). However, as the year progressed – as professional conversation and reflection became commonplace, as arts-infused approaches to teaching and learning were gradually

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implemented into teachers' routines, and as teachers examined and revised their teaching within the arts disciplines themselves – participants found that making changes to their practice became less laboured. Grace, reflecting on her sustained attempts to place the arts more centrally in her classroom, declared "It's coming more naturally now than it was at the beginning. It's a lot more natural than it is forced" (Interview: May, 2016). Emma similarly professed that "once you start doing it, it becomes second nature ... and that's the stage you would hope everyone would get to I suppose. That's where I'm at, at the moment" (Interview: May, 2016). For each of these teachers change was, as Fullan and Miles (1992) termed it, a journey: a continuing and ongoing endeavour which required time.

Benefits to pupils' learning.

While personal motivation; a willingness to take risks; reflection upon professional practice; building teacher-confidence; and the provision of adequate time have been identified as integral components of successful teacher development (Bolam & Weindling, 2006; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Guskey, 2002; Oreck, 2004; 2006), for those involved in this study the positive response of their pupils reinforced, and further propelled, changes to their professional practice. As Katie attested, revising her practice within the arts as discrete disciplines, and infusing the arts into her teaching across the curriculum, was something that:

> took time, but every time I did it I enjoyed it so much and I felt that I got so much back from the kids, that I got such a level of engagement, that it made it worthwhile. That it made me want to do it again. (Interview: June, 2016)

Grace – capturing the sentiments of her co-participants – acknowledged that while there were times whereby a teacher "might not be in the mood ... because it does take so much planning", her pupils' reaction to high-quality arts experiences proved both encouraging and motivating (Interview: May, 2016). This is a phenomenon similarly highlighted in the research literature, with Villiegas-Reimers (2003) reporting that CPD which incorporates opportunities for

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teachers' to witness the positive impact their efforts have had on pupils' learning proved effective in sustaining change to their pedagogical practice. Indeed throughout the year there were numerous episodes whereby pupils' positive response to classroom activities bolstered teachers' resolve to sustain changes to their professional practice. Although experienced by all participants at numerous stages throughout the year, this phenomenon is sufficiently illustrated through a focus on three such episodes.

In the initial stages of the research, when she first began to infuse the arts into her teaching, Emma found herself taken aback by the depth of response her junior infants exhibited in reacting to the stories she read aloud (Reflective Journal: October, 2015). Acknowledging that her expectations had been incongruous with the ability of her pupils, Emma confessed that she needed "to give them more credit for what they are able to do" (Reflective Journal: October, 2016). This realisation merely strengthened Emma's determination to infuse the arts into her classroom practice, thus providing pupils with multiple and diverse opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of academic content and concepts. Similarly Katie, whose first foray into arts-infusion saw her utilise mime and still image to consolidate and assess pupils' knowledge of new vocabulary, declared that despite the boisterous classroom this activity initially created it was something she would incorporate into her weekly routine. Watching the enthusiastic participation of her pupils – particularly those she identified as struggling with both reading and concentration – encouraged Katie to persevere (Reflective Journal: September, 2016). Discussing the experience with her fellow participants she declared:

> They were giddy, but everyone was on task. I would have one or two boys who would have difficulty explaining things, or working in a group, but no, there were no issues with that, everybody was on task and they still, even now when I check with the words, they seem to find it a much easier way to remember them because it's like, "Oh

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do you remember so and so was doing that, that means..."

...that worked really well so that's definitely something that I'm going to try and use regularly. (PLC Meeting: October, 2016)

Indeed, during an observation conducted in Katie's classroom more than 8 months later, her pupils were seen employing these same drama strategies in revising vocabulary encountered during a scheme of work revolving around the rainforest (Figures 24 & 25). Reflecting on her teaching throughout the year she declared, quite simply, that "Observing the class become more engaged and involved throughout lessons had a huge impact on me" (E-mail: July, 2016).

Image removed from digital copy
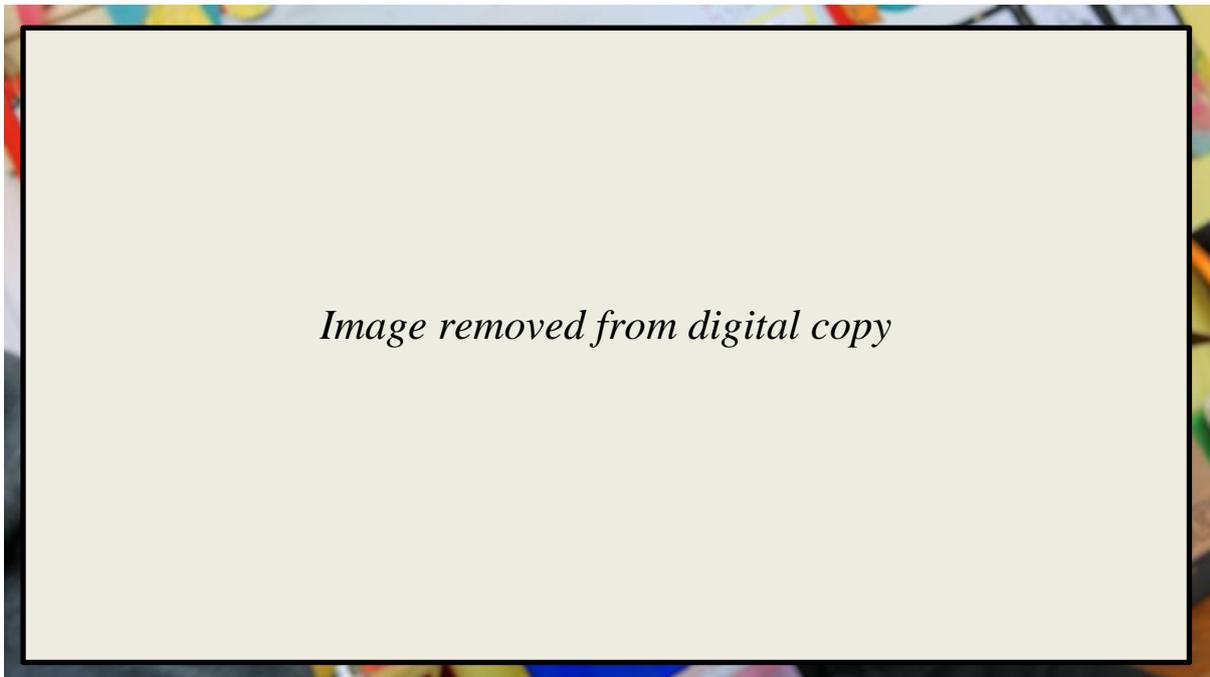
Figure 24. "Grub": still image by second class pupils
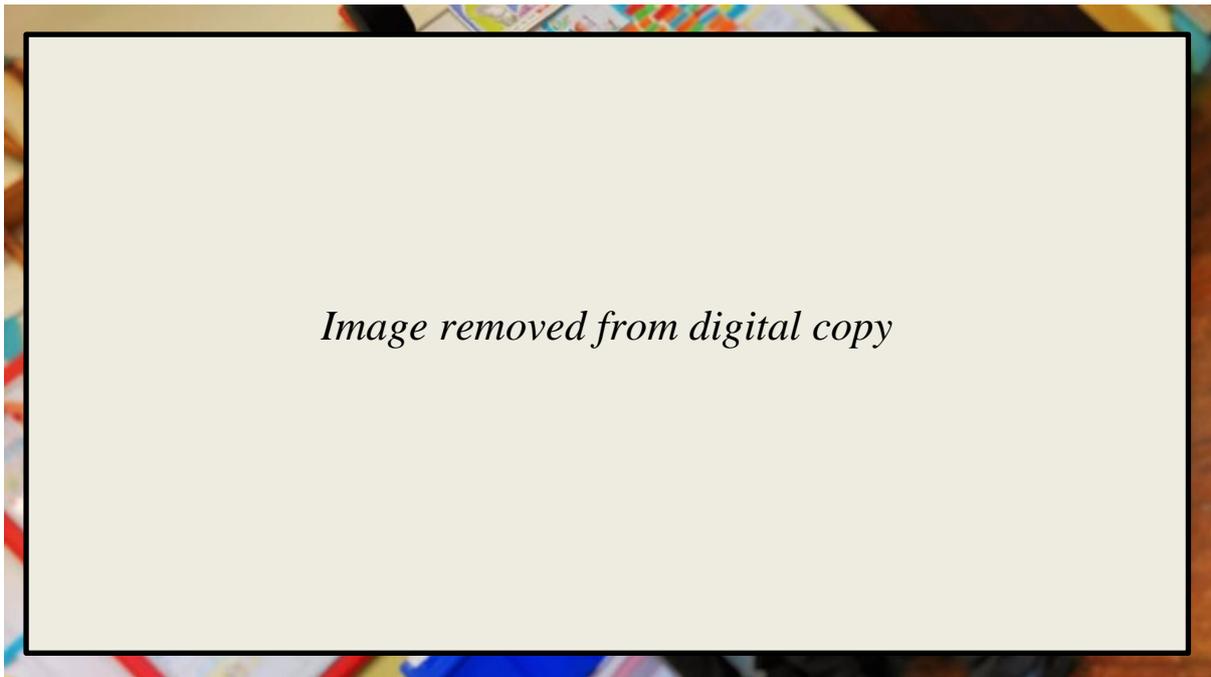
Figure 25. "Habitat": still image by second class pupils

In the build-up to the centenary celebrations of the 1916 Rising Elizabeth began utilising the desktop background of her interactive whiteboard to expose her pupils to high-quality artworks depicting scenes from this tumultuous period in Irish history. This is a strategy that had already been adopted by some of her co-participants, however it was the reaction of her pupils, rather than the reports of fellow teachers, that inspired Elizabeth to continue. Reflecting on the experience she professed, "It's brilliant, it's absolutely brilliant! Every day they came in and were like, 'Ooh what's on the board today?' 'What's this one about?'" (PLC Meeting: March, 2016). Indeed while conducting an observation in her classroom the following May, Norman Rockwell's *The Problem we all Live With* – an iconic image of the Civil Rights movement depicting Ruby Bridges' walk to school – was the focus of her pupils' attention whenever they looked at the whiteboard. This was a painting carefully selected to pique pupils' interest, arouse curiosity, and promote thinking around the topics of prejudice and racial inequality (Interview: May, 2016). Guskey (2002) has declared that teachers are more likely to accept and sustain new practices when these practices are

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perceived as increasing their professional effectiveness and proficiency: for Elizabeth, awakening the interest and attention of a particularly challenging class through exposure to relevant artwork was something that warranted retaining.

Within in the context of this research, pupils were found to contribute significantly to the process of teacher change. Indeed for participants, the response of their pupils not alone reinforced changes to their professional practice, but furthermore encouraged the examination and revaluation of their beliefs about how these pupils learn. As Katie attested:

> I think it makes me think more about how children learn rather than just, "Ok, tick, you've done this subject". You start to realise that there are certain children and this is how they learn. They enjoy it more, they are more engaged. I think it made me look at how kids learn a lot more than I was beforehand. (Interview: June, 2016)

Guskey (2002) has emphasised that, for teachers, voluntary participation in CPD – like that which characterised involvement in this research – is usually inspired by their desire to become a more proficient educator. He further affirmed that "for the vast majority of teachers, becoming a better teacher means enhancing student learning" (Guskey, 2002, p. 382), and it is to the impact that changed professional practice had on pupils' learning that our attention now turns.

Pupils' Learning

While there is a wealth of international research which speaks to the benefits of arts participation among children (eg Bamford, 2009; Catterall, 2009; Ewing, 2013; Hetland et al, 2013; Winner et al, 2013), in the national context very few studies have examined the positive impact of arts involvement on Ireland's youth. Recent examination of GUI data, however, has indicated that among young children, frequent participation in drawing and painting activities is associated with fewer socioemotional difficulties, while being read to on a regular basis contributes to improved vocabulary development (Smyth, 2016). Similarly, among older

children, participation in structured cultural activities – such as music, dance, or drama – and self-directed reading were found to contribute to cognitive development with regard to both verbal and numeric skills. In addition, these activities were also found to enhance children's confidence to manage schoolwork and their general attitude toward school (Smyth, 2016). The strong relationships that were found to exist between arts participation and these academic and socioemotional outcomes, however, were exactly that: associated with arts participation, not necessarily arts education.

Although every child attending primary school in Ireland is exposed to cultural activities as part of the formal curriculum, the amount of exposure to the arts disciplines has been found to vary considerably from school to school, and indeed, even within schools from classroom to classroom (Smyth, 2016). Furthermore, data gathered in the national context – such as that garnered through GUI – does not speak to the quality of this exposure, something which Bamford (2009) emphasises is of utmost important. What follows is a description of the impact – as observed by participating teachers – that increased exposure to high-quality arts experiences within the formal school structure had on pupils' learning.

Pupils' engagement and enthusiasm.

Enhancing their pedagogical practice within the arts disciplines, and exploiting opportunities to infuse the arts into other subject areas, was something that participants affirmed had an immediate and lasting impact upon pupil engagement. This engagement manifested itself in different ways in different contexts: whether pupils worked in silence on independent creative tasks; conducted independent research into topics explored during class, or voluntarily completed schoolwork at home; moved with animation and enthusiasm in response to music; worked collaboratively to compose an original piece of music (Figure 26); sat entranced during a teacher read-aloud (Figures 27 & 28); zealously and effectively communicated a story through creative dance; or walked slowly and cautiously through the

rubble of Sackville Street, what was consistent were participants' reports of pupils'

enthusiastic engagement.
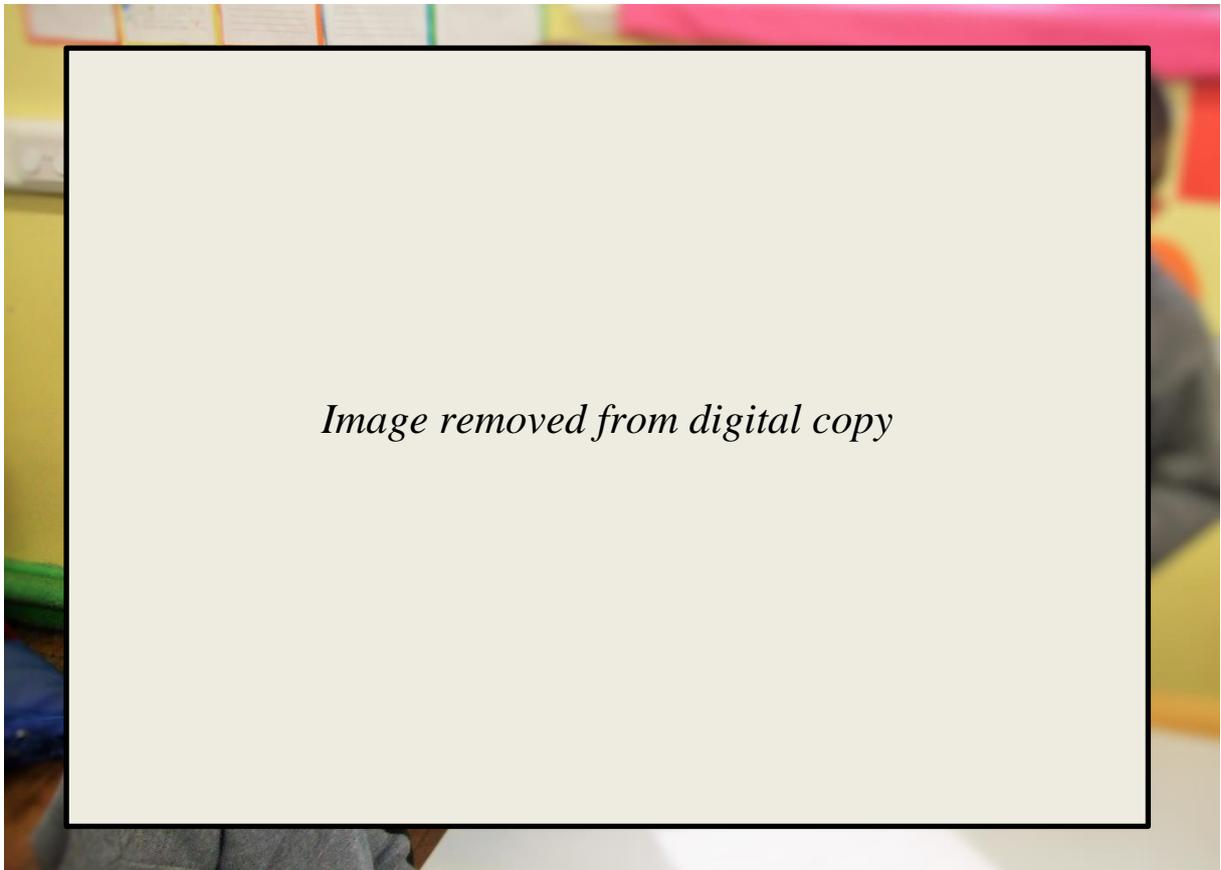
Figure 26. Second class pupils compose a piece of music inspired by *The Planets*

