

Finding Creativity in the Classroom

Bernadette Larkin

This guide drew on the experience of artists working on Creativity in the Classroom - an art in schools project working with children across the Canal Community, Dublin 8, since 1997 along with my own experience as a creative practitioner working in arts, education and community for longer than I'd like to say.

With thanks to artists: *Liz McMahon, Mirjam Keune, Beth O'Halloran, Genevieve Harden, Sarah Kernaghan, Jane Groves, Una Keeley*, and to *Melissa Hogan* (Creativity in the Classroom Co-ordinator)

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Bernadette Larkin 2026

Photographs by kind permission of Creativity in the Classroom.



**“There are only two lasting bequests
we can hope to give our children.
One of these is roots, the other, wings.”**

Hodding Carter

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Introduction

This guide grew out of a research Master's in Education in Maynooth University and over three decades spent working as a creative practitioner in arts, education and community, developing my practice across a range of art forms with artists of all disciplines.

As Project Manager of ArkLink in Fatima Mansions, (an initiative of The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children) I embedded myself in this community for over six years developing and managing a multidisciplinary arts programme with some wonderful artists and an army of creative, talented children. This is also where I became aware of the incredible Creativity in the Classroom project as the children moved between ArkLink and school, developing fluency with materials and art forms, taking their arts rich life for granted, as should be their right.

Later, as Head of Education & Programmes in the beautiful Airfield Estate, I designed and developed a range of arts & education programmes linked to the natural world. After this and many more creative collaborations under my belt, I decided to go in search of the theory to fit my practice.

This might be viewed as a slightly skewed approach, but based on my research with these experienced artists, I am not alone. I liken it to an old-style apprenticeship where your craft is learned and honed by working alongside masters who are willing to share their knowledge. It is also based on a spirit of reciprocity, of putting back in as much or more than you take.

Much of what I have learned is based on curiosity, of being a bit of a magpie – stealing bits from here and tacking it on there, trusting my gut instincts, being willing to make mistakes, own them and learn from them. Some of the best things I have been part of emerged from what I saw as mistakes, but later realised that they gave me roots and supports. I have been blessed with the people I have met along the way who were kind enough to listen to my tales of woe along with sharing in and celebrating my joys.

My advice? Stay curious, trust in your instinct and in the creative process, listen to everyone then make your own decision. When working with children let them lead you – you will learn more from them than from any textbook or expert. Remember to take time to celebrate the joys. Feed your own creativity with whatever works best for you but don't forget to take the time to do nothing – to just be.

Finally, ask for help when you need it, remember to say thank you and give credit where it's due and most importantly, know that we are all making it up as we go along!

Bernadette Larkin, April 2026



Rationale

This guide aims to be a support for artists wishing to develop their practice in primary schools. As already outlined, it draws on the experience of artists who, during a series of interviews, drew on their considerable experience of working in education and numerous other contexts.

It also draws on my own creative practice, learned over many years working to create the conditions where artists and children can thrive, immersing themselves in the creative act. It is geared more towards developmental programmes where artists have time to develop relationships with children and teachers, rather than once-off workshops, but some of the information here will be of use to both.

While some of the suggestions may seem obvious and lean towards the practical, this is a deliberate choice. You, as the artist, are the expert on your own creative practice, so the purpose here is to provide practical suggestions in order to support you in your work with children in primary schools. In my experience, when the practicalities are taken care of, it gives the artist freedom to focus on the work and creating a meaningful experience for all involved.

Often, it is the small, unforeseen things that can get in the way of the work and cause tensions between artists and teachers in that moment. If you are new to this environment, it can take time to get used to the constraints of the classroom, so take time to talk to and listen to the teacher – you are the visitor here. Although this guide is written from the perspective of artists and aims to contribute to an understanding of the needs of the artist working in this environment, at its core this work is founded on a collaborative partnership between artist, teacher and children. Clear and open communication is key to good partnerships. Within this, however, be true to your vision and pedagogical decisions as an artist; you are there to make a difference with your practice and, in disrupting the usual class dynamic, can bring about transformative experiences for children and teachers.

Take what you want from this and add or subtract as suits you. Most of all, remember to take time to reflect on and celebrate your work and remember to feel and share the joy.



Creativity in the Classroom

The beginnings ...

Against the social and economic background in the late 1980s and 90s, where communities of the south inner city of Dublin were devastated by unemployment, poverty, poor housing and a heroin epidemic that ravaged their young people, a group of stakeholders, concerned by the unacceptable conditions and inappropriate events they were witnessing in their neighbourhoods, gathered to address social and educational inequity in their area.