While participants observed greater levels of pupil engagement as a result of increased

and enhanced arts exposure – with Grace happily describing her pupils as being "excitable

and enthusiastic about school" (Interview: May, 2016) – they similarly acknowledged the

importance of carefully selecting stimuli which would capture the imagination: stimuli which

would arouse, motivate, and elicit a range of creative responses. As the year progressed, this

became increasingly apparent to participating teachers. As Katie remarked, "it's very

important, the content, and that you pick the right painting. I'm starting to realise that more

and more, that is key because otherwise it's kind of futile. It's so important to pick the right

poem, to pick the right topic..." (Interview: June, 2016).
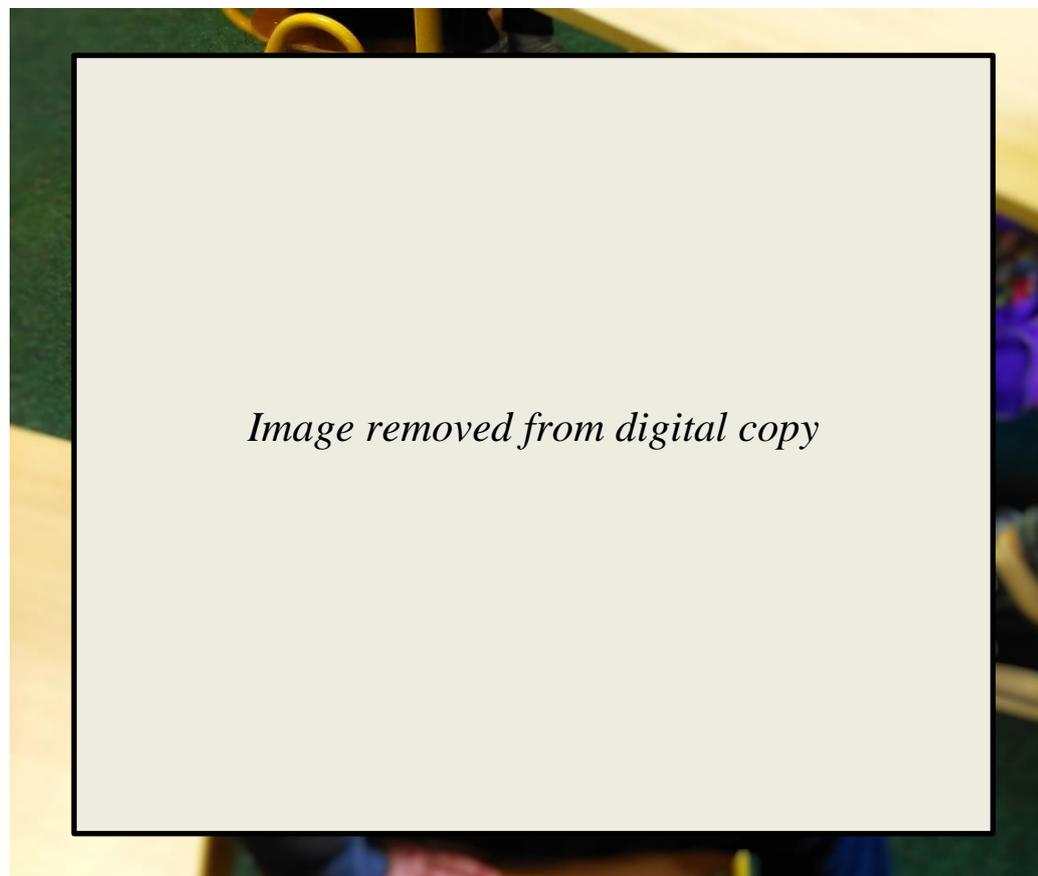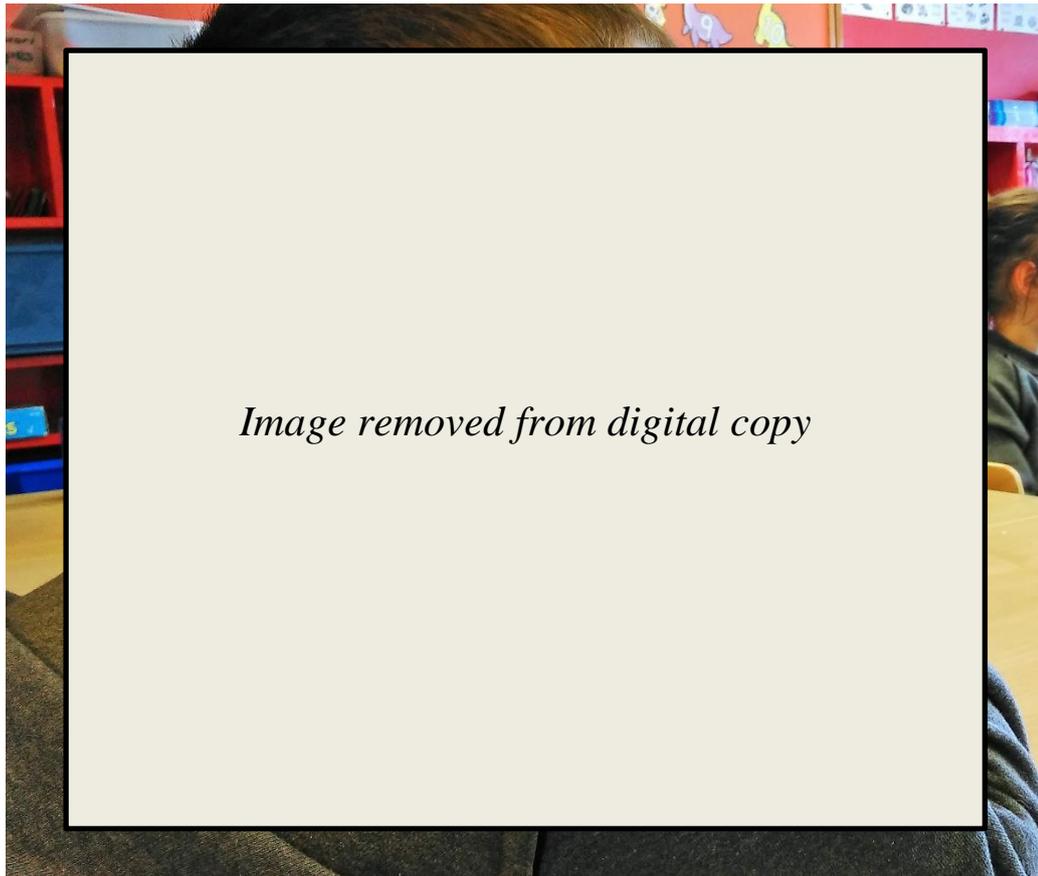
Figures 27 & 28. Junior infant pupils listen to *Wolf's Magnificent Master Plan*

While participating teachers and their pupils explored numerous noteworthy topics throughout the year, none captured the imagination quite as powerfully as the 1916 Rising. The centenary celebrations – marked on both the national and international stage – required that schools nationwide, regardless of the ages of their pupils, explore this significant chapter in Irish history. In providing a safe, suitable, and age-appropriate environment in which young children could meaningfully investigate the insurrection, Amelia created a drama scheme in which her pupils' could explore, through the fictional lens, the impact it had on the ordinary people of Dublin. Her pupils were immediately captivated: from that first community-building activity whereby they each formed part of a mystery machine to their entering into role as a resident of a Dublin tenement. In the initial stages of adopting the part of such a character, Amelia's pupils assumed a variety of roles: she observed that "Some kids decided to be kids out on the street playing games like hopscotch and skipping and stuff and then others were inside cooking the dinner or washing the clothes" (PLC Meeting: March, 2016). After that initial session Amelia's pupils were eager to revisit the tenements and resume their roles:

> They just keep asking "When are we doing drama? When are we doing drama?" and it was funny because the next time we went to do it, I just called them all into the circle and I moved the desks back the way I had them ... and I asked, "What do you think we are doing now?" and they went, "*Ohhh, drama*!!"
> They knew straight away because they knew where the desks were and they were like, "That's the house" and, "That's outside" so they went straight to where they were the last time and they got back into their roles. (PLC Meeting: March, 2016)

After Amelia introduced the problem – that a nearby tenement was on the verge of collapse as a result of the ongoing violence – her pupils engaged wholeheartedly in characterisation,

generating and accumulating information about their character while discussing whether or not to give assistance:

> ...they talked about whether we should or shouldn't go and help the other family ... So it kind of brought in the whole thing that this has consequences. We were all here cooking our dinner and playing on the streets but for other people it did have consequences. The things they came up with were great, they were like, "We could get shot", "What if other houses collapse when we are on our way?" All this sort of stuff for the reasons we shouldn't go ... I did the conscience alley then and I walked down the middle. And the other ones were like, "We should go... we can help them". Another one was like ... "What about the babies? We should be helping the babies." (PLC Meeting: March, 2016)

Amelia reported that the boys "engaged brilliantly with the scheme" (Reflective Journal: March, 2016), and as the drama progressed she kept participants abreast of developments within the fiction:

> Since we're going to be climbing through the rubble on the streets to travel two streets over I've decided I'll set up the class while they're out at lunch. I'll put tables upside down, pile up boxes, have chairs scattered etc to represent the mayhem and destruction. Should be a surprise when they come back from yard! ☺ (WhatsApp: 01/03/2016)

During the subsequent session, whereby her pupils tried to carefully navigate a path through the wreckage, a traveling learning support teacher happened upon the chaos. Struck by the engagement of Amelia's pupils, when next in the school he resolved to tell her so:

> He sought me out today as last week he came in while we were prancing around the classroom in our 1916 drama. We pretended he was a soldier and he played along. He

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said he'd been thinking about it all week and wanted to compliment me. Said the kids

were so engaged and didn't break role when he came in. Said he's been in learning

support for 10 years and it's the first time he's seen a proper drama lesson taking place

in a class. He was really struck by it and wanted to let me know. Was lovely to hear

both for myself and as a reflection on the work we've all done as part of this group

🙌🙌🙌 (WhatsApp: 15/03/2016)

Pupils' behaviour.

While participating teachers each encountered some minor behavioural issues in their

classrooms, for Amelia and Elizabeth – both working in DEIS schools – these behavioural

issues proved to be more frequent and considerably more challenging. For both of these

teachers however, increased pupil engagement and enthusiasm during arts and arts-infused

lessons moderated, to varying degrees, such behavioural concerns.

For Amelia, not alone did her pupils' positive response to high-quality arts

experiences contribute to sustaining and further promoting changes to her professional

practice, but this positivity also helped to foster a more constructive relationship between her

and her pupils:

> I was thinking, "Even if they are going to do my head in at least they are going to
>
> enjoy something or learn something..." But it made me just like them as a class ... the
>
> more I did stuff like that the more I grew to like them, and it made it a lot easier. I
>
> think, especially for a class like that, they needed it. They needed not to be sitting
>
> down working on books and they have learned so much more without it. (Interview:
>
> May, 2016)

Indeed Amelia reported that her most positive memory of the year was of an arts-infused

geography lesson examining homes in the local community (Figure 29). Having brought her

pupils to the school's rooftop garden – a disruption to their classroom routine with the

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potential to provide considerable opportunity for misbehaviour – Amelia encouraged them to survey and discuss the scene before asking them to record, through drawing, the buildings in their local environment:

> There was complete silence while they set to work. Heads tilted, tongues absentmindedly stuck out and bodies shifted to get comfortable while drawing. Some chat began about what each other was drawing, some children asked questions about the buildings they could see ... The vocabulary for the theme of homes was covered and understood within minutes, as was horizon, background and foreground. Some chose to draw one building, others many, some added in cars, birds, people. But all were engaged and having fun and learning. It was sunny (if a bit windy) and I pulled out my camera and snapped as many pictures as I could to grasp the moment. The photos were great, the children's drawings were magnificent, the moment is gone but it was so energizing and bloody lovely! (Reflective Journal: January, 2016)

Figure 29. First class pupils examine and draw the buildings in the locality

Similarly, as early as October, Elizabeth observed that as pupil engagement was heightened, classroom behaviour became less disruptive. Reflecting on an English lesson whereby – having listened to a teacher-modelled read-aloud of *I am David*, accompanied by an atmospheric John Williams composition – her pupils were required to draw their prediction for the future of the novel, Elizabeth noted:

> What struck me most about the lesson was the fact that every child was engaged in the activity. I have a class full of "movers and shakers" and this activity was the first time that I have seen them all so focused that they aren't engaging with those around them. (Reflective Journal: October, 2015)

As the year progressed, Elizabeth designed numerous arts-infused lessons which succeeded in capturing the attention of her pupils: whether designing ear muffs in science, or consolidating their knowledge of length through drawing (Figure 30), disruptive behaviour was at a minimum.
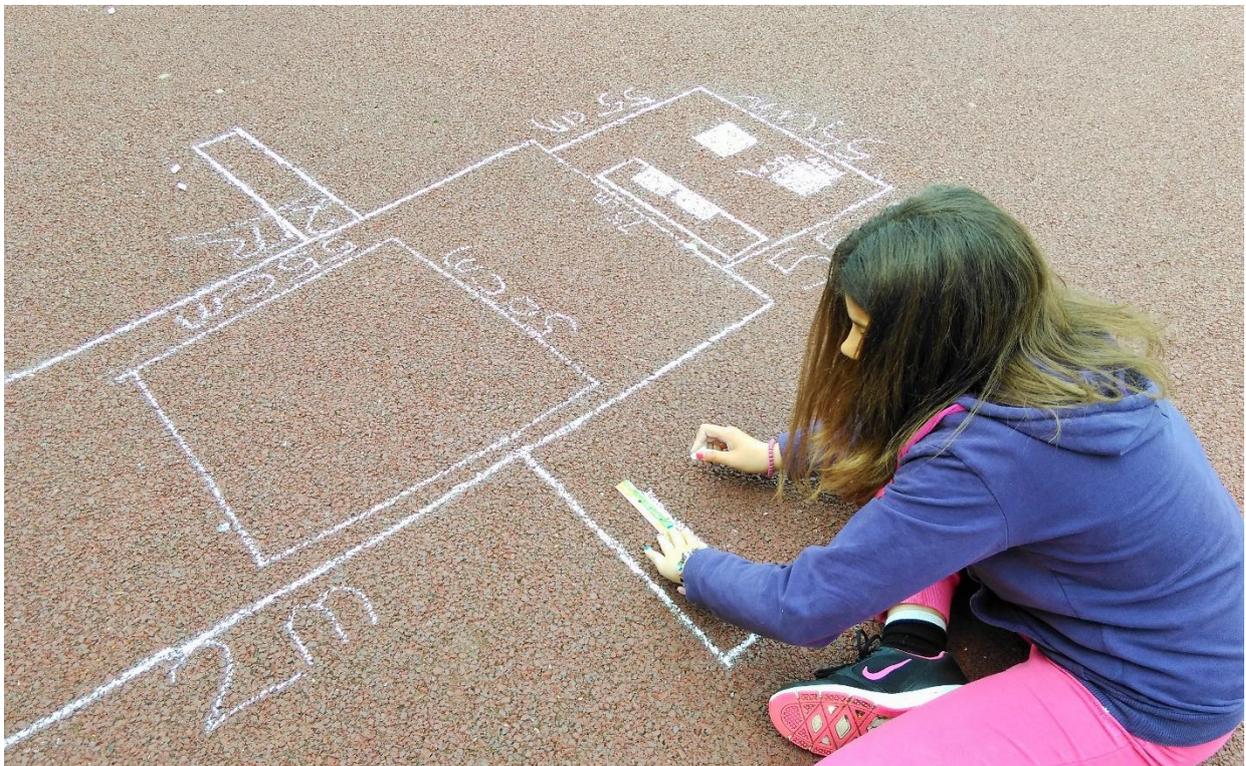

Figure 30. Using lines of varying length, a fifth class pupil draws a robot

While the improved behaviour that became commonplace during arts-infused lessons was also evident in discrete arts lessons, Elizabeth was concerned about introducing her class to percussion instruments. However she found herself pleasantly surprised when – in response to *Carnival of the Animals* – her pupils diligently set about the task of creating a group composition to represent an animal of their choice:

> I was shocked with how each child in the class totally immersed themselves in their composition. I had expected that children may mess with the instruments but it was the exact opposite. For the first minute or two children made as much noise as possible, but after that they were utterly engrossed in perfecting their composition. The children were brilliant at "layering" the sound with each child joining the composition at different times. (Reflective Journal: January, 2016)

Although increased exposure to the arts didn't eradicate all challenging behaviour from her classroom, Elizabeth affirmed that the extremely defiant behaviours to arise during the year were absent from arts and arts-infused lessons. Indeed, for Elizabeth, one of the most pleasant moments with her class came at the close of the year when – in recognition of her forthcoming wedding – her pupils surprised her with homemade cards filled with messages of celebration, congratulations, and well-wishes:

> So I got a wedding present from my class yesterday and all the kids had made us wedding cards. They said "Oh you will love them because we made them really individual and we were all creative". So cute and shows that they learned to think for themselves a bit more (I think!) Pictures to follow! (WhatsApp: 01/07/2016)

Pupils' confidence.