Driven by the Canal Community Partnership, local schools spanning Inchicore, Rialto, Kilmainham and Bluebell in Dublin 8 were invited to explore ways in which children at risk of early school leaving could be assisted to achieve their potential through supporting their emotional and social wellbeing. Teachers noticed that some children were exhibiting signs of trauma and were concerned at the lack of opportunity within the classroom for children to deal with and express negative emotions. They also wanted to explore ways in which children with varying needs could access diverse ways of learning that would support the development of the whole child.

In 1997, Creativity in the Classroom (CIC), a school-based creative arts programme, was born out of this process of cross-sector discourse and the belief that the arts could actively and positively contribute to the holistic development of the child and their educational experience. It aimed to engage with the philosophy of the Primary curriculum (1997) and had its own defined set of aims. It would be a partnership between artist and teacher and would involve parents and guardians closely in the creative process. Finally, it would also take a whole class approach, rather than withdrawing the most vulnerable for one-to-one attention. Creativity in the Classroom is still working with children in schools in the areas bordered by the Grand Canal, despite Department of Education funding ending in 2009.

Since then, the project has continued to support the creative development of children through contributions from each of the schools involved and successful grant applications to local authorities, educational and community and philanthropic organisations.

**“If you have found your purpose in life
and experience a feeling of deep joy -
doesn't have to be every minute of every
day - you are following your bliss.”**

Joseph Campbell, *Pathways to Bliss*

Creativity in the Classroom aims

- To use the process of Creativity in the Classroom / Artist in the Classroom, to enhance and develop children's emotional and mental wellbeing
- Artist to work alongside the teacher to increase opportunities for better integration of all children within the classroom environment
- To improve children's feelings of self-worth and self esteem
- To allow opportunities for safe and meaningful expression
- To enhance children's engagement with learning and make it more meaningful for them
- To encourage the development of supportive relationships with adults and with their peers
- To integrate with other relevant areas of the curriculum: e.g. S.P.H.E and the new Oral Language Curriculum
- To be flexible in how the programme is delivered using ongoing evaluation
- To help children develop emotionally, intellectually, physically, socially, spiritually and aesthetically
- Through all the above to positively impact upon early school leaving which manifests itself most acutely in areas of disadvantage and poverty

The schools

- Inchicore National School, Sarsfield Rd, Kilmainham, Dublin 10
- St James Primary School, Basin Lane, Dublin 8
- Loreto Junior Primary School, Crumlin, Dublin 12
- Loreto Senior Primary School, Crumlin, Dublin 12
- Warrenmount, Presentation Primary School, Blackpitts, Dublin 8
- Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Inchicore, Dublin 8
- Inchicore National School, Kilmainham Road, Dublin 8

The artists

Liz McMahon

Liz McMahon graduated in Fine Art from Limerick School of Art and Design in 1981. She moved to Co. Wicklow in 1986. She was Children's Programme Co-ordinator at the Irish Museum of Modern Art from 1991 to 2000. She has been working with children in and out of school on creative long-term programmes such as Mus-e – a three-year programme in primary schools, Mapping – a six-year programme with children in Bluebell Youth Project, Creativity in the Classroom since its beginning. She qualified as a Forest School Leader several years ago and has been facilitating Forest School in Killiney.

Deirdre O'Reilly

Deirdre is a ceramics artist; she works independently on her own work and also in collaboration with other artists and with children. She has worked creatively with children on the Creativity in the Classroom program for over 20 years.

“I get immense enjoyment and inspiration from working with the children; in particular I love children's use of colour and line. Seeing their excitement and confidence grow when discovering a new way of working and a new way of creating is very fulfilling. I feel this newfound confidence can have a really positive impact in all aspects of their lives.”

Genevieve Harden

Genevieve's practice encompasses both educational and community settings, which include exhibitions, installation, video, painting, performance and public commissions. Education combined with process-based projects are a core source of inspiration. She has worked in many different settings around Dublin and Wicklow since 1998.

Mirjam Keune

Mirjam works as an artist with children and adults in schools, community settings and on collaborative art projects. She has a degree from NCAD in fine art. Her studio practice involves mixed media and crafts (painting and textile crafts).

Jane Groves

Jane Groves is a visual artist whose work is embedded in meaningful process-driven engagement and site-specific installation. Her work encompasses a variety of methodology, from silversmithing and metal work to printing and fabric design. She has worked extensively with children and communities, working with The Ark, Dublin City Council, Creativity in the Classroom, the Craft and Design Council, DLR and many more. Jane curates spaces and creates work intended to be viewed in context. She loves to connect people, place and landscape.

Jane specialises in working with young people, inspired by her own observations of nature and informed in part by many children's lack of interaction with, and vocabulary, about the natural world. She delights in bringing her spark to the classroom, listening carefully and delighting in the creative response, encouraging passion, playfulness and curiosity

Sarah Kernaghan

Sarah Kernaghan studied fine art at Crawford College of Art and Design and continued to train there as a teacher of art at second level. Sarah worked in The Ark, a Cultural Centre for Children, and then for Creativity in the Classroom as an artist in residence. She currently teaches art and ethical education in North Wicklow Educate Together Secondary School and doesn't paint as much as she'd like to!

Beth O'Halloran

Beth O'Halloran is a visual artist, writer and educator based in Dublin. She is an MFA lecturer in painting at NCAD, has exhibited widely in Ireland and internationally and is in Irish public and US museum collections (OPW, Irish Arts Council, Olin Museum of Art, Maine). She is also a recipient of the Irish Times Hennessy Fiction Award 2019 for her prose.

Una Keeley

Una Keeley is a professional Irish artist, educator and mindfulness instructor. She has designed educational programmes for arts organisations and institutions for over 25 years, including 15 years for the Irish Museum of Modern Art, The Ark, Fingal County Council and Gorey School of Art.

Where do I belong?

“The uses of time, the choices we make with respect to what to think and write about, are part of visual politics... As we think and write about visual art, as we make spaces for dialogue across boundaries, we engage in a process of cultural transformation that will ultimately create a revolution in vision.”

bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics*

Artists who work in education often occupy several other work environments, so where do they belong? Some artists are clear about their practice(s), while others are not sure where they fit. They are not teachers in the traditional sense but are, nonetheless, working in education; they are artists but often find themselves on the outside of the arts world. Some artists have a separate and distinct personal arts practice, while for others collaboration is the core of their practice.

Many teaching artists find themselves having to justify their work as ‘real’ artists. Indeed, “Are you a real artist?” is a question children often ask, and this emerges from a variety of places. Children are concerned with authenticity; they like to know that the person is real, believes in what they are doing. They frequently ask, “How much money does an artist make?” and while this may seem mercenary, this can be inspired by the fact that they have met a real person who is an artist, so maybe they can be one too.

Despite collaborative and participatory art becoming more recognised by the Arts Council and being taught in art colleges, let’s be honest, we still have a lot of work to do until some of the arts world sees teaching artists as ‘real’ artists, with a deep understanding of their practice and a commitment to excellence. One of the artists interviewed sees this as emerging from the historical context, where fine art has a centuries-old tradition of documentation and study behind it, while collaborative arts are still relatively new.

Perhaps it is the job of the current generation of artists and creative practitioners to continue to create high-quality, meaningful arts experiences for children, while also advocating for adequate time and funding for reflection, evaluation, documentation and mentorship. In this way, we will continue to build a body of literature that will contribute to the understanding of and esteem for this work.



Invisible pedagogies

“Pedagogy is not about training; it is about critically educating people to be self-reflective, capable of critically addressing their relationship with others and with the larger world. Pedagogy in this sense provides not only important critical and intellectual competencies; it also enables people to intervene critically in the world.”

Henry Giroux, *‘Rethinking Education as the Practice of Freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy’*

While teaching artists may have difficulty finding their place within the arts world, it can be just as difficult in the education sector. They are not usually qualified teachers, and therefore their approach to working in the classroom can sometimes be questioned, leading to them feeling undermined and isolated. This is not always so, and respectful and reciprocal relationships, built with teachers, have the potential to create transformative arts experiences for the children and also for the adults. While the approach may be different, both teacher and artist want the best possible experience for the children. However, developing a good working relationship does not mean compromising on your artistic values or your ambition for the children; as an artist you are there to bring about different possibilities and ways of seeing. This needs to be made explicit, so be open with the teacher from the start.

Artists often feel called on to justify their practice, sometimes leading to tensions in the classroom and leaving the artist demoralised. This can occur because artists make decisions on their feet, in the moment, and often fail to communicate these to the teacher. This can arise because, having met the group, they know that the original workshop plan is not going to work. What is second nature to the artist is invisible to the teacher and may look like the artist is unsure and has simply changed their mind. The artist does not want the children to sense uncertainty so acts swiftly, and this can leave the teacher unsure of what is happening.