Among participants an observation to arise consistently and repeatedly throughout the year was the positive impact that increased and enhanced arts experiences had on pupils' self-

confidence. Reflecting upon this phenomenon, Elizabeth emphasised what she believed to be distinctive about the arts within the primary curriculum:

> Look at all of it from poetry ... right through to the drama ... a lot of it is allowing for the children's voices to be heard, that they get to dictate some of what they're doing. It's creative. They get to choose their own process and choose where they are taking their piece of learning to.
>
> Whereas when you compare that to something, maybe like Gaeilge, they don't have that same freedom. It builds up their confidence then, the fact that they have that freedom to push the learning boundaries and say "Well this is what I'm going to do" and "This is what my artwork is about" and they have a little story behind it ...
>
> It gives them a bit more autonomy, is that the word? Autonomy in their learning.
>
> (Interview: May, 2016)

Elizabeth asserted that this self-confidence – which developed gradually but steadily in her pupils as the year progressed – shone through to her on a daily basis (Interview: May, 2016). Indeed these pupils – who, a mere 6 months earlier, had intentionally destroyed their schoolwork to prevent her from reading it – became increasingly assured in their creative endeavours, with some even asking that their writing be presented to their peers:

> One child asked me to read his diary entry to the class. This led to many children enthusiastically offering their entries up to be read. Children offered praise and words of encouragement to each other. As we have had some difficult relationships between children in the class, this was a lovely moment. (Reflective Journal: March, 2016)

Similarly Grace, who had carried her class from third through to fourth, found herself taken aback at how open her pupils had become:

They are far more willing to try things than they were before ... before they were quite hesitant about making mistakes. They wouldn't try something because they were fearful of if they did it wrong. Now they are more enthusiastic. They are like, "Oh sure we'll give it a go" and "It's ok to make mistakes". They are more open about things and I think it has helped their self-esteem and their confidence alongside their academic development. (Interview: May, 2016)

Indeed her pupils' first foray into composition – a venture into unfamiliar territory – saw many of them become nervous at the prospect of performing for others (Reflective Journal: September, 2016). However, as exposure to the arts and arts experiences became more commonplace, her pupils' confidence, self-esteem, and their willingness to participate were greatly enhanced (Interview: May, 2016). In Amelia's classroom – where these gains were similarly witnessed – increased utilisation of the arts within her teaching gave her a fresh perspective on a pupil she had initially perceived as struggling. As time progressed what became apparent to Amelia was that this pupil, rather than struggling with the content of lessons, was struggling with the possibility that he might make a mistake:

The ability was always there but he was so afraid of getting things wrong but you don't get it wrong in music, you don't get it wrong in drama ... You can't get it wrong when you're writing your own poem, it's your poem. I find that has brought him on in everything and I would put it down to this because I saw the change in art first. (Interview: May, 2016)

While each teacher regularly alluded to the impact that frequent arts exposure had on the self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and even the relationships among their pupils – gains that McCarthy and his co-authors (2004) hypothesised would become palpable within an arts-rich culture – Emma conversely cautioned that, all too frequently, if pupils "are not achieving in English, Irish, or maths it can really be detrimental to their confidence in school

overall" (Interview: May, 2016). She consequently emphasised that the heightened sense of self-worth she witnessed among her pupils was especially important for those whose strengths lie outside these core subjects:

> There are others who have struggled with other subjects and have come on really well or have become really confident with the drama and the music and the art and you can see that's where their talents will lie ... it's important to have something that they're good at. (Interview: May, 2016)

These sentiments – shared by all participants – echo Robinson's (2015) assertion that it is "essential that all students have proper opportunities to explore the range of their abilities and sensibilities in school" (p. 87). Affording pupils the opportunity to examine, create, and respond to a variety of art forms; to express themselves through the visual, language, movement, musical, and dramatic arts; and to showcase these creative endeavours empowers pupils to develop confidence in themselves as learners, and indeed as individuals. As Eisner (2002) has asserted, the arts "help students recognize what is personal, distinctive, and even unique about themselves and their work" (p. 44).

Enhanced learning outcomes.

The central purpose of teaching is to facilitate and promote pupils' learning (Robinson, 2015), and, according to participating teachers, increased and enhanced arts experiences – as well as promoting greater engagement, militating against disruptive behaviour, and raising the self-confidence and self-esteem of their pupils – contributed significantly to enhancing pupils' learning outcomes.

Referring to the dramatic transformation her perception of pupils' ability underwent throughout the year, Emma professed, "now I get really defensive if people say that infants can't do anything and I get really like, 'Of course they can'" (Interview: May, 2016). As the year progressed – as creative arts experiences were positioned more centrally in her classroom

– Emma found herself taken aback at the depth of learning her pupils exhibited. Whether expressing themselves through movement, music, or the visual arts; engaging in dramatic play; transferring their learning from one curricular area to another; or articulating their thoughts with greater proficiency, what became apparent to Emma was that her pupils were making considerable progress in their learning:

> They are up singing and dancing and they are drawing pictures for everything because they can't write but where I have noticed a huge improvement is in the engagement, the oral language, and being able to take part and actually verbalise what they are thinking, where they are going, and what's actually happening. That's the huge improvement I have seen ... I think actually their pre-writing skills as well, I don't think the other classes are doing as well. We are drawing the beginning, middle and end. We are drawing what comes next. We are doing all that kind of stuff and they are really engaging with all the books they are listening to and reading and everything, so that's where we are. (PLC Meeting: March, 2016)

Indeed the development of her pupils was such that, as the year drew to a close, Emma found herself concerned at the prospect of their moving on to a teacher who might not appreciate either the value or importance of arts experiences:

> But it's gone to the point in the year where I am kind of worried that they are going to go on to a teacher that doesn't approach it in the same way and that ends for them which is sad as well. But I feel like I have exposed them to something very different and I think their experience ... in this room was very different to experiences in other junior infant classrooms, which is nice because it's their first year in school and I wanted it to be something special and I want them to have those skills now for the rest of their school career. (Interview: May, 2016)

Reflecting on the impact that increased arts exposure and participation had on her pupils' learning, Amelia emphasised not alone the development of their skills within the arts disciplines themselves, but also the improvement of their ability to think:

> They are better thinkers and they are better at reasoning with their thoughts because that's what you have to do in the arts. If you are doing drama and someone is on one side of a conscience alley and they have to say to you, "Right you have to do something", they have got to reason it, they can't just say, "Yea, you have to do it". So they are actually using their thinking skills and they are putting themselves in someone else's shoes and all that sort of stuff that they need to be able to do ...
>
> I thought they were really strong like that anyway at the start, but then I look back at September and think no, they weren't. They have actually really come on in their thinking and their reasoning and it's affecting their writing. (Interview: May, 2016)

This enhanced thinking and reasoning was similarly referenced by Grace, who referenced her pupils' evolving capacity to ask sensible, insightful questions (E-mail: March, 2016), and by Katie, whose pupils gradually learned to "critique work and debate theories and opinions clearly" (E-mail: July, 2016). For Katie, however, the most significant impact on her pupils' learning arose as a result of her infusing the arts into non-arts disciplines:

> Children became more engaged and participated actively throughout lessons. There was an improvement in oral language and over time students were making connections between different topics. They were encouraged to be creative and work independently ... Arts-infusion enabled all children in the class to take part in lessons. I noticed that children who often switched off during lessons were taking part in class discussions more frequently. Also, visual learners were given more opportunity to express themselves and show understanding of a topic. Children's confidence in their own ability definitely improved. (E-mail: July, 2016)

Indeed the positive impact that arts-infusion had on pupils' learning was similarly emphasised by both Elizabeth and Grace. For each of these teachers, using the arts to provide multiple and varied entry-points into curricular content not alone heightened pupil engagement, but also provided pupils with more opportunities to access, come to an understanding of, and retain information. Grace, in particular, highlighted how beneficial she perceived arts-infused lessons to be for those pupils whose talents lie outside the core subjects. Speaking about such a pupil, she declared:

> She would be quite weak but she's a fantastic artist and she is quite musical as well, but when you are infusing them into other curricular areas ... she seems to be getting a better grasp on the curriculum now than before ... Her understanding is enhanced. (Interview: May, 2016)

Grace further emphasised the positive impact that arts-infusion had on such a pupil's attitude toward those core disciplines: for example approaching mathematics through the arts – whether examining, creating, or responding to an art form – has the potential to counteract both a negative self-image regarding, and a negative attitude toward, the subject (Interview: May, 2016). This was a point similarly stressed by Elizabeth, who asserted that in arts-infused lessons, pupils "don't confine themselves as much ... they are a bit more open" (Interview: May, 2016). Elizabeth further professed that providing her pupils with multiple approaches to a topic not alone increased their ability to retain information, but also gave them a broader perspective on that topic. This was a point similarly raised by Emma, who professed that, through the use of arts-infusion, pupils "have a broader understanding of a certain topic because it's being done from lots of different angles" (Interview: May, 2016).

The impact that participants' enhanced professional practice had upon their pupils' learning resonates powerfully not alone with the wealth of arts education scholarship (eg Bamford, 2009; Brustein, 2016; Catterall, 2009; Ingram & Seashore, 2003; McCarthy et al,

2004; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005), but also with the research literature pertaining to teachers'

professional learning. Indeed Cordingley and her co-authors (2005) have highlighted that,

among pupils, a demonstrable enhancement of motivation; increasingly sophisticated

responses to questions; more positive attitudes toward specific subjects; and improved

academic performance – gains similarly reported by participants in this study – are among the

substantial outcomes of effective teacher professional development.

Satisfaction, Fulfilment, and Pride

This was an academic year that saw teachers and pupils alike embrace opportunities

for learning, take risks, push boundaries, tackle new challenges, and examine and reflect upon

their classroom experiences. Amid all of this activity – indeed as a direct result of this activity

– there emerged, on numerous occasions, a blossoming sense of satisfaction, fulfilment, and

pride. While this is a word that often carries negative connotations, the pride I refer to here is

the sense of satisfaction felt at working to the best of one's ability, at having that work

recognised and valued, at having a positive impact on another person. This pride was

multifaceted, encompassing the sense of satisfaction pupils demonstrated in their learning, the

pride teachers demonstrated in that same learning, and the enhanced fulfilment teachers felt

with their own professional practice.

Pupils' satisfaction with their own learning.

By their very nature, works of art – whether musical, dramatic, visual, movement-

based, or language-based – are meant to be shared (Stevenson & Deasy, 2002). Within the

context of education, arts experiences often culminate with the creation of a tangible product:

a product which pupils can perform or exhibit. According to Stevenson and Deasy (2002), this

prospect of performance or exhibition "endows arts learning experiences with a purpose that

focuses energies and heightens the importance of its challenges, adding another dimension to

the power of the arts to matter to students" (p. 28).

Across each of the five classrooms this facet of learning experiences in the arts – the creation, individual or collaborative, of an artwork shared with an external audience – not alone demonstrated to pupils that their learning in the arts was both valuable and valued, but provided a forum in which they could articulate the process they had gone through in creating that work. In each classroom, pupils of all ages and abilities demonstrated a sense of satisfaction and pride in their own learning. This pride manifested itself in many ways: in pupils requesting permission to take their work home to share with family members; in their friendly jostle towards the teacher to present and discuss their work; in sneaking their work out to yard to show to friends in other classrooms; in walking slowly to admire their work on the corridor; in asking that their writing be read aloud to their peers; in excitedly informing the teacher that "I added that bit in at the end! Just there! It wasn't planned!" after performing a collaboratively composed piece of music (PLC Meeting: December, 2015); in their eagerness and enthusiasm to occupy the artist's chair. Indeed after a lesson in the visual arts whereby pupils – in response to an array of Rousseau's tropical paintings – created drawings of a previously undiscovered creature living in the depths of a mysterious jungle (Figures 31–33), Katie reported intensified demand for the artist's chair. Her pupils – who she described as being "just so proud of their work ... so pleased with themselves" (PLC Meeting: February, 2016) – continued to describe and present their creatures from the artist's chair for over a fortnight.

Figure 31. "Mystery Creatures" created by a second class pupil

Figure 32. "Hidden in the Jungle"

Figure 33. "Batelf"

In Elizabeth's classroom it was an arts-infused science project that inspired the first glimmers of pride she witnessed among her pupils. Placing equal importance on comfort, insulation, and design, her pupils were required to work collaboratively to plan, draw, and create a pair of earmuffs. Elizabeth reported that amid the "organised chaos" her classroom became, pupils engaged enthusiastically with the project (PLC Meeting: December, 2015). The creative process – which saw pupils thinking about and discussing the assignment, exploring the materials available to them, drawing plans for their earmuffs, and evaluating those plans from a design, feasibility, and insulation perspective – was entered into with gusto. Once their plans were finalised, pupils sat upon what Elizabeth termed *The Scientist's Chair* and presented their ideas to the class (WhatsApp: 19/11/2015). Although concerned about the tendency of pupils in her school to tear work from the walls, upon the project's completion Elizabeth displayed her pupils' work – both the drawings and the earmuffs themselves – on a noticeboard outside their classroom (Figure 34). Elizabeth and her pupils, however, were pleasantly surprised at the positive attention their earmuffs received from the wider school community:

> If anything, children kind of go up to them and say "*Ooohh*"...
>
> I have them on a long piece of string ... so you can hold them and look at them and there are children that you wouldn't necessarily think would be the most gentle but they are actually really gently trying them on and then my class see this happening and they go, "Those are my ones!" (PLC Meeting: December, 2015)

Figure 34. Earmuffs designed and created by fifth class pupils

Not alone did pupils demonstrate pride and satisfaction in the learning completed in school, but as creative and artistic experiences became more commonplace pupils were eager to showcase the creative and artistic endeavours they entered into outside the formal school structure. For example during an arts-infused Gaeilge scheme of work – whereby her pupils were learning *Ionsaí na hInse* – Katie spoke with enthusiasm about a young boy who, amid the initial indifference of his peers, started coming to school with his Irish dancing shoes:

> And every time he gets up afterwards and does a little dance for everybody. They are all starting to point the feet out and stand like him ...
>
> He's proud as punch of himself but the kids are really responding to it. He's a real cool character. It's brilliant. It kind of reinforces for him what he's learning because he's the expert so he is loving it! (PLC Meeting: March, 2016).

The satisfaction teachers demonstrated in their pupils' learning.