Taking a few moments here would reassure the teacher that you are, in fact, making a pedagogically informed decision, drawing on your experience and your learnings. Most of us in this sector are freelance workers and go from job to job in a feast or famine mode, often taking on too much work, which leaves us little time to reflect on the project afterwards. Most of our process and decision making is instinctive and draws on muscle memory and intuition. Yet if we can take the time to locate our practice, we will find a rich lineage of critical and creative theorists, from Freire to Giroux and bell hooks, to name but a few. A clear and visual model of critical creative pedagogies by Dr Anke Schwittay can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/599659072>

Identifying your practice within these theories will help you communicate your pedagogical approach and the values underpinning it and support you in the education environment. You are standing on the shoulders of giants; get to know them.

Finding your tribe

As an artist navigating both arts and education sectors, it can often be hard to find where you fit. You may have to look for your tribe in more than one place. Look on this as a positive, as you will have a diverse network and community of practice across a range of sectors.

You will find in-person and online special interest groups that will expand your network and your knowledge. Find artists' book groups or start one yourself – an online one may build an international network, while a local one will provide a space for meeting and potential for collaboration.

Look out for artists' coffee mornings or meetings in arts and cultural organisations. Check out education centres too. Ongoing attendance at CPD sessions will build your skills as well as your community of practice.

Be generous but not foolish with your ideas – let them ferment until they are ready to see the light.

Approach education and outreach departments in museums and galleries to get information on upcoming openings and trainings. Sometimes you may be able to join in First Aid or Child Protection Training. You won't know until you ask.

Your local arts office and your library are great sources of information.

Keep informed about funding possibilities from the Arts Council and local authorities – further training and mentorship opportunities will develop your practice and your network. One artist here advises to allocate a third of your time to funding applications to finance projects, but also to keep your name recognised in arts and education circles.

Experiences beyond your immediate sectors will provide you with surprising connections, so think outside your immediate circle.

Be brave, make the first approach, they will love you.



Who owns this place anyway? exploring the city

“Who do you think owns this place?
Is it the President? Is it the Taoiseach? Is it yours?

Yes, it’s mine but it’s yours too!
It belongs to all of us, you, and me,
and your mummies and daddies.

We can come in here anytime
we like and look at our paintings and
our sculptures and things from the past.”

(Creativity in the Classroom artist)

Built into Creativity in the Classroom is a spirit of reciprocity between artists and children, with a constant exchange of conversation and ideas. This also extends beyond the children to their families and beyond the classroom out into the city. These trips take place each year and provide children with artistic stimulation but also with a sense of place and ownership of their city.

Visits to galleries and museums begin to gently establish a sense of ownership and a sense of cultural rights in children. Artists make sure to bring children to cultural institutions that are accessible on foot or on public transport so that these places are accessible to the children and their families. Children often happily report back to artists that they have visited some of these places afterwards with their parents. Involving parents in these visits is hugely valuable, as a connection with the city beyond the children’s immediate environment is not always the case. Creativity in the Classroom has seen a high uptake for these visits over the years, and artists and teachers have witnessed the positive effect on both parents and children of sharing the same cultural experience.

Cultural institutions are very welcoming to school groups, and if you give them advance notice, you may be able to book a guided tour, free of charge. Sign up to the mailing list to keep up to date with what is coming up. The learning and community departments in galleries and museums are an excellent source of information; they are well worth linking in with and can often accommodate a thematic visit linking in with your work in school.

Plan any visits well in advance with the class teacher. Don’t expect it to happen at short notice. Permissions must be sought from a variety of stakeholders, including management and parents/guardians, and you will need accompanying adults to help on the day.

If parents are involved in the trip (highly recommended), make sure they have lots of advance notice, so they have adequate time to arrange time off, childcare, etc. Ensure that the parents are aware of the location and the itinerary for the day.

If there are any travel costs, bus fares, refreshments, check if they can be covered by the budget so that no one is embarrassed on the day.

Sometimes Dublin Bus can put an extra bus on the route if you let them know the time you are expecting to bring a large group – it’s always worth checking.

Give any details of the trip to the teacher and ask for help in the planning; they will have done it before and know the ropes. Know the child protection, health and safety policies of the school and the destination.

Check the practicalities, like toilet facilities and if children can eat lunch on the premises. All this may seem obvious, but nevertheless these are the things that can cause complications on the day and lead to tensions – nothing like twenty-five children all wanting to go to the toilet at the same time or all telling you they are starving with nowhere to eat!

The teacher will most likely have done this before, so make a check list, in collaboration with them, in advance, taking all the needs into account to ensure smooth running on the day.

A few 'gallery' words will help the children feel empowered – one artist suggested a few words to build vocabulary, e.g. texture, colour, palette, tone, cube, oval, circle, sculpture, medium, plinth, etc.