Just as the sense of personal satisfaction that pupils experienced manifested itself in many forms, so too did the satisfaction that participating teachers demonstrated with the learning and progression of their pupils. Whether sending images and videos of their pupils' learning in the arts to co-participants; enthusiastically discussing the observations and insights their pupils made during arts or arts-infused lessons; regaling co-participants with an anecdote about listening to pupils discuss the paint they needed only to hear one child declare, "Listen, just use the primary colours because we can make whatever we want from that"; texting the group declaring, "Once again the junior infants amaze me with what they're able to do" (WhatsApp: 16/02/2016); or bringing samples of pupils' work to PLC meetings, participating teachers frequently displayed a strong sense of pride – and indeed a strong sense of professional fulfilment – in the achievements of their pupils.

For Elizabeth, affording pupils the opportunity to discuss their artwork – the ideas that inspired it and the decisions they made while engaged in the artistic process – had a considerable impact on both her perception and appreciation of their work. Reflecting on the emphasis she formerly placed on having "perfect displays" showcasing pupils' learning, Elizabeth declared that, for her, what now mattered was "the story behind their work and not necessarily how the work looks. It's the processes they have gone through to get that product that I'm proud of" (Interview: May, 2016).

Meanwhile Grace – who professed that "last year creative writing was almost like a chore" to her class (Interview: May, 2016) – throughout the year made frequent reference to her pupils' enhanced disposition towards, and indeed their increased capacity for, writing. Speaking enthusiastically about one particular lesson – whereby her pupils animatedly discussed a photograph of two piglets whose faces were covered in paint before writing, in a

genre of their choice, about the secret life of pigs – Grace beamed with pride as she read a poem, *Pork Problems* (Figure 35), written by one of her pupils:

> Roast beef, ham and gummy pork:
>
> People chow down on these with a knife and fork.
>
> Why does this happen to us pigs?
>
> Why can you not stick to eating ice-cream and figs?
>
> My kind is out of luck,
>
> Because all humans think is that we're something to cook.
>
> I have not seen my mother in years,
>
> They took her into that shed and left me in tears.
>
> Going into that shed is my greatest fear.
>
> I need to escape, I can't stay here.
>
> I shall follow in the footsteps of the famous pig
>
> Who ate the evil Farmer Bland and rose up big.

Discussing the child in question, Grace declared, "He gets quite awkward, you know, and quite nervous in his actions and things like that but he was really enthusiastic about coming up to read that out which I was delighted with" (PLC Meeting: February, 2016). She further reported that when he took to *The Author's Chair* to present his writing to the class, her pride was evident to all: "You should have seen me! I was like, '*Oh my God!*' … I think the kids could see how shocked I was!" (PLC Meeting: February, 2016).
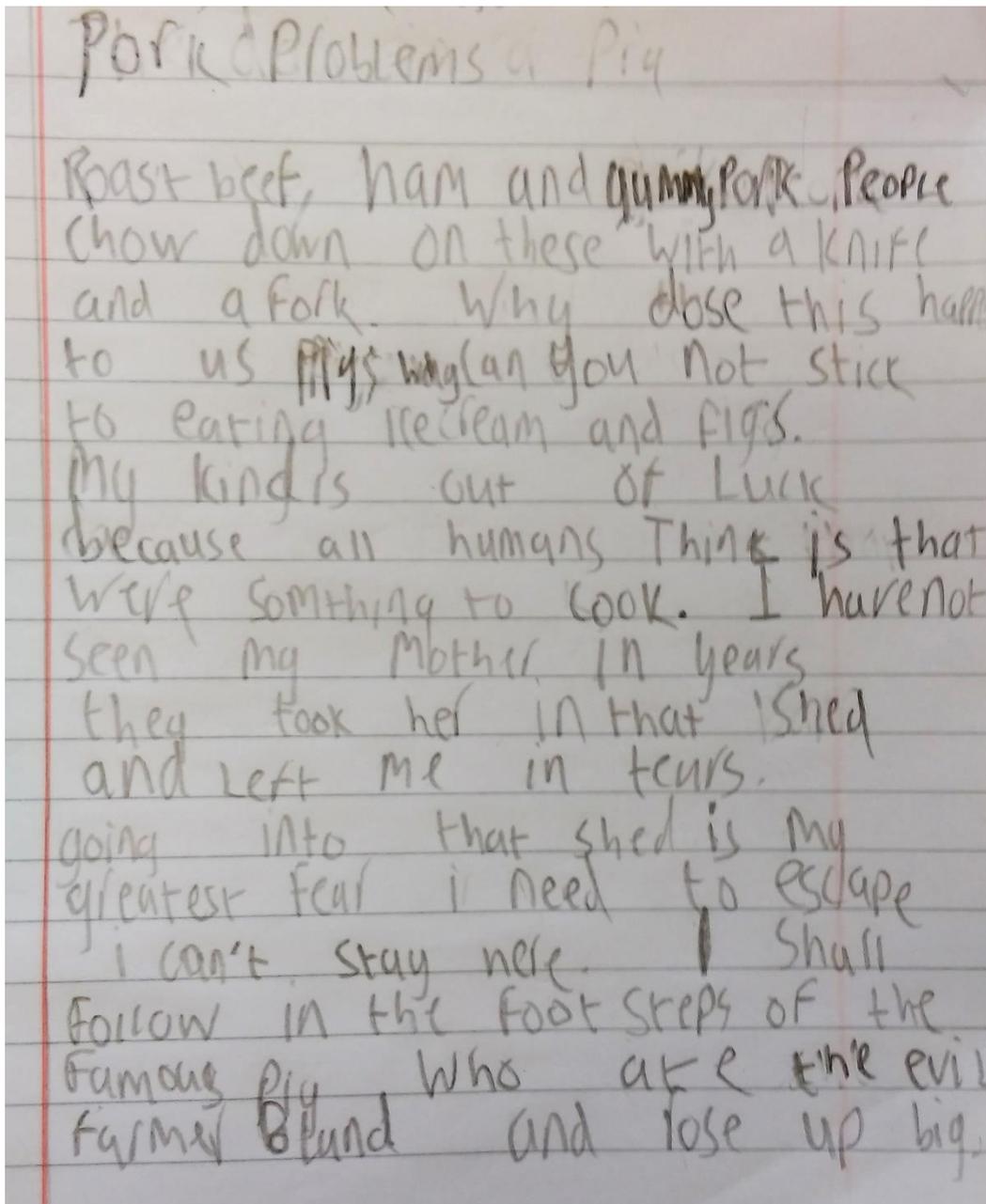
Figure 35. "Pork Problems": poem written by a fourth class pupil

Enhanced job-satisfaction.

"It falls to those of us in education to try to design the situations in which children's

efforts become increasingly more sophisticated, sensitive, imaginative, and skilled. This is no

small task, and no minor achievement when realized" (Eisner, 2002, p. xiv). So proclaimed

Elliot Eisner. And while the renewed professional energy and enthusiasm of participants has

already been alluded to, that does not sufficiently capture the enhanced job-satisfaction and

sense of professional fulfilment these teachers demonstrated at creating a classroom environment in which pupils could flourish; at designing learning activities that engaged and enthused their pupils; and at watching their pupils grow in confidence, efficacy, and ability.

Grace, then a newly-probated teacher, expressed pride at having her professional practice admired by more experienced colleagues. One particular visual arts lesson – whereby her pupils drew an imaginary creature discovered on an Antarctic expedition (Figure 36) – inspired much admiration from her colleagues, with one teacher asking her to describe, in detail, how she taught the lesson so that he might replicate it with his own pupils (PLC Meeting: February, 2016). Speaking about the impact the enhanced emphasis she placed on pupils' creative and artistic capacities had on colleagues, Grace said:

> They are really enthusiastic as well because they can see the results that we are getting they are like "God they look *great*. That's a really good idea. I might rob that on you." It's nice. It's great that people are actually seeing good art even though it's not prescriptive ... People are catching on to it and it's kind of making them think a little bit about it ... it seems like, I don't know, maybe people are catching on to process as opposed to the product which is really quite nice. (PLC Meeting: February, 2016)

Her involvement in the project – all that she learned and the impact it had upon her teaching and pupils' learning – was something she declared "changed other people's perspectives on the arts" (Interview: May, 2016).

Figure 36. "Antarctic Rainbow Princess" drawn by a fourth class pupil

Although this was a particularly challenging year for Elizabeth, the change in both her teaching of, and attitude towards, the arts disciplines was a source of immense professional satisfaction. Reflecting on her professional practice over the past number of years Elizabeth professed that while she had certainly had more enjoyable years teaching – largely due to the behaviour and attitude of her class – this was, by comparison, not alone the most purposeful her teaching had been within the arts disciplines but also the most centrally she had positioned meaningful arts experiences (Interview: May, 2016).

Emma, meanwhile, professed that she had, for a number of years, felt as though she was merely coasting from day to day, month to month, and year to year. Her habits had become routine and perfunctory, her professional practice unthinking and uncritical. Indeed at that inaugural meeting in September her dejection, doubt, and dismay were almost palpable, and made evident in her declaration that, "I just don't know what to do with them ... I'm really gonna struggle, I'm not gonna lie, I think, like half of them can hold a pencil, the other half can't so I don't know where to begin or how to start" (PLC Meeting: September, 2015). A mere 3 weeks later – having entered into the habit of reflecting meaningfully upon, and asking questions of, her professional practice – Emma found that not alone were her expectations of her pupils raised considerably, but the importance of carefully designing meaningful learning experiences had become evident:

> ...my expectations were raised quite a bit in what they are actually able to do. Especially with art and writing and stuff I thought, "Right, they are not going to be fit for anything, it's not going to work, it is going to fall apart", you know? Actually when they were given the chance, and when I actually actively planned it as opposed to just winging it on the day because I had a spare 15 minutes, they were able for a lot more than I thought. (PLC Meeting: October, 2015)

For Emma, transforming and enhancing her professional practice, discussing this practice with fellow practitioners, and witnessing the positive impact – social, emotional, and academic – her teaching had on pupils greatly enhanced her self-image as a professional, her self-efficacy, and ultimately, her job-satisfaction. Indeed the following year, while reflecting on her time with those junior infant pupils, Emma professed, "It was the first time in about 5 years that I actually felt I was teaching properly... I was proud of what I was doing every day" (PLC Meeting: December, 2016).

While Katie's enhanced sense of professional fulfilment has previously been made evident – in both the enthusiasm with which she spoke about her experiences in the PLC and the declaration that, as a result of those experiences, her teaching had been "refreshed" and "rejuvenated" (Interview: June, 2016) – the pride that she took in her work was evident on many occasions throughout the year. The enhanced job-satisfaction that Katie reported to experience on a regular basis (E-mail: July, 2016) was displayed in: the passion with which she discussed her pupils' learning; her assertion that involvement in the PLC made her examine not alone how she taught, but also how her pupils learned; and her declaration that infusing the arts into classroom practice had made it "so much more enjoyable to teach" (PLC Meeting: March, 2016). Katie was adamant that participation in this collaborative action research study – that examining, revising, discussing, and reflecting upon her professional practice in the arts – resulted in her "feeling a lot more satisfied in what I'm doing with the kids" (PLC Meeting: March, 2016). As she declared, "I feel very proud of what I'm doing, not that I didn't before but it's just heightened, it's definitely heightened" (Katie Interview: June, 2016).

The professional satisfaction that Amelia experienced at improving and strengthening her practice in the arts is perhaps best captured in the following extract – written as she reminisced about her experiences within the PLC – from her reflective journal:

I could list all the ways I am using the arts now every day. I could talk about how

engaged my pupils are when I use arts-infusion. I could give examples of children

who have progressed academically, socially, or emotionally as they took part in arts-

based lessons this year. (Reflective Journal: May, 2016)

However, for Amelia, enhanced job-satisfaction arose not alone from watching the impact

enhanced and increased arts exposure had upon the learning of her pupils, but also from

creating educational experiences that subsequently travelled to other schools and classrooms.

As she professed, "It was making myself think of things, and then when other people tried

them out as well feeling like, 'Oh, other people tried that out too. Cool!'" (Interview: May,

2016). Her experiences, and indeed those of her co-participants, speak to the transformative

capacity of this PLC, not alone among its members, but in their extended school communities.

While research conducted in the national context indicates that primary teachers

believe their job has become increasingly stressful and demanding in recent years (Morgan,

2015) – a sentiment echoed by those participating in this research – it is noteworthy that in

spite of the demands, in spite of the stress, these teachers elected to invest considerable time

and effort in their own professional learning and development. Similarly, in spite of the

demands, and in spite of the stress, these teachers took immense satisfaction from their job:

from improving their professional practice and witnessing, first hand, the impact that

meaningful arts experiences had on pupils' learning. Their willingness to devote personal

time to increased lesson planning, PLC meetings, and the upkeep of their reflective journals is

perhaps accounted for in their expressed desire to improve their teaching within the arts in the

belief that it would positively affect their pupils. As Amelia proclaimed, "I was teaching to

my own standards, nobody else's. It's not that I was ticking some box for the Department of

Education, I was teaching the way *I* wanted to teach... and felt so good about myself" (PLC

Meeting: December, 2016).

Arts-Rich Education: Insights Gained

All that has been described in this chapter – all of the examination, experimentation, reflection, and discussion – occurred as teachers sought to investigate the potential for arts-rich education in Ireland's primary classrooms. Their experiences offer valuable insights – for educators and policymakers alike – into the role, importance, and impact of the arts in primary education. Furthermore, their experiences provide substantial evidence of the capacity of the generalist teacher to create learning environments in which the arts might flourish.

For each of these teachers, an arts-rich classroom is one in which the arts are visibly valued. This value is made evident not alone as pupils engage in artistic processes, but also through their meaningful exposure to high-quality art, music, literature, poetry, dance, and performance. As Elizabeth professed, it is a classroom in which the teacher "recognises the arts as key to pupils' personal, social, and emotional development" (E-mail: May, 2016). It was further emphasised by each of these teachers that an arts-rich classroom is one in which the arts are not only taught as standalone subjects with worth in their own right, but in which the arts are meaningfully infused into other subject areas to enhance the learning process. Indeed Amelia – echoing the assertions of Stevenson and Deasy (2005) – proclaimed that in such a classroom "the arts permeate the everyday experience of the child" (E-mail: April, 2016).

When asked what learning looks like in such a classroom, participants enthusiastically and passionately described the enriched learning experiences and enhanced learning outcomes – many of which have been outlined in this chapter – they witnessed in their own classrooms. Their responses, however, extended beyond the mere description of learning activities, and spoke also to learning processes. As Amelia professed, an arts-rich classroom is one in which "children learn about learning. The emphasis is placed on the

process not the product, trial and error is a natural occurrence" (E-mail: April, 2016). The significant importance an arts-rich classroom places on the activity of learning was similarly stressed by Grace, who declared that in such an environment pupils are "learning through the process of completing work, rather than examining the end product" (E-mail: March, 2016). Emma further highlighted that in an arts-rich classroom, teaching and learning become "less rigid and formulaic" as, through arts-infusion, the barriers between subject areas are obscured; "Children are given a chance to learn in a way that suits them, whether through visual stimulation, dramatic interpretations, reading, writing, or moving" (E-mail: April, 2016). This was a point similarly emphasised by each participant, with Katie declaring that "Children learn in different ways, and an arts-rich classroom tries to cater for that" (E-mail: April, 2016).

It is noteworthy, however, that when asked whether they would describe theirs as an arts-rich classroom, no participant answered with a categorical yes. Instead, participants indicated that this year had been the beginning – albeit an exceptionally strong beginning – of a process. While they were certain the arts had assumed a greater and more meaningful status in their classrooms, they were similarly adamant that there was more they could do to infuse the arts further into their classroom practice. More they could do to realise the full potential of the arts within primary education. As Katie attested, "I feel like I'm only starting" (Interview: June, 2016). In their reluctance to declare theirs arts-rich classrooms, these teachers demonstrated an awareness of the complexity – highlighted by Brustein (2016) – of the concept of arts-richness. Yet each of these participants believed it would be possible, through concerted and ongoing effort, to create an arts-rich school (Appendix G): a subject which will be discussed more thoroughly in the concluding chapter.