Let the children know the rules, for example, not touching art works or whatever may apply before they reach the destination. They will be so excited when they get there, they won't even hear you!

Places of interest will vary depending on your geographical location, but these are the places mentioned by the interviewed artists:

Chester Beatty

<https://chesterbeatty.ie/>

Design and Crafts Council of Ireland

<https://www.dcci.ie>

Dublin Castle

<https://www.dublincastle.ie>

Dublin City Gallery

<https://www.hughlane.ie>

Irish Museum of Modern Art

<https://imma.ie>

The Lab

www.dublincityartsoffice.ie/the-lab/about-the-lab-gallery

National Botanic Gardens of Ireland

<https://botanicgardens.ie>

Natural History Museum

<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Natural-History>

National Gallery of Ireland

www.nationalgallery.ie

National Museum of Ireland Collins Barracks

<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Decorative-Arts>

National Museum of Archaeology Dublin

<https://www.museum.ie/en-IE>

National Library of Ireland

<https://www.nli.ie>

Richmond Barracks

<https://www.richmondbarracks.ie>

*(charge may apply)

The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children

www.ark.ie

*(charge may apply)



Materials in the classroom

The role of a range of good-quality materials cannot be overestimated, so use the best quality that your budget will allow. The feeling of abundance is important too. Too often the fear of making a mistake and spoiling the piece of paper or using up what they have been given can leave a child frozen and unable to make a mark. Even if you know something is in short supply, take a deep breath and pretend, trust in the process and allow it to happen. You will be rewarded by the sight of a child being freed up to experiment and create. Teachers have reported how the simplest of found objects, coupled with the freedom and time to explore and play, have a positive impact on the development of gross and fine motor skills. Teachers tell how exposure to these materials has impacted on their own teaching practice and given them confidence to work with a range of materials and processes. These aspects of the project in effect give teachers continuous exposure to ongoing in-service training, developing their practice through collaboration with the artist.

So...

- Try to use the best-quality materials that the budget will allow so that children will develop a literacy and confidence.
- Work with teachers to give them an idea of what to order (see the next page for an outline of what the artists here recommend as a basic list).
- Teachers might get better value if they can pool their resources and make an order across classes rather than individually.
- Natural materials don't cost anything, and the children can help collect them. It also creates the opportunity for children to look at nature and the environment and learn about the abundance of nature while also learning how to respect the natural world and do no harm.
- Discuss set-up, clean-up and levels of messiness in advance. Ask children to bring in old shirts to wear over their clothes – these could be left in school for the duration of the programme.
- Leave plenty of time to clean up – involve the children in the set-up and clean-up. Do it as calmly as possible. It's often at the end of a session, when spirits are high, everyone is busy and out of their desks, that accidents can happen. Don't take your eye off the ball!
- N.B. Discuss any potentially dangerous equipment – (glue guns, craft knives) in advance with the teacher and agree a place where only the adults can access them. Don't leave them unattended at any stage even for a second.
- Build in ten quiet minutes at the end, if you can, for the children to regroup and reflect on their work.

Advice from one artist – obviously learned the hard way...

“Don't give the lids out with the Pritt sticks – you will be crawling around on your hands and knees for twenty minutes at the end of the session.”

Basic materials list

Paint

- Ready mixed colours in a good-quality variety (they need to have good pigment content)
- Colours
 - Brilliant red
 - Crimson
 - Brilliant Blue
 - Brilliant Yellow
 - Lemon
 - White
- Colour blocks – concentrated cakes of hard powder colour which are good for colour washes only

Equipment

- Display tray per 3 children
- Palette per child (thick plastic – cut in 700mm x 100mm – product name – Rigid Polystyrene)
- Paint brushes – variety of sizes
- Sponges
- Paint rollers
- Cloth / J cloth per child
- Glue brushes / spatula
- Drying rack / string clothesline with pegs



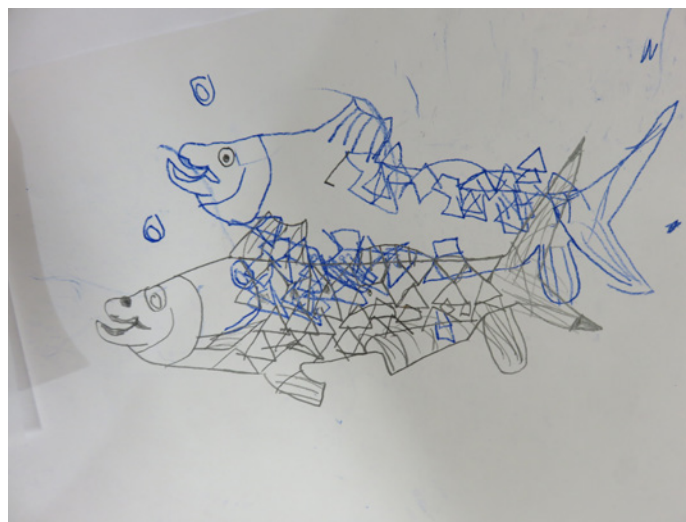
Paper

- Tall brown paper roll from K&M Evans
- Good-quality white cartridge paper

Sizes	mm	inches
A0	840 x 1189	33.11 x 46.81
A2	420 x 594	16.54 x 23.39
A3	297 x 420	11.69 x 16.54
A5	148 x 210	5.83 x 8.27

Drawing

- Cartridge paper
- Sugar paper – variety of colours
- Variety of paper surfaces, colours, shapes and sizes
- Chalk pastels
- Oil pastels
- Drawing pencils – 2b, 3b, 4b and 5b
- Charcoal
- Markers
- Colouring pencils
- Graphite



Printing

- Sheets of polystyrene (see paint) or sheets of Perspex
- Water-based printing ink
- Brilliant red
- Brilliant yellow
- Brilliant blue
- Printing rollers
- Metal spoons
- Paper for drawing

Clay

- Educational clay tool pack from RPM
- Terracotta or buff natural clay
- 1 wooden board per child (hardboard or MDF)
- Bin with sealed lid
- Wire-cutting tool

Construction

- Glue gun
- Adhesives, P.V.A. / Copydex / cellulose powder
- Masking tape / Sellotape / scotch tape
- String
- Elastic bands
- Wire
- Split pins
- Stapler / staples
- Plasticine
- Lolly sticks
- Match sticks
- Needles
- Thread
- Scissors



Workshop guidelines with children

It is difficult to remember the name of every child in the class, so ask the teacher if the children can wear name tags. Wear one yourself. You may need to bring a roll of name tags and a thick black marker with you so you can read the names at a distance.

Ask if there are any additional needs in the class so that you can be prepared. Remember, some additional needs are not always visible.

If there is an SNA present, they are there to support one specific child and are not an extra pair of hands. If you think you will need extra help, make sure to ask for it in advance. It may be that the process needs to be simplified, so revisit the plan with this in mind.

Give clear instructions step by step. The children will be excited and won't hear more than one or, at the very most, two steps in the process.

Also, some children take a little longer to process and may need to ask more questions.

Don't give out the materials until you have given the instructions and are confident that they have been understood – it will be too tempting to play with them and may result in noise or things rolling around the floor.

Try to notice and become aware of the needs of all. Some children will need more attention and be vocal while others may need it to be quiet.

If you say one piece of work is good, you have to say it to everyone. Some children won't notice if you forget, but others may think it means you didn't like theirs as much.

Not all children learn in the same way, and some may finish in a few minutes, while others will still be working at the end. Try to relax; they will find their own way of working and you can encourage the quick ones to go a little deeper, exploring the materials in different ways – you could try asking “what do you think might happen if you did X?” In this way you are encouraging experimentation. Let the children come up with the suggestions and ask them to notice what happens when they do X.

Look at how you measure success. For some children it will be total engagement and immersion, while for others it may be making a single stroke or kneading and squishing clay for the full session.

Ensure children can share their experiences and discoveries in relation to materials and outcomes with others and try to use their suggestions, where appropriate.

Allow children to find support amongst the group; in this way they will exchange ideas and help each other.

Working together...

Building a good working relationship between the artist and teacher is vital to the success of any project. Open and honest communication is at the heart of this. Getting off on the right foot and drawing on each other's skills will ensure a good collaborative atmosphere in the classroom but again developing a collaborative approach does not mean compromising on artistic vision. Be clear about why you are doing certain things while respecting the teacher's environment.

Some of the items of advice here may seem obvious, but it is useful to consider them in advance and to make a checklist for yourself so that these processes become a habit.