While this chapter has offered a thorough discussion of the themes to emerge as these five primary teachers strove to place the arts more centrally in their classrooms, the closing

chapter will present a detailed discussion of the conclusions and findings that can be drawn

from their experience: of their message to the stakeholders of primary education, and of their

implications, for both educational policy and future research.

CONCLUSION

Introduction

While arts education has long been a source of a great enjoyment, fascination, creative development, stimulation, growth, and immense curiosity – both in my life as a student and since becoming a member of the teaching profession – the catalyst which gave impetus to this research, to the formalisation of this long-standing curiosity (Hurston, 1991), was the publication of the *Arts-in-Education Charter*. Published during Ruairí Quinn's tenure as Minster for Education, the *Arts-in-Education Charter* – a welcome reprieve from the GERM-oriented policy so characteristic of the former Minister's noted reform agenda – sought to address the "challenge in our cultural landscape" (p. 3) posed by arts-provision both within and outside the structures of formal education. Although it is highlighted within the policy that arts education is the responsibility of the DES and education providers alike, both commitments from the DES and actionable guidelines for practitioners are thin on the ground. Focused predominantly on arts-in-education experiences, for those of us working in primary education the most pertinent, and indeed the most significant, development is the Charter's proposal to introduce ARIS. This scheme – to be spearheaded by the Arts Council – will seek to simultaneously nurture and acknowledge those schools endeavouring to "place the arts centrally within the life of the school community" (DAHG & DES, 2013, p. 17). This is a beautiful aspiration in policy, but what will it look like in practice? Endeavours such as this are almost entirely contingent on an engaged and dedicated teaching staff, yet the role of the teacher is all but overlooked in this policy document.

Hopkins (2003) has argued that the successful implementation of any new educational initiative or innovation – such as the proposed ARIS scheme – requires that it both allows for and encourages adaptation by teachers at the local level. Indeed Hopkins (2003) further

asserts that such adaptation – and the ability to exercise critical judgement over the task of curriculum implementation it demands – lies at the heart of the concept of teaching as a profession. Moreover, he suggests that the translation of policy to practice, of educational aspiration to educational endeavour, is best achieved through research-based teaching. This is a stance echoed by McNamara and O'Hara (2004; 2008) who have repeatedly emphasised the close relationship between the quality of a teacher's professional practice and their capacity to make professional research-based judgements on their own teaching and, indeed, on those initiatives and methodologies they are required to implement. Such judgements, McNamara and O'Hara (2004) assert, are "fundamental to the professional role of the teacher" (p. 464).

For each of these authors, research conducted in the context of practice has the capacity to empower teachers, to enhance their professional judgements, and to contribute to their becoming autonomous professionals (Hopkins, 2003; McNamara & O'Hara, 2008). Indeed professional autonomy – regarded by Pearson and Moomaw (2005) as a necessity for teachers – has, in recent decades, emerged as a key variable in educational reform initiatives. So much so that these authors suggest that "granting autonomy and empowering teachers is an appropriate place to begin in solving the problems of today's schools" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p. 37).

These disparate but connected issues – the marginalised voice of practitioners in educational policy, the capacity of practitioner-research to enhance educational practice, and the necessity for professional autonomy in the implementation of educational initiatives – together with a lifelong appreciation of the arts and an awareness of their historical neglect within Irish education, converged to form the intertwining roots from which this research grew. Determined to offer a voice to those at the coalface of arts-provision for the nation's youth – primary school teachers – the research that has been described in this thesis sought to work with practitioners in exploring not alone the potential for arts-rich education in Ireland's

primary classrooms, but also the means through which they might be empowered to create such a learning environment. Offered to the reader in this concluding chapter are: a presentation of the findings derived from an in-depth analysis of the data; a discussion of the implications of these findings for policy, practice, and future research; an outline of the limitations of this study; and a brief overview of recent policy developments in the arena of arts education which offer arts advocates – both within and outside the structures of formal education – a glimpse into a future full of potential.

Research Findings

The substantive overarching question posed at the outset of this research – and indeed perennially throughout the processes of conducting a review of relevant literature, data collection, and data analysis – asked, *How might primary school teachers be empowered to create an arts-rich classroom, and what are the characteristics of such a learning environment?* All that has been described thus far – all of those anecdotes illustrative of the imaginative, passionate, reflective teaching which took place throughout the year, all of the accounts and photographs providing a snapshot into the meaningful pupil learning that occurred – happened in pursuit of an answer to this question. The findings of this research, predicated on the insights derived from a comprehensive analysis of the data, are therefore presented in three distinct categories pertaining to: the potential for arts-rich education in the primary classroom; the transformative capacity of PLCs in providing teachers with the emotional, professional, and practical support required to stimulate and maintain changes to their professional practice; and the impact of practitioner-research on teachers' reflective practice, sense of empowerment, and job-satisfaction respectively.

Arts-rich education in the primary classroom

An arts-rich education is one in which pupils, being educated in and through the arts, are offered frequent and varied opportunities to experience, and develop a positive attitude toward, the arts (Bamford, 2009; McCarthy et al, 2004; Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). The experiences of the five teachers involved in this study provide significant and substantial evidence of the capacity of the generalist teacher to provide such an education for their pupils, and to create learning environments in which the arts can flourish. Although described within the context of this work as an arts-rich classroom, it is important to note that the arts-rich cultures these five teachers created did not exist solely inside the four walls of their classrooms. Rather, the high-quality arts experiences organised and facilitated by participants as part of the school day – whether in the classroom, the garden, the playground, the school hall, or even on the roof – all contributed to the development of a classroom environment in which the arts were embedded meaningfully in their pupils' education. Such an education not alone complements the aims of the *Primary School Curriculum*, but, further, enhances and enriches pupils' experiences of the curriculum.

The process of developing an arts-rich classroom.

While the experiences of these teachers demonstrate that the construction of an arts-rich classroom is entirely possible within primary education in Ireland, their experiences similarly illustrate that providing such an education requires a concerted and sustained effort on behalf of the teacher. Creating an arts-rich classroom – a learning environment in which the arts are visibly valued and permeate the everyday experiences of the pupil – is something these teachers came to regard as a process. Engaging in this process required of teachers: the diligent preparation of arts experiences that carefully balance the development of pupils' evolving ability and skill with the fostering of their creative capacities; careful planning to design high-quality learning experiences that infuse the arts into non-arts disciplines in a

meaningful, purposeful way; a willingness to experiment, to step outside their tried-and-tested classroom routines, in order to find approaches and methodologies that engage and motivate their pupils; a readiness to risk a less-than-accomplished professional performance; and that they research, explore, and interact with the arts world so they might continue to expose their pupils to a diverse range of high-quality works in a variety of art forms. Indeed it was engaging in this process that led Katie to the conclusion that she had, in her own life, stepped further away from the arts than she had recognised (Interview: June, 2016). Upon arriving at this realisation Katie acknowledged that – in seeking to place the arts more centrally in her classroom practice – "I need to challenge myself to become more culturally aware" (Interview: June, 2016).

The display of pupils' work.

Although there was little consistency in the physical appearance of these classrooms – suggesting that an arts-rich classroom is greater than the sum of its parts – certain commonalities were found to exist in each of these distinctive learning environments. The value ascribed to pupils' artistic and creative endeavours was manifest not in the mere display of their work, but crucially, in the *type* of pupil work these teachers chose to display. Samples of pupils' writing were displayed neither on the basis of their appearance nor for accurate adherence to conventions of grammar and punctuation, but instead on the basis of the quality of their content regarding pupils' ideas, use of language, and expression of their thoughts. Similarly artwork on display demonstrated that pupils, although frequently working within a common theme or medium, retained complete ownership of their work. In short, the work that was showcased in each of these classrooms emphasised not the product of pupils' learning but rather the valuable learning process pupils had engaged in, for in each of these works their unique voice was evident.

While every primary school pupil in Ireland has access to the arts through the formal curriculum, research has indicated that the quantity of arts exposure can vary considerably between classrooms, with both the teacher's gender and their number of years' teaching experience affecting the time they spend on cultural subjects (Smyth, 2016). The teachers participating in this study, though unable to comment with certainty on the variation that is reported to exist between classrooms with regard to the quantity of arts exposure, highlighted the considerable variation that existed within their own schools regarding the quality of this exposure. Indications of poor practice – predominantly evident in visual arts displays – became increasingly apparent to participating teachers as their own professional competence and confidence enhanced. Candidly addressing poor practice was not something participating teachers felt either equipped or positioned to do. Instead, these teachers sought to lead by example and, as Amelia phrased it, "show the value" of high-quality arts experiences (Interview: May, 2016), sharing both lesson ideas and accounts of their classroom practice with interested colleagues.

Arts-infusion in primary education.

Smyth (2016) – whose examination of GUI data presents a clear picture of the impact of arts and cultural participation on the nation's youth – has suggested that within primary education "there would appear to be considerable potential to use the tools of drama, art and music as a way of enriching other curricular areas" (p. 99). Arts-infusion – a holistic term used to describe the process of educating children through the arts – has been defined within the context of this research as the meaningful and purposeful utilisation of relevant art form(s) to enrich children's learning and provide multiple entry points to academic content, and varied tools for the assessment of same, across all areas of the curriculum. For the five participating teachers, arts-infusion became an increasingly common feature of their classroom practice. Their experiences – their reports of reaching the disengaged pupil;

motivating the reluctant learner; diminishing the subject-specific negative self-image of pupils; providing diverse opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a topic – resonate profoundly with the findings of international research literature. Stevenson and Deasy (2005), for example, have reported that in schools utilising arts-infused pedagogies climates were fostered whereby: pupils were enabled to take risks, explore ideas, questions, and solutions; pupils' abilities to think creatively were nurtured; pupils took ownership of their own learning; pupils' self-efficacy was developed; and they became more engaged in school. Similarly, Ingram and Seashore (2003) have asserted that the utilisation of arts-infusion brought with it meaningful change in teachers' pedagogical practice, in teachers' perception of pupils' capabilities, and in the quality of pupils' learning. Cognisant of these findings, though founded more assuredly on the experiences of those teachers who participated in this study, the conclusion is drawn that arts-infusion has the potential to democratise the learning process: to provide multiple and diverse entry points to academic content; to reach and engage those pupils who "switch off" during more traditional, sedentary approaches; to cater for individual learning preferences in the use of multiple, diverse media in the delivery of curricular content; to appeal to visual learners not alone in utilising visual art forms in facilitating access to academic content, but in allowing pupils to demonstrate their understanding through visual representations; to diminish barriers to academic content posed by language or text-heavy media; and to validate and promote the diverse intelligences of children.

Professional Learning Communities in the Context of Primary Arts Education

In recent decades an intensified focus on the concept of the "teaching career", alongside a burgeoning acknowledgement of the importance of collaborative cultures within education communities, has created an educational landscape in which PLCs are increasingly pursued as a mechanism for teachers' professional development. This research, in seeking to

explore the potential for arts-rich education in the primary classroom, examined the capacity of teachers' in-career learning – mediated through a PLC – to provide them with the support required to transform their professional practice.

DuFour (2004), though a powerful and vocal advocate of PLCs, has asserted that it is a term which has inaccurately been used "to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education ... In fact, the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning" (p. 6). Like Fullan (2006b), DuFour (2007) has drawn a distinction between those communities of educators which are a PLC in name only, and those which embrace the principles, values, and ideologies of professional learning communities to establish collaborative cultures with a shared focus on learning, action, and improvement.

A sense of community.

The teachers involved in this study – each working in a different school with a different class level – were united by a shared goal, a shared sense of purpose, and a shared appreciation for the role of the arts within education. The PLC that was established became, for want of a better word, a true community: it was a space in which participating teachers engaged in reflective conversation based upon professional practice, acknowledged and discussed the difficulties they faced in their professional lives, consoled and comforted one another, offered advice and actionable suggestions, and animatedly shared professional successes and breakthroughs as well as joyous news from their personal lives. While this community emerged from a shared desire to enhance professional practice in the arts, to participating teachers it became considerably more than that. Not alone were these teachers given a forum in which they could engage in meaningful professional conversation focused on a topic determined by their own professional needs and interests, but, significantly, community meetings offered a safe space in which they could vocalise frustrations with their own professional performance or practices within their school. For these teachers the strong

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sense of community that was established not alone encouraged their sustained enthusiasm for and participation in the project, but also made steps towards diminishing the professional isolation teachers experience behind the closed door of the classroom.

Support: emotional, professional, and practical.

The strong sense of community that permeated all actions and interactions within the PLC was bolstered by, and in turn further strengthened, the support it provided to its members. Not alone did participants offer one another the emotional support they required to contend with classroom challenges and the validation of practice that is all-too-infrequent due to the isolated nature of teaching, but this PLC provided participants with the professional support required to critically reflect upon their teaching. Purposeful, structured professional conversation – focused on classroom practice and professional reading – offered participants a forum in which they could ask questions of their teaching, and of their beliefs about teaching. The significant importance of such conversations has been highlighted by Feiman-Nemser (2001), who asserts that as "teachers learn to talk about teaching in specific and disciplined ways and to ask hard questions of themselves and others, they create new understandings and build a new professional culture" (p. 1043). In facilitating the type of professional conversation that promotes teacher-learning, this PLC offered professional support to practitioners who sought to enhance their practice in the domain of arts education. Although this professional support was valued by participants, developing classroom strategies that would both improve their teaching within the arts disciplines and position the arts more centrally in the education of their pupils required practical support. While reflecting on their experiences within the PLC, participating teachers placed considerable emphasis on, and expressed enormous gratitude for, the teaching resources and lesson ideas that were shared among the group. These resources and ideas are best conceived of as tools with which teachers could set to work. Crucially, however, these were tools which were neither presented

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nor seen as one-size-fits-all, rather they were tools which could be adapted to context. Not alone did teaching resources and lesson ideas frequently move from one classroom to another, but there were teachers outside the PLC who were eager to utilise those same resources and lessons with their own pupils. Participants' reports of those lesson ideas which travelled outside the PLC and into the wider school communities – alongside their accounts of the prevalence of "the same old template art" witnessed along the corridors – indicates that while primary teachers appear to routinely seek practical support in implementing the arts curricula they are, perhaps, unable to make judgements about the quality of an educational activity. For the teachers participating in this study, however, the focus on professional learning – and the professional support provided – ensured that the critical examination of classroom practice became increasingly commonplace. Indeed the distinct but interrelated dimensions of support which were evident within this community – the emotional, the professional, and the practical – converged to not alone stimulate substantial changes to teachers' professional practice, but to provide the assistance they required to sustain that change. In short, the support provided within this PLC empowered teachers to transform their pedagogical practice and develop arts-rich cultures in their classrooms.

The role of digital technologies in a learning community.

That this was a PLC comprised of teachers working in different contexts meant that communication among its members was not as straightforward as it might be for a school-based learning community. Therefore, within the context of this research, the utilisation of social media proved invaluable in facilitating conversation, in sustaining the sense of community, and in providing ongoing support between formal PLC meetings. Furthermore, WhatsApp's capacity to instantly share videos and photographs provided participants with frequent glimpses into one another's classrooms, so to speak. Pictures of pupils' learning, photographs of teaching resources, and participants' accounts of and updates on their lessons

within the arts disciplines sent via WhatsApp made considerable steps towards negating the distance separating participants. However while social media was of inestimable value to the members of this community, a digital existence alone would be insufficient: it was at formal PLC meetings that focused, meaningful professional conversation could flow, unstilted by time-delays, and that communication was most effective and interactive. While conversations which took place in person saw participants engaging in a mutually shaping process in which they could explore their thoughts on education or their reaction to professional reading, conversations which took place via WhatsApp could, for the most part, be characterised as falling into one of two categories: requests for practical support or progress reports. In its digital existence alone, this community would not have embodied the characteristics of an effective PLC as identified by the research literature (DuFour, 2004; 2006; Fullan, 2006b; Kruse et al, 1994). Yet, in providing support to participants seeking practical lesson ideas and in providing tangible evidence of pupil learning, social media certainly has the potential to play an important role within an effective PLC.

If Irish schools are to provide an arts-rich education for their pupils, teacher capacity in the arts must be enhanced: building teacher capacity in this domain requires meaningful CPD that is sustained over time and relevant to the context of practice. While curricular developments since the dawn of the 20th century have enhanced, considerably, the position of the arts within Irish educational policy, the dearth of such professional development has meant that the immense potential of these developments has not been fully realised in practice. The experiences of those teachers involved in this research indicate that PLCs – comprised of practitioners with a shared purpose, a focus on learning, an action orientation, and a commitment to improvement (DuFour, 2006) – have the capacity to improve the professional practice of teachers within the arts disciplines. Furthermore, with the utilisation of digital technologies, there is great potential for establishing effective PLCs among

educators working in different schools. Such communities offer a viable model of professional development – fully aligned with the Teaching Council's (2016) framework for teachers' in-career learning – that not alone has the ability to considerably enhance teacher capacity in the arts, but, significantly, can do so at very low cost.

The Teacher-as-Researcher

Hopkins (2003) has argued that teachers "regard educational research as something irrelevant to their lives and see little interaction between the world of the educational researcher and the world of the teacher" (p. 35). He is not a lone voice in this regard, for an enduring criticism of educational research has been its perceived failure to impact upon or improve practice on the ground (eg Anderson, 2002; Cohen et al, 2011). In fact it is in response to this distance that is believed to exist between educational research and the work of educational practitioners that a growing advocacy of practitioner-generated knowledge has emerged (eg, Anderson, 2002; Atweh & Heirdsfield, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; 2009; Hopkins, 2003). More than just bridging the gap between the worlds of educational research and the context of practice, however, the burgeoning practitioner-research movement is conceived by McNamara and O'Hara (2008) as a powerful voice of resistance against increased efforts to reduce teaching "to merely implementing a 'proven' programme of instruction" (p. 21): against the marginalised voice of the teacher in educational policy.

In seeking to explore the potential for arts-rich education in the primary classroom participating teachers examined their own context of practice: their professional experiences, their knowledge of practice, their beliefs about arts education, their beliefs about pupils' learning, and their ability to provide high-quality arts experiences for their pupils. While such matters were examined collectively and collaboratively within the PLC, and while it was PLC meetings that provided the forum in which teachers could engage in purposeful, structured professional conversation, it was in their own classrooms that these teachers sought to enact

change. It was in their own classrooms that these teachers became researchers. It was in their own classrooms that each of these teachers set about the task of generating knowledge of practice through practice, and, crucially, through reflection upon that practice. For, as Dewey (1933) asserted, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (p. 78).

The teacher as a reflective practitioner.

Engaging in the self-reflective spiral of action research encouraged participants to not alone plan and enact changes to their pedagogical practice, but to reflect upon those changes. Indeed each of these teachers indicated that participation in this study had a considerable impact on both their inclination towards and capacity for reflective practice. Emma, for example, indicated that in previous years the frenetic activity of the classroom, as well as intense curricular demands, had created a situation in which she rapidly moved from one topic to another without taking the time to either contemplate or examine her practice. This is a scenario that she, like Amelia, believed to be common among educators. While discussing her newfound disposition to reflect upon her professional practice Emma mused, "I wouldn't say it's a very common thing ... we don't have time to sit down and do it but I don't think we are naturally programmed that way. We are always thinking ahead as opposed to behind" (Interview: May, 2016). For Emma and her co-participants the emphasis placed on reflection – in both their individual efforts in their own context of practice and their collective efforts within the PLC – enhanced their knowledge of practice as they contemplated, considered, and reconsidered all they had learned in practice (Loughran, 2002).

Their experiences indicate that while practitioners have the capacity to reflect upon classroom practice – and on the beliefs and assumptions underlying that practice – it is possible to become distracted from that task by the daily demands of the classroom. Their experiences further indicate that this is a capacity that is enhanced as it is used, and that

becoming a reflective practitioner requires a concerted and sustained effort on the part of each teacher.

The teacher as an empowered, autonomous professional.

In their capacity as teacher-researchers, those participating in this study were generating knowledge of practice through practice. Their teaching became increasingly research-based as evidence generated and gathered in the context of practice was used to inform their pedagogical practice. They were enabled and empowered to, as Hopkins (2003) phrased it, take control of their professional lives. In researching their own professional practice participants were empowered to develop and implement educational practices that would most benefit their pupils. This, for Pearson and Moomaw (2005), is central to the very concept of teacher empowerment. These authors assert that teachers "must have the freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students, as doctors/lawyers do for their patients/clients" (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005, p. 37). Their role as teacher-researchers – alongside their position as member of a community of teacher-researchers – increased participants' confidence in their own professional practice within the arts disciplines. Indeed as a result of their increased propensity toward reflective practice, and their enhanced sense of professional autonomy and empowerment, participants' concepts of arts education were seen to evolve. This evolution is perhaps best captured in the transfer of their focus from the products of arts education to the processes of arts education, to the fundamental, intrinsic value of the educational pursuits in question. As Elizabeth attested, "I realised that the end product that others saw didn't really matter if the children gained from it throughout the process... your lessons should not be for an end product that go up on a wall" (Interview: May, 2016). These teachers, in the words of Richard Peters (1973), came to value and pursue educational activities "for what is in it as distinct from what it may lead to" (p. 42).

For those participating in this study the enhanced professional competence and confidence they felt as a result of their assuming the role of teacher-researcher – as well as their membership of a community of teacher-researchers – led to greater job satisfaction. Their experiences indicate that, in the domain of arts education, adopting what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) term "inquiry-as-stance" has the potential to empower teachers, enhance their sense of professional autonomy, lead to research-based teaching, and heighten their sense of professional fulfilment.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

It was the expressed aim of this research to map teaching in and through the arts in a manner which would enable policymakers, teachers, and researchers to see that terrain more clearly, and to offer a range of pragmatic visions – grounded in real classrooms within the real opportunities and limits of primary education – for the future of arts education and teachers' professional development therein. This research has indicated, quite clearly, that not alone is it entirely possible for the generalist teacher to provide an arts-rich education for their pupils, but that there is immense potential in the utilisation of PLCs for enhancing teachers' professional competence and confidence within the arts disciplines. The experiences of participating teachers have further indicated that adopting the role of teacher-researcher – routinely reflecting upon and asking questions of their practice – empowered teachers, leading to an enhanced sense of professional autonomy and satisfaction. Reflecting on these findings, and upon this research in its entirety, has served to highlight a number of potential trajectories for the future of primary arts education – and for the proposed ARIS scheme – with implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Recommendations for Policy

The following recommendations – developed from a comprehensive review of selected national and international literature alongside the insights gleaned from the experiences of those participating in this study – speak both to the *Arts-in-Education Charter* implementation group and to those tasked with responsibility for developing, implementing, and evaluating the ARIS scheme.

The *Arts-in-Education Charter* marks a significant milestone in the landscape of Irish educational policy. By those in the arts community it has been described as a "Godsend" teeming with "exciting potential" (Shine-Thompson as cited in Wallace, 2013), yet it is a policy that ignores, almost entirely, the positive contribution that primary teachers can make to the artistic and aesthetic education of their pupils. Policies that ignore the competence, professionalism, and expertise of practitioners are policies which deskill and potentially disenfranchise practitioners. In focusing predominantly on the contribution that interventions from the world of the arts make to education, this policy undermines the hours of curricular time devoted to arts experiences that tens of thousands of primary school pupils access each week.

The Arts in Education Portal.

This study recognises that if they are to provide high-quality arts experiences for their pupils, primary teachers require support. However this study has made evident that with support, dedicated professionals not alone teach with greater competence and confidence, but are enabled and empowered to position the arts more centrally in their classrooms and work towards providing an arts-rich education for their pupils. To support the provision of high-quality arts experiences within primary education it is recommended that the remit of the Arts in Education Portal be broadened beyond the scope of the arts-education partnership and

extend to the generalist teacher. Alternatively, a sister site – complementing the aims of the Charter but focused entirely on primary education – could be established.

The proliferation of questionable arts practices witnessed in the schools of participants suggests that, in seeking practical support in the guise of lesson ideas, not all teachers are capable of discerning good practice from bad. However lesson ideas hosted on such a website, vetted by experts in the field, could prove an invaluable resource to primary school teachers in search of inspiration. Although high-quality professional development is required to address the fundamental misunderstanding underlying the use of such practice, the addition of such a section to the website (or indeed the introduction of a new website with an exclusive focus on primary education) is an immediate action which could tackle the excess of poor and mediocre practice in the arts. Particularly if this site also featured accessible professional readings – both research-based and theoretical – detailing the significant contribution high-quality arts experiences make to pupils' education. Furthermore, once ARIS is in operation, a site which offers practical support in the guise of lesson ideas and professional support in the guise of arts education literature has the potential to become an important resource to school communities striving to develop an arts-rich culture.

Professional development in the arts.

Teachers participating in this study conceived of in-career learning not alone as a professional responsibility, but as a professional right. If the significant importance that the *Arts-in-Education Charter* – and its related publications – purports to place upon the arts is not to be undermined, then it is imperative that meaningful professional development in the arts disciplines be at the very least encouraged by the DES. At present, all Department-sanctioned CPD courses offered during the summer months must address "national priorities": identified as school self-evaluation, digital learning, literacy, and numeracy. If the inconsistency between the Department's espoused and enacted beliefs is to be reconciled,

then an immediate action which must be taken is that courses which seek to enhance teacher capacity in a curricular area must be valued in their own right.

However if enhanced professional practice in the arts is to be sustained over time, then short courses alone are insufficient. This research has presented arts advocates with a powerful model of collaborative professional development which empowered teachers to transform their classroom practice. There is enormous potential for the development of such learning communities in the Irish educational landscape. Indeed the *Arts-in-Education Charter* has advocated that networks of "skilled and experienced practitioners" be developed so that good practice in the arts might be shared and disseminated (p. 14). It is therefore recommended that, in addition to the ongoing professional development focused on the teacher-artist partnership, DES funding also be made available to regional education centres for the establishment of PLCs comprised of primary school teachers seeking to develop their professional capacity in the arts disciplines. While the establishment of the PLC described in this research proved a very low-cost venture, if this model of CPD were to be rolled out at scale it would require a modest budget. This funding would allow communities of practitioners – as appropriate and in accordance with their identified learning needs – to invite experts to deliver the professional development segment of community meetings. Facilitating this flexible mode of professional development in the arts – that would encourage teachers to address what *they* consider to be deficits in their PCK or shortfalls in their professional practice – would not alone further reconcile the Department's espoused and enacted beliefs about the importance of the arts within education, but would respect the professional judgement of teachers in trusting them to determine their own professional learning needs. Furthermore, in providing funding for the assistance of experts – from either the realms of teacher-education or the arts – both Departments with responsibility for the implementation of

this Charter would ensure that regional PLCs were engaged in meaningful professional learning in accordance with best practice.

In the Irish educational landscape there is, at present, little incentive – beyond the inherent desire to improve oneself and one's professional practice for the benefit of pupils – for teachers to engage in CPD: particularly in award-bearing models of professional development which are completed at the considerable expense of teachers themselves. Consequently, it is strongly recommended that the qualification allowance offered for postgraduate study, abolished in 2012, be reintroduced.

If the aims of the *Arts-in-Education Charter* are to be fully realised, then teachers' professional development within the arts disciplines must be encouraged, supported, and incentivised by the DES in a consistent and meaningful way, not merely "as available resources permit and in line with prioritised curricular initiatives" (p. 14).

The Arts-Rich Schools scheme.

An important development to arise from the *Arts-in-Education Charter* is the proposal to introduce ARIS. Arising from the experiences of participating teachers – and particularly from their assertions that creating an arts-rich learning environment is a process which requires sustained effort over time – it is recommended that the ARIS award be conferred upon schools for a limited period of time. Creating a school environment in which the arts are visibly valued, a school community in which the arts are centrally positioned, is an accomplishment that, once achieved, must be maintained. So that the ARIS award might be conceived of as one attained rather than obtained it is recommended that the arts-rich status of a school be subject to biennial review.

While the Charter outlines a set of criteria which might be used to determine the arts-rich status of a school – including the presence of arts ensembles, the display of artwork, visits to cultural events and institutions, and participation in the visiting artists programme –

these criterion require considerable elaboration. Arising from insights gained through the completion of this research it is recommended that, in determining the arts-rich status of a school, the Arts Council place considerable emphasis on arts provision within the formal curriculum: on the quality of teaching and learning both within the arts disciplines themselves and in the utilisation of arts-infusion so that children might also learn *through* the arts. Similarly, the mere presence of arts displays provides no indication of the quality of arts experiences that a school provides for its pupils; in assessing the arts-richness of a school it is imperative that emphasis be placed on the content of displays. Was the voice of the pupil formative in the creation of exhibited work? For the teachers participating in this research, developing an arts-rich school is not merely an aesthetic endeavour. It is not a matter of simply enhancing the physical environment – adorning the corridors with more artwork, more poetry, or photographic evidence of an appreciation of dance and music – but a fundamental reimagining of both the place and value of the arts within education. While considering practices in her own school Elizabeth mused:

> I think if you asked many educators that they would say "Oh yes, this is *very much* an arts-rich school", because they would come in and they would see the artwork adorning the halls, they would hear the singing from rooms, and the use of poetry but from what I have seen I don't feel it's an arts-rich school ... I don't feel that the subjects are being taught in a way that is the most advantageous to the children...
> It's almost like baking a cake. All of the ingredients are there but unless you mix the right amounts together, in the right way, you are not going to get a cake. (Interview: May, 2015)

Though flawed, this baking analogy is apt. While the criteria outlined in the *Arts-in-Education Charter* do provide interested parties with some indication of what becoming an arts-rich school might require, it provides them no guidance: akin to a list of ingredients

without a recipe. Armed a list of ingredients and the knowledge that these ingredients can be combined to produce a cake, the baker is likely to succeed in creating a cake *of sorts*; however without a recipe, without guidance, the emphasis is removed from the process of baking and placed instead on both the raw materials required and on the product of his or her endeavours. Similarly, while school communities endeavouring to develop an arts-rich culture might succeed in placing greater emphasis on the arts by referring to the criteria outlined in the Charter, it is not guaranteed that teachers will reflect meaningfully upon their teaching within the arts disciplines or that their pupils will meaningfully engage in artistic processes. Conferring the ARIS award upon a school must therefore be determined by more than a checklist of requirements. The provision of high-quality arts experiences and the cultivation of a school environment that appreciates the arts and pupils' creative endeavours – though more difficult and time-consuming for an assessor to evaluate – is what schools aspiring to an arts-rich status must strive for.

In promoting the concept of an arts-rich school, in highlighting the importance of the arts within education, and in promoting the ARIS award, it is recommended that a nationally celebrated Arts Week be introduced. Such an event would encourage schools: to highlight and emphasise the valuable learning that occurs when pupils' engage in artistic processes; to showcase their pupils' work in the arts disciplines; to foster links with local artists and arts organisations; to position the arts more centrally in their pupils' education; to visit cultural institutions; and to demonstrate to their pupils that the arts matter and are valued.

Recommendations for Practice

Developing an arts-rich school.

Cultivating an arts-rich environment is something that participants believed would not alone be possible, but would prove a worthwhile endeavour for any school. Their experiences throughout the year, however, led them to conclude that developing an arts-rich school would

prove a substantial undertaking requiring both strong leadership and the support of staff. Emma, for example, declared that embarking on the journey of developing an arts-rich school would require considerable "open-mindedness and flexibility from the staff and management" (E-mail: April, 2016). However while Katie emphasised the need for the collective support of staff – highlighted in her assertion that "All staff would need to feel strongly about using the arts to explore different subject areas. If the teachers value the arts then the students will too" (E-mail: April, 2016) – Amelia declared that in the absence of such harmony there must be members of staff who are prepared to advertise and showcase the value of the arts. "If some teachers were not on board" she attested, "one could easily refer them to the vast amounts of research that points to the benefits of the arts for developing divergent, creative, resilient learners and hope that they'd be inspired by the learning happening in the classrooms next door" (E-mail: April, 2016).