For the artist:

- Make sure you have a chance to communicate with the teacher beforehand. If the class teacher was not your first point of contact within the school, make sure that they know first of all that you are coming, the day and time you will arrive and the duration of the workshop. You might think that this is a given, but you would be surprised how often, in the busy school day with unforeseen emergencies, things drop off the list.
- Exchange contact details and find out the preferred method and time of communication. Stick to one way – texts, WhatsApp, email or calls – otherwise messages could be missed. Find out in advance if the teacher will be contactable during the day of arrival – you may need to contact reception on arrival.
- Find out if there is parking, and if you need to call someone, get the number in advance.
- Ask if there will be somebody to help you carry heavy or bulky materials. Don't leave it to chance and struggle on the day – remember health and safety!
- Try to see the space in which the workshop will take place in advance – ask if it's possible to have a Zoom meeting with the teacher in the space.
- Discuss set-up and how you might need the tables and chairs to be repositioned and help the teacher put everything back in place before you leave.
- If it's a classroom, ask if bags and coats can be cleared out of the way to avoid any tripping hazards.
- Make sure you know what class you will be working with – how many are in the class and their interests and needs and any additional needs.
- Plan ahead with the teacher so that they know what is expected of them and you know what they expect of you – ask their advice; they know the children, you don't, yet.
- What other adults will be present? If a child has an SNA, they are there to support that child, inform the SNA of the plan so that they can help prepare the child for the session.
- On the day – plan your route, check entry to the school and if there is parking available. Make sure you leave plenty of time to get there so you arrive in plenty of time, so you have a relaxed set up.

For the school / class teacher:

The same advice applies to the teacher as to ensuring clear and open lines of communication. The initial contact made by the artist with the school may be dependent on the funding stream that brings an artist to your school. It is not always made directly with the class teacher. If someone within the school holds an arts post, they will usually be the person who liaises between artists and teachers, but it is vital that the class teacher is in the communications loop from the start.

- The class teacher must be given all the contact details they need to communicate with the artist in advance and time to develop a working relationship and collaboratively plan with the artist.
- Make time for meeting with the artist – even if it 30 minutes on Zoom at the end of the school day – it will be time well spent.
- If you can be in the space and allow the artist to see it, it will be much easier on the first day.
- Discuss your class, their needs and their interests, openly with the artist; this will ensure that the children get more benefit from the process.
- Endeavour to involve any other staff that may be present in the classroom in the meetings and be clear that the SNA is not a general helper – the artist may not always be aware of who they are supporting.
- Don't be tempted to merge classes for the workshop – it never works. It may seem like more children are getting to participate in a creative process, but in fact it dilutes the experience for everyone.
- Don't try to get too many sessions out of an artist in a day – they need time to recharge and maybe have lunch before the next session – don't forget to show them where the staff room is!
- Join in – be part of the experience and don't use it as an opportunity to leave the classroom or correct work. This is your chance to have a dive into your own creativity, sit with the children and have a creative, nurturing experience for yourself. This is your time to develop your own skills, make mistakes and have fun. It is your time to be a learner, see your class from a different perspective and not have to know it all.
- Let your skills shine! Don't be shy; if you have a creative skill or practice an art form, let the artist know. They will be only too happy to draw on your creative skills as well as your teaching skills.

Artists and teachers:

Take time to reflect and evaluate at the end of each session – it may not be that easy to do it then and there in the classroom, but it is important to discuss what went well and why, and what could be improved and how. Do not shy away from anything that went badly – it's not about blame but an opportunity to use both of your skills and experience to solve any problems together.

Mistakes will happen – take that as a given and as a means of further developing your approach and practice and your working relationship.

Jot down your notes and have a plan in place to talk it through before the next session – do it over a call or email, whichever suits best. Be honest and open with each other and don't take offence. There is no blame here, just an opportunity to learn from each other and collaboratively ensure the best outcomes for the children.

One artist interviewed here recommends finishing the workshop 30 minutes before the end of the school day. This will give adequate time for cleaning up as well as time for the teacher to take care of any remaining business.

Another artist suggests visiting an exhibition together in advance of the project; it will be useful for the project and a way of getting to know each other in a relaxed atmosphere.

What feeds you?

It is important to feed yourself as an artist. When engaged in collaborative and participatory arts practices, you are giving of yourself and your creativity, so you need to take time for yourself and time to put something back in, otherwise lies burnout and disillusion. Plan time to nurture your own creativity, time in nature, time to visit galleries and museums, websites, podcasts and time to do nothing except watch the clouds float by.

Here are some books the artists like to draw on and some they return to again and again. Some relate directly to their practice and methodology, and some give them inspiration and feed their soul. When I am tired and in need of inspiration, and not able to concentrate I need something that feeds the senses without too much effort. Image-heavy books are great for an instant lift. I love picture books – they are not just for children, and many demonstrate beautiful use of colour, texture and images. They come in all shapes and sizes, from the very large scale to the miniature, which are also perfect for small hands. Tales for Tadpoles is a children's bookshop in Dublin with a very diverse range of books not readily available elsewhere, from Scandanavian authors to classics: talesfortadpoles.ie.