Initiating and sustaining change in teachers' pedagogical practice is a challenge which requires strong leadership, substantial commitment, and strategic action. Therefore, arising from the experiences and insights of the teachers participating in this research, it is recommended in that schools aspiring to become arts-rich, an ARIS or arts education coordinator be nominated. This coordinator, or coordination team, would provide leadership and example for all members of staff, whether eager to enact change or struggling to get on board. In facilitating the professional learning of teachers and in promoting the value of arts education these coordinators would: highlight examples of good practice; disseminate professional literature; encourage the sharing of expertise among staff members; promote reflective practice; and organise, as appropriate, for experts in specific arts disciplines to assist the professional development of staff. Essentially it is envisioned that with a strong coordinator leading a school's efforts to become arts-rich, the staff might become a learning community, critically examining their professional practice and developing approaches to

teaching and learning which not alone position the arts more centrally, but which are appropriate to their school context.

The role of such a coordinator, at it is envisioned, parallels with that of a Special Duties teacher with responsibility for the arts. Having previously highlighted the abolition of the qualification allowance awarded to teachers upon the completion of post-graduate study, it is incumbent that attention also be drawn to another austerity-era measure to negatively impact primary education: the moratorium on posts of responsibility. It is declared that ARIS will "encourage" and, crucially, "facilitate" schools seeking to improve their performance in the domain of arts education (DAHG & DES, 2013, p. 17). Without affording schools the opportunity to designate a post of responsibility to an arts education coordinator, however, it unclear how such improvement will be facilitated. It is therefore recommended that posts of responsibility be reintroduced, and that in schools seeking to enhance arts provision for their pupils a post of responsibility be dedicated exclusively to the arts disciplines. Indeed in "facilitating" the improvement of arts provision in schools it is further recommended that schools endeavouring to become arts-rich be awarded grants to assist them in their efforts. Such grants could not alone finance professional development from external experts, but would offer teachers valuable release time during which those with a particular expertise in an arts discipline could facilitate the professional development of their colleagues, either in observing lessons and offering constructive feedback, having their lessons observed, or in offering planning assistance.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

This is a piece of research which has presented educational stakeholders with a powerful model of professional development for primary teachers. Not alone is this a model of CPD which empowered teachers to transform their pedagogical practice in the domain of arts education, but it is a form of in-career learning which sits comfortably within the national

framework for teachers' professional development presented by the Teaching Council (2016).

However reflecting on this research – on its driving aim, overarching question, the literature

reviewed, participants recruited, and findings generated – has served to simultaneously shine

a spotlight on the limitations of the study and illuminate potential avenues for future research.

The first limitation of this work is that it is a small-scale study. While much has been

achieved by this research and its participants, and while it makes no claims other than to

present the experiences of those five teachers as they sought to enhance their professional

capacity in the arts and provide an arts-rich education for their pupils, it is acknowledged that

the modest proportion of this work may lessen its impact on educational policy. Therefore, in

response to this limitation, it is recommended that others build upon this research and that

replication studies – which, according to Robson (2011), are underutilised in social research –

be conducted. Replication of this study would provide policymakers, practitioners, and

researchers alike with a richer accumulation of data – gathered in different contexts from

different participants – and a more fulsome and extensive portrait of arts practices in primary

education.

While data yielded through classroom observations proved invaluable not alone in

informing the individual interviews but in enabling triangulation, a second limitation of this

study is that, due to teaching obligations, only one day could be spent observing the

classroom practice of each participant. Observations conducted with greater frequency

throughout the course of the year could have potentially yielded greater insights into the

process of developing an arts-rich classroom. It is also possible that recurrent observations

conducted at regular intervals throughout the duration of the study would reduce the potential

reactivity effects the presence of the researcher could have on participants. It is therefore

recommended that future studies investigating teachers' pedagogical practice in the arts not

alone conduct multiple observations of participants' lessons, but, if possible, have those

observations conducted by multiple observers. Such observations have the potential to generate robust data – grounded in real classrooms within the real opportunities and limits of primary education – providing greater insight into the realities of arts-provision in Irish schools.

While those teachers participating in this study each worked in different schools with different class levels, it is a limitation of this study that they are – with regard to their gender as well as their appreciation of, and desire to enhance professional practice in, the arts – a relatively homogenous group. Although this research provides tangible evidence of the immense potential of PLCs to enhance both professional competence and confidence in the arts, it speaks only of those who wanted to learn. This research provides no insight into the effectiveness, or otherwise, that CPD opportunities have on practitioners who either undervalue, or feel no impetus to improve their practice in, the arts. Similarly, while this work provides some insight into the task of developing an arts-rich school its focus was on individual practitioners and their efforts to develop an arts-rich classroom. It is therefore recommended that, once ARIS is up and running, future research document the experiences of a school community as it strives toward attaining the status of arts-rich school. Such a study would provide the stakeholders of arts education and arts-in-education practices alike with valuable insights into the place of arts education in the primary school and the professional development needs of the generalist teacher.

Conclusion

Those five teachers who participated in this study offer a message of profound hope to all concerned about the future of the arts in primary education. They offer us a glimpse at the quality, passion, dedication, and commitment of the teaching profession in Ireland. These were teachers who volunteered their free time so that they might become more effective

practitioners, who – in spite of enhanced demands for paperwork, in spite of the barrage of educational initiatives and policies to be implemented, in spite of the fact that their job is perceived to be more challenging, more hectic, more demanding, and more stressful than it was in the past (Morgan, 2015) – believed that change was possible and that they could be agents of that change. Their experiences show us that with meaningful professional development the generalist teacher's professional practice in the arts can be greatly enhanced.

Michael Fullan (2005) has declared that "it would be a fundamental misunderstanding of systems theory to assume that the system should change first. Each of us *is* the system; there is no chicken and egg. We must connect with others to change whatever parts of the system we can" (p. 222), and while he wasn't speaking about the arts in education, his words certainly speak *to* the arts in education. This research presents a message of hope, and a model of CPD with the capacity to empower teachers, enabling them to transform their professional practice and position the arts centrally within primary education. It was, from the outset, presented as a bottom-up change effort, and its success can be measured not alone in positive changes to the professional practice of participants, but in the ripple effect it had on their colleagues. Great teaching is an art form in itself: teachers, Robinson (2013) declares, have freedom to innovate and should not wait for policy changes before doing so. If the DES continues to prioritise literacy, numeracy, and digital learning to the detriment of the arts then we must strive to demonstrate their value, if arts policies marginalise the voice of teachers then we must make our voices heard.

At 4pm on an dull Friday afternoon at the beginning of December, 2016 – in a classroom much like any other – a community of primary teachers came together to reflect on the journey of collaborative professional learning which had been embarked upon a year previous. Their conversation was as amiable, pleasant, productive, and filled with laughter as the eight which preceded it, and while I have taken great care to accurately document the

experiences of five of these teachers, I have not yet written about the sixth. Through my involvement with this wonderful community of teachers I myself became a better teacher. I, like my participants had sought to: enact change in my classroom; reflect critically upon my pedagogical practice; enhance that practice; infuse the arts into non-arts disciplines; and foster a classroom environment in which the arts were visible and valued. Although I had always held the arts in great esteem I can readily acknowledge that I, like my participants, had neither been teaching to the best of my ability within the arts disciplines nor effectively capitalising upon the immense educative potential of the arts when used to enhance pupils' learning in non-arts subjects. The year I spent with this PLC has had a profound and lasting impact on my teaching. I noticed, and continue to notice, a demonstrable difference in the engagement of my pupils when participating in arts or arts-infused lessons. I was, like Emma, "proud of what I was doing every day" (PLC Meeting: December, 2016).

In 2016 the centenary commemorations of the 1916 Rising dominated the cultural, social, and educational landscape of Ireland. It was a year in which we celebrated the lives of the thinkers, teachers, artists, and poets who generated a social movement which forever altered the course of Irish history. Less than one week after that concluding PLC meeting – as 2016 was drawing to a close and events commemorating the centenary of the Rising were dwindling into memory – Enda Kenny announced the launch of *Creative Ireland*: a cross-governmental initiative and legacy project of the 2016 Centenary Programme. This ambitious policy is built upon five pillars, one of which – enabling the creative potential of every child – converges with the central aim of arts education within the *Primary School Curriculum*. However while it is a key objective of this programme that by 2022 every child in Ireland will have access to tuition and participation in art, music, and drama (GoI, 2016) – an objective which, if realised, has the potential to eradicate socioeconomic barriers to cultural participation creating a fairer and more equitable society – it is a policy document in which

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neither the words "teach" nor "teacher" appear at all. Like the *Arts-in-Education Charter*, this is a policy in its infancy, and it is only in the implementation that we will see its effect. However as we await the publication of *Creative Children* I implore policymakers not to forget about teachers, for truly enabling the creative potential of every child requires that we first enable the creative potential of every teacher.

The present trajectory of development – as highlighted in both the *Arts-in-Education Charter* and *Creative Ireland* – points toward a future full of potential for the arts in primary education. However such futures have evaded our reach in the past. Curricular reforms in 1900, in 1971, and in 1999 each considerably strengthened the position of the arts in primary education, yet the aspirations embedded in policy were never fully realised. The future to which they aspired, in which the arts would be genuinely embedded in the holistic education of the child, never fully materialised. Teachers are "critical to the success of all efforts to improve education" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 1); where these curricula faltered was in their respective failure to provide sustained and meaningful professional development to the teachers who would be required to reconsider, reconceptualise, revise, and refine their practice. Seeking to provide an arts-rich education to Ireland's pupils is indeed a worthy pursuit, but it is one which will not succeed without teachers. While the teacher-artist partnership offers a valuable model for the professional development of Irish teachers, it is not the *only* model. This research – and the teachers who made it possible – has presented a model of professional development which succeeded in empowering teachers to transform their professional practice, not in the arts disciplines alone, but across the entire curriculum as they sought to meaningfully infuse the arts into their teaching. Their individual and collective experiences affirm PLCs as a promising approach to the development of professional knowledge and practice in arts education: in seeking to develop arts-rich cultures in primary education, this is a mechanism worth pursuing.

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Appendix A

The Hague Convention and the Preservation of Cultural Property

Asserting that to destroy or damage the cultural property of any human society is to damage the cultural heritage of all mankind, The Hague Convention sought to make provisions for the protection of cultural property during armed conflict (UNESCO, 1954). The resultant international treaty – formulated in a time of tentative peace – serves as a substantial testament to the arts as an integral thread in the very fabric of human societies. Indeed, as argued by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (2008), it is beyond dispute that the arts have been "among the most potent forces in the development of shaping of our culture and its traditions" (p. 21). However, while the preservation of cultural heritage is protected by international law, the destruction of culturally significant artistic works is ongoing in the crises of today. In May 2015 the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra was captured by Islamic State (IS), whose militants have routinely plundered and destroyed sites in the large stretches of Syria under their control (Curry, 2015). In a region known as the "cradle of civilisation" their initial promises to leave the site's ancient ruins untouched proved empty as IS went on to execute archaeologist Khaled al-Asaad – hailed by Robert Edsel (2015) as a modern-day Monuments Man – before reducing to rubble the remarkably well-preserved temples of Palmyra (Curry, 2015). With their ongoing destruction of libraries, monasteries, and temples, and with the systematic looting of artefacts to be sold in funding their operations (Curry, 2015), the world has lost a significant part of its history and culture (Kahn, 2015).

Appendix B

Plain Language Statement offered to Participants

My name is Mary Grennan and as you have been made aware, I am about to enter my third year of Doctoral studies in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research project entitled "Exploring the Potential for Arts-Rich Education in the Primary Classroom". An invitation to participate in this study has also been extended to all of the teachers who participated in this summer course.

This research seeks to work with a small community of mainstream class teachers who, in reflecting on their professional practice and engaging in structured professional conversation, will investigate the place of the arts in Irish schools and explore the possibility of creating an arts-rich classroom. In the context of this research "the arts" refers to dance, drama, music, the visual arts, poetry, literature, and creative writing.

If you agree to participate in this study you will become a member of a Professional Learning Community which will meet once a month to discuss their teaching, their observations, their ideas, and their questions. It is expected that these meetings will last approximately 90 minutes. Each one will have a different focus, and all participants are invited to suggest a topic or element of arts education they would like to discuss. Community meetings will be audio-recorded and will run from September until March. Participants will be encouraged to keep a Reflective Journal between meetings. One observation of your teaching, and an individual interview will be conducted in the final term. While this is quite a commitment, it is anticipated that involvement in this project will be a wonderful professional development opportunity and will have a positive impact on classroom practice.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, if you agree to participate in this study you can withdraw at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the study have been completed. If you do choose to participate in this study, you will be ascribed a pseudonym, and neither your school nor any potentially distinguishing information will be disclosed. Data which is gathered will be stored on a password protected laptop, and disposed of within three years of the study's completion.

If you have any concerns of questions about this research please feel free to contact me by email or phone. If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person please contact the REC Administration in St. Patrick's College on 01-8842149.

Appendix C

Letter of Consent sent to the Parents or Guardians of Participating Pupils

*Letters all printed on official school-headed paper.

September 2015

Dear Parent / Guardian,

I am writing to inform you that this year I will be participating in a research project which aims to explore the potential for arts-rich education in Irish primary schools. While this research is focused on teachers' professional practice, photographs taken in the classroom will provide invaluable data illustrating the valuable learning that happens during arts activities and what children are capable of when working within a supportive and creative learning environment.

This research is being conducted by a doctoral student in St. Patrick's College, and has ethical approval from the institute's faculty. Neither participating teachers nor their schools will be named in the research, and photographs of your child will only be used with your consent.

I believe that participation in this project this will provide a wonderful learning opportunity for both me and your child, and would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Kind regards,

_____   _____   _____

Class teacher   School principal   Lead researcher

_____

Please tick as appropriate and return to your class teacher:

Child's name: _____

I give permission for photographs of my child's work samples (artwork, writing etc.) to be included in the research.   O

I give permission for photographs of my child, where their face is not visible, to be included in the research.   O

I give permission for photographs of my child involved in learning activities to be included in the research.   O

Appendix D

The Format of Professional Learning Community Meetings

1. ## How's it going?

   Each member will present a brief overview of the classroom activities / lessons / learning activities which have taken place in the domain of arts education in their classroom. What worked? How can you tell it worked? Were children engaged? Motivated? On-task? What didn't work? Why? What would you change...?

   30 minutes

2. ## Feedback

   An opportunity to provide members with feedback on their practice or to ask for elaboration on a particular idea or lesson.

   10 minutes

3. ## Professional conversation / Professional development

   The focus will change from month to month, and conversation will revolve around a pre-selected aspect of arts education. Articles, videos, and personal experience will inform conversation as we try to determine what is possible within an Irish context.

   40 minutes

4. ## Personal action planning

   A chance for individualised planning: what will be possible in your class?

   15 minutes

Appendix E

The Content of Professional Learning Community Meetings

Date	Venue	Topic	Resources
September, 2015	Researcher's Classroom	Action Research Arts-Infusion	*Self-reflective Spiral of Action Research,* (adapted from Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998) *All you Need to Know about Action Research*, Jean McNiff & Jack Whitehead (2009) *Teaching through the Arts: Creating the Future* (YouTube video by the Arts Education in Maryland Schools Alliance) Arts Integration Solutions website
October, 2015	Amelia's Classroom	Enabling the Creative Process *proposed by Elizabeth*	*Creativity and the Arts in the Primary School*, INTO (2010) *A Kick in the Seat of the Pants,* Roger von Oech (1986) *Do Schools kill Creativity?* Ken Robinson (2006) *How to Escape Education's Death Valley*, Ken Robinson (2013)
November, 2015	Elizabeth's Classroom	Composing *proposed by Katie*	*Teacher Guidelines* (GoI, 1999) PDST website SFS Kids' website

December, 2015	Grace's Classroom	The Arts in the Approach to Festive Occasions *proposed by Emma*	*VA Teacher Guidelines* (GoI, 1999) Artworks by: Norman Rockwell, Robert Bradford, Ivan Shishkin, Wassily Kandinsky, Claude Monet, & Edvard Munch.
January, 2016	Elizabeth's Classroom	Poetry *proposed by Katie*	*Teacher Guidelines* (GoI, 1999) *English within the Arts*, Peter Abbs (1982) *Windharp: Poems of Ireland since 1916*, Niall MacMonagle (2015) Children's Poetry Archive website
February, 2016	Emma's Classroom	Drama *proposed by Grace*	*Step by Step*, Joanna Parks & Sarah FitzGibbon (2006) *Step by Step Together* Joanna Parks & Sarah FitzGibbon (2010) *Teacher Guidelines* (GoI, 1999)
March, 2016	Katie's Classroom	Dance *proposed by Elizabeth*	*Teacher Guidelines* (GoI, 1999) PDST website Arts Online website (New Zealand arts education portal)
April, 2016	Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery	Visual Thinking Strategies *proposed by Amelia*	*Visual Thinking Strategies,* Philip Yenawine (2014)

Appendix F

Sample Interview Schedule (Amelia)

Was today representative or typical of your teaching this year?

Do you think participation in the ARC project has had an impact on your teaching?
(Has your professional practice changed? How have children responded to these changes?
*try to elicit evidence/example)

Do you feel there is anything distinctive about the arts disciplines within the PSC?

What do the arts disciplines contribute to the education of the child?
(What have you seen to make you say that? *try to elicit evidence/example)

Do you feel that the arts are valued in your school?
(If so, how does that manifest itself? If not, why not? What is impeding an arts-rich culture?)

Your day appears quite fragmented, does that have an impact on your teaching? Does it impact your teaching of the arts?

You've said before that an arts-rich classroom is one where the arts are visibly valued, whereby arts infusion is used to enrich other areas of the curriculum, whereby children are exposed to high quality works of art and enjoy artistic processes themselves… Would you describe yours as an arts-rich classroom?
(What changes have you made? Were these changes easy to make? *try elicit examples)

Do you feel that ITE prepared you sufficiently for teaching arts disciplines?

What is your understanding of the terms "professional learning" or "CPD"?

Do you think teachers have a responsibility to engage in CPD? Who should finance it?

What type of supports do you think primary teachers need to become more competent in their teaching of the arts disciplines?

What do you recall of your own arts experiences in primary school?
(Have attitudes towards the arts changed in the interim?)

Appendix G

Participants' Individual Reflections on Arts-Rich Education

What, in your opinion, is an arts-rich classroom?

Amelia:
An arts rich classroom is one in which the arts are visibly valued. This is achieved through the dual process of exposing students to high quality art, music, literature, poetry, dance, drama and the implementation of artistic processes as learning tools.
It is one in which the arts are not only taught as standalone subjects with worth in their own right but which also infuses them into other subject areas to enhance the learning process. In this way the arts permeate the everyday experience of the child in school.
For example a piece of poetry may be looked at in an English poetry lesson or it may be used as part of a history lesson; as a stimulus for visual arts; as a story to accompany a dance composition; or to explore a topic in SPHE.
To embrace the artistic process means that the children are seen as creators. The emphasis is on the creative process (whether it be in science, maths or visual arts) and allowing the children to explore and experiment as much as possible.

Elizabeth:
An arts-rich classroom is one where the teacher recognises the importance of the arts as key to students' personal, social and emotional development. An arts-rich classroom is not necessarily confined to teaching a certain amount of arts subjects each day, but uses and infuses the arts across the curriculum. It encourages children to involve themselves in varying experiences that many may be reluctant to engage in at first. An arts-rich classroom provides ways of engaging all pupils, catering for different learning styles and interests. In an arts-rich classroom children are encouraged to connect with their peers and teachers in a way that enriches their educational experience. I have noticed a discernible difference in the children's positive attitudes to each other. They are more aware of their peers comments and work, and often respond to what they have noticed with a positive comment or a question to clarify something. Without a doubt this has helped develop self-esteem and communication skills within the classroom.

Emma:
An arts-rich classroom exposes the children within it to a variety of art forms, and allows them to respond to these art forms as well as create them and participate in them. Exposure to, and interaction with, works of art/music/literature allows the children to appreciate various art forms, encourages appreciation and discussion, and fosters an interest in creatively developing their own pieces of art. Not only does this provide the opportunity to develop their own artistic skills, it also helps develop oral language, group work, appreciation of their other unique talents and skills, and an awareness of the world around them. In an arts-rich classroom, many different art forms can be integrated and used to teach other subject areas, allowing the children to become more actively engaged in the topics and develop a broader understanding and greater knowledge of the subject matter.

Grace:

An arts rich classroom is a classroom which has created a healthy learning environment for all children. It caters for all children and their learning styles and allows for each child to develop in a holistic manner. An arts rich classroom breaks down preconceived ideas of what learning should look like, breaks down ideas of teaching lessons and subjects in isolation and breaks down barriers of learning which are restricted by the use of books and pressures of completing work books. Within an arts rich classroom, children find learning more enjoyable and are more engaged in their learning as a result. Children are more able to make connections between curricular areas and their personal lives and experiences. They also have more in-depth responses to questions and topics which are being taught as a result of new stimuli (arts based). Children may also experience improved self-esteem and self-confidence as they discover their new strengths through their engagement with the arts both within the core subjects and on their own.

Children are active in their lessons.

Stimuli such as images, pieces of music, photographs, maps are used to introduce topics to a class whilst other curricular area teaching tools are used to develop a lesson and are also used to assess children's knowledge such as drawing an image to summarise the main aspects you have learned in the topic (like Ancient Rome).

Katie:

An arts rich classroom is a space where children explore different subject areas using the arts. For example they could learn about a historic event by looking at the music and songs of the time. In Science they could attempt to prove a theory or solve a problem by using the creative process (Explorer, Artist, Judge and Warrior). Art could be used when learning Maths. It is a space where the arts are used to show understanding of a topic. For example creating a drama based on a historical topic that the class has been studying. It is a classroom where the process is valued as much as the outcome. Where discussion and active learning are a routine part of the day. To me it is a space where children are encouraged to think and problem solve creatively. They are praised and given opportunities to put their thoughts and opinions forward. By placing the arts at the centre of learning in enables different types of learners to express themselves. What I mean by that is that in an arts-rich classroom a child who has difficulty recording what they have learned in written form could be given the chance to so in visual form instead.

What does learning look like in an arts-rich classroom?

Amelia:

In an arts rich classroom children learn about learning. The emphasis is placed on the process not the product, where trial and error is a natural occurrence.

Children are engaged in meaningful tasks that generally focus on more than one curricular area. Leaning is more of a blended experience in which children learn more in the doing than they could in just hearing/seeing. It is the epitome of constructivist learning: learning is a process which includes action and reflection to improve future learning. When your paper town collapses you not only want to fix it but you learn how to improve it. When you need to spell a word for your own poem, you remember it the next time you need it. When your maths equation isn't working out you retrace your steps or you find a different method that works for you.

From the learning I seen taking place in my classroom during so many of the arts rich activities this year, I can also say without a doubt that is a social type of learning. The children naturally chatted to each other about their art pieces, they couldn't wait to read bits of their poetry out, they asked each other for help with their creations, they revelled in the interactions through drama and they were far more excited about creating music together than alone.

The language development that took place during this time was amazing. The role of dialogue was evident. Kids were having internal conversations while engaged in individual work, they spoke with others as discussed above, and they engaged in dialogue with myself to bridge that learning further.

This social aspect was abundantly clear to me this week as the children created their own paper theme parks in visual arts. As before, the children were chatting to each other, helping each other get the roller coasters upright, getting ideas from each other and asking each other about their creations. But today, something great happened, I approached one corner towards the end of the lesson and four children had glued their parks together "we thought they'd be even deadlier together" "like a huge big theme park". All the other kids wanted to add theirs (and insisted I add mine); we now have one huge theme park and I've no idea where to put it!

Elizabeth:

Having promoted an arts-rich classroom for the last seven months I have seen first-hand how learning experiences have been shaped by my perception of and involvement in an arts-rich classroom. I have seen first-hand how children have moved from doing a 'subject' to being wholly involved in a theme that may have stretched from Maths, to History, Art and Poetry. As a result, children are not confined in their learning. They are now cognisant of how what they learn can be of benefit to them in a variety of ways. This knowledge can then be brought up naturally and appropriately throughout the day-not just in one subject. Children who had restricted themselves to only being involved in the subjects that they deemed themselves good at now use the knowledge that they acquire throughout a number of lessons. This has resulted in an increase in confidence. The children are also more likely to positively comment on each other's work, or ask inquisitive questions about another peers story, poetry or artwork. Children are keen to read out their creative writing/poetry and now applaud each other on their work, unprompted! This has resulted in better classroom relationships and an increased interest in topics/subjects that was not as visible at the start of the year.

Emma:

Through promoting arts-infusion throughout the subject areas, learning and teaching becomes a lot less rigid and formulaic, and begins to break down the barriers between subject areas. When working on a theme, many subjects can be integrated into one, with the children inevitably receiving a more interactive and well-rounded experience of a certain topic. Through infusing the arts into History or Science, for example, they can access the information through different media, rather than just reading information from a book. Children are given a chance to learn in a way that suits them, whether through visual stimulation, dramatic interpretations, reading, writing or moving.

As the children are more actively and creatively involved in the lessons, they become more engaged with the topic. Enjoyment of, and pride in, their work occurs when the children see that all ideas are valued and that there is not just one measure of successful completion. The process of assessment within an arts-rich classroom is less intimidating for children, as they know they are working in a classroom environment that appreciates their efforts, and that all talents are accepted. Many different levels of success are presented to them, rather than just doing well on a written test or assignment.

Grace:

To begin with the children are engaged with the content of the lesson but also enthusiastic to return to lessons and learning within multiple curricular areas. The children are using the creative process – The explorer, the artist, the warrior and the judge. The questions which children ask are constantly improving as they are inferring across curricular areas and making connections between their own life experiences and their education. There is a lot of inquiry based learning as children are learning through the process of completing work, rather than the examining the end product. In conjunction with this, each piece of work completed is specific and special to the individual student. Children have ownership over their work. Assessment is also authentic and specific to the children themselves as opposed to more formal methods of assessment which can cause anxieties within children.

Katie:

In an arts-rich environment learning can be seen in various forms. Children learn in different ways and an arts-rich classroom tries to cater for those different learning styles. Learning can take place in so many ways such as: song singing, acting, drawing, playing, composing, responding to a piece of art or music, reading a poem and dance. In my experience when children are learning in an arts-rich classroom they are more engaged and confident. They respond extremely well to active learning activities such as using freeze frames to show understanding of new vocabulary. Students are extremely proud of their work and want to show off what they have learned. They are not afraid to be creative and to think outside the box. They find it easier to make connections and they learn so much from each other.

Do you think it would be possible to create or develop an arts-rich school? If so, how might this be achieved? If no, what barriers would impede it?

Amelia:

Teachers are not always naturally collaborative. However, given the opportunity to share ideas the possibilities are limitless. If teachers in a school were to meet as we did with the plc this would be highly conducive to building an arts rich school. There would need to be investment on a school level in the provision of high quality arts materials if they were not already available (prints of nice paintings in the hallways/stills from plays or dance/embroidery). These would be a nice touch and would make the arts more visible but with the abundance of online resources these days this would not need to be too expansive. The important thing would be that the commitment was there from the teachers and that they truly believed in the value of an arts rich education. If some teachers were not on board, one could easily refer them to the vast amounts of research that points to the benefits of the arts for developing divergent, creative, resilient learners and hope that they'd be inspired by the learning happening in the classrooms next door.

There will always be progressive, proactive schools but until the arts are valued more by the Dept of Education and the NCCA it would be unlikely to become the norm in schools. Real commitment to the arts has yet to be seen from either source. The support of the arts remains disjointed and sparsely scattered for schools. The focus on the arts as a major part of the centenary celebrations of the 1916 rising show the high status conferred upon them when aiming to show our best face to the world. Yet the grassroots culture is still underdeveloped.

Elizabeth:

It would be possible to create an arts-rich school. However, it must be noted that this would be a difficult endeavour and cannot be done without review and change of the attitudes and beliefs of many educators, parents and, at times, children. Throughout college, student teachers receive substantially more training in what are deemed to be the 'academic' subjects. The arts seem to take a backseat. This undoubtedly influences a trainee teacher's perception on how important the arts are. This also hinders teachers from recognising the full potential of an arts-rich classroom as a place where topics can be explored through a variety of media: poetry, song, dance, articles, journals, story, creative writing, but to name a few.

I have been teaching for 7 years now and have yet to encounter a parent who asks about any of the art subjects at all, except the language arts when they seek to know their child's reading achievement. Many of the questions are related to Maths or Irish. Once, I commented on a wonderful piece of creative writing and showed the parent the relevant text. The response was 'Why are all the spelling mistakes not corrected?' For an arts-rich school to work, everyone involved: parents, teachers and children must be aware that learning is a process and the mistakes that we make will pale in comparison to what we have learned. An arts-rich school needs the full support and understanding of all members of staff. As a result, continuous professional development is needed. I have found it difficult to teach some aspects of the arts that previous teachers had neglected to teach. For example, I recently tried to engage the children in dance for PE. Many strong characters within the class refused to engage within the lesson, claiming it was not PE. The children who seemed interested were not confident enough to take part in the lesson for fear that they would be ridiculed. In order for an arts rich school to be achieved then it is imperative that all educators include all aspects of the arts in their teaching and learning. Commitment to an arts rich education needs to be promoted by all in the school community and not just one or two educators.

Emma:

I think for this to happen you would need a huge amount of open-mindedness and flexibility from the staff and management. It is something that many would find daunting at first, and it would inevitably encounter negative views from many teachers. I think in order for an arts-rich school to be successful at the present time in Ireland, there would need to be training provided for the teachers, as even those teachers who are newly qualified have forgotten the bases of the arts curriculum and how it should be approached. In my own school in particular, I feel a huge shift would be needed to move away from the product and result centred attitude that is there currently. Every teacher has an enormous work load to deal with, and also has to contend with test results and parental expectations. I think if it were to be suggested in my own school, the over whelming opinion is that 'we have enough to do, stop making us do more.' Again, I can only talk of my own experience, but until attitudes like that are removed, it would be very difficult to get a whole school on board.

As we are coming to the end of a school year, I am already concerned that the excellent progress my class have made this year, in all curriculum areas and in their arts education, will go to waste if they are to move on to certain teachers next year who will not continue this approach. This would obviously not be the case if there was a whole school approach and if we were all to practice arts-integration, but unfortunately, this is the reality.

I think the way the current curriculum is developed, and the assessment methods that are used in Irish schools, with the focus being on literacy and numeracy, is detrimental to the arts curriculum as it stands. Reading, writing and arithmetic still take priority, even though the '99 curriculum was established to curtail this attitude. Unfortunately, in its current guise, and with English and Maths taking the bulk of the suggested time according to Department guidelines, the arts are already being pushed aside.

Grace:

I think it would be possible to create an arts rich school.

- Staff meetings: Present the teachers with evidence of the benefits of an arts rich classroom. Showing video evidence and pieces of work where the benefits of an arts rich classroom are clear.
- School workshops/Demonstrations within classrooms by teachers with previous experience.
- Provide schools with sample schemes of work with teaching strategies and guidelines to show teachers how to create an arts rich classroom.
- Amending a Plan Scoile.
- Assigning a post within the school to have someone/ a group of people to oversee the efforts of teachers but also act as a person to go to with concerns, questions, to brainstorm with or gain information from in order to help develop an arts rich classroom.
- Arrange meetings to discuss how things are going in class and how things may be improved.

Katie:

I definitely think it would be possible to create / develop an arts-rich school. It would need a whole staff approach. Every member would need to believe in using the arts as a core approach to teaching and learning. In my opinion this is the most important factor. All staff would need to feel strongly about using the arts to explore different subject areas. If the teachers value the arts then the students will too. It would be important that school policies would reflect this and place a very strong emphasis on the arts. Individual and stream planning would need to contain arts rich content also. The school and staff would have to put a lot of emphasis on the importance of the process rather than the outcome. I think this would be the greatest challenge. Teachers and schools are under huge pressure to provide an end result, something that 'looks good' and this is often at the expense of children's learning.

I think an arts rich school would need time. Time to create and foster its ethos and time for the benefits of this type of teaching and learning to be seen. I believe these benefits would be seen not only in children's learning but in the form of a positive and inclusive school atmosphere. Staff would also need training to help them to use the arts when teaching. Personally, I believe that an arts rich school would go from strength to strength. Since putting more emphasis on the arts in my own teaching I feel more motivated and empowered. The children are more engaged and because of that I am enjoying teaching more