Don't overlook the potential of cookery and nature books too, anything that feeds you. If you are overloaded, you may want some words to inspire; poetry is wonderful for this, and some descriptive passages from your favourite novels can help too. Go back to old favourites for comfort or ask friends to recommend their favourite form of literary inspiration and maybe swap a title with them for a new perspective.

Remember to sleep when you need to, be in nature, be with people who make you laugh and feel good. Eat nice food and read good books; life is too short to do otherwise.



From the artists' bookshelves...

- *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger, Penguin, 2008
ISBN: 9780141035796
- *Bento's Sketchbook*, John Berger, Verso Books, 2015, ISBN: 9781781688199
- *Renaissance in the Classroom*, Gail E. Burnaford, et al., Arts Integration and Meaningful Learning, Routledge, 2001 ISBN: 9780805838190
- *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach – advanced Reflections*, Carolyn P. Edwards, Lella Gandini, George E. Forman, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998, ISBN 10: 0893919276
- *Understanding the Reggio Approach* Linda Thornton & Pat Brunton, Routledge, 2014, ISBN-10. 1138784389
- *Rapunzel's Supermarket: All about Young Children and Their Art*, Ursula Kolbe, Peppinot Press, 2006 ISBN 9780975772218
- *Rumi, Selected Poems*, Penguin, 2004, ISBN: 9780140449532
- *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Penguin, 2020, ISBN: 9780141991955
- *Why art cannot be taught: A handbook for art students*, James Elkins, University of Illinois Press, 2001, ISBN: 9780252069505
- *Art heals: How creativity cures the soul*, Shaun McNiff, Shambhala Publications, 2004, ISBN: 9781590301661
- *Art, artists and pedagogy*. Naughton, Christopher, Gert Biesta, and D. Cole, Routledge, 2017, ISBN: 9781138500600
- *Bringing the Reggio Approach to Your Early Years Practice*. Thornton, Linda and Pat Brunton. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2010
- *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation*. Edwards, Carolyn P., Lella Gandini, and George E. Forman. 3rd ed, Praeger, 2012
- *My stroke of Insight*, Jill Bolte Taylor, Penguin Books, 2009, ISBN 13: 9780452295544
- *The Power of Myth*. Joseph Campbell and Bill D. Moyers, 1st ed., Doubleday, 1988 ISBN 13: 9780385247740
- *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and how Schools should Teach*, Howard Gardner, Fontana, 1993
- *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Howard Gardner, Heinemann, 1984. ISBN: 9780006862901
- *Creative Schools: Revolutionizing Education from the Ground Up*, Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, Allen Lane, 2015, ISBN-13: 9780670016716
- *Out of our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, Ken Robinson, Capstone, 2011, ISBN 13: 9781841121253
- *Emergent Curriculum in the Primary Classroom: Interpreting the Reggio Emilia Approach in Schools*. Carol Anne Wien, Teachers College Press, 2008
- *The Blackwinged Night: Creativity in Nature and Mind*, David Peat, Helix Books, 2001, ISBN: 9780738204918
- *A Space to Grow: New Approaches to Working with Children, Primary School Teachers and Contemporary Art in the Context of a Museum*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1999, ISBN 1873654502
- *The Butterfly Effect: An Arklink Retrospective 1999–2006*, The Ark, A Cultural Centre for Children 2006, ISBN-13978-0952668206
- *The Velveteen Rabbit*, Margery Williams, Simon & Schuster, 1922 (2017), ISBN13: 9781944686468
- *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2017, ISBN 1524733164

Resources

Arts Council of Ireland

<https://www.artscouncil.ie/home/>

Children's Books Ireland

<https://childrensbooksireland.ie>

Children First-Child Protection

<https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/children-first-e-learning-programme/>

Citizens Information

<https://www.citizensinformation.ie/>

Common Ground

<https://www.commonground.ie>

Create – National Development Agency for Collaborative Arts

<https://www.create-ireland.ie>

Creative Ireland

<https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/>

Department of Education

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-education/>

Department of Social Protection

<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/department-of-social-protection/>

Dublin City Arts Office

<http://www.dublincityartsoffice.ie>

Dublin City Council Culture Company

<https://www.dublincitycouncilculturecompany.ie>

Dublin City Libraries

<https://www.dublincity.ie/residential/libraries>

Growing up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children

<https://www.growingup.ie>

Visual Artists Ireland

<https://visualartists.ie>

Artist in Schools Guidelines

https://artsineducation.ie/wp-content/uploads/ArtistsSchools06_English.pdf

Arts in Education Portal

<https://artsineducation.ie/en/home/>

Monoprint



