

South Dublin County Council
Arts Office
Creative Approaches for Learning
Arts in Education Professional Development Programme

Evaluation October 2011



"It was amazing"

Participant

Written by
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BACKGROUND

Creative Approaches for Learning is an annual professional development seminar held by South Dublin County Council's Arts Office since 2009 for secondary school teachers and home school and transition year coordinators. This event is an initiative of South Dublin County Council's Arts office.

Aim: To demonstrate practical ways that arts practise can be an aid to teaching for learning and for the curriculum.

What can be gained?

- Creative learning techniques via an active, hands-on workshop that will be applicable to school lessons;
- A packet with ideas and usable lesson plans that can be used and adapted to your own lessons; and
- Opportunities to discuss and work through some of the ideas with artists, and colleagues.

These seminars attempted to harness the work carried out by previous and current artists working within South Dublin County Council area schools for two key objectives. One has been to empower teachers to engage more directly with the arts in order to access learners of all types. The seminars demonstrate the ways in which curriculum areas overlap, for example in the areas of Music and English, thus responding to the "multiple intelligences of pupils...[encouraging] greater scope for creative and constructivist learning" (Coolahan 2008: 37). Another objective has been to introduce new ways in which teachers and schools might further work directly with artists within their school environment to promote greater access and participation within the arts as well as build critical thinking, team work and learning across the curriculum. The overarching goal has been to work more closely with schools to develop a strategy to promote engagement with the arts. It is hoped that these seminars go some way toward empowering teachers and thus schools to overcome feelings of restriction that predominate regarding the timetable and syllabus and thus become more committed to arts in education practice as a valuable element of schooling. This focus addresses a specific need indicated by the Special Committee on the Arts and Education (2008: 23) on changes in school policy for promoting arts in education.

This report summarises the evaluation findings of the 2011 seminar. A more detailed report on the development of the programme from 2009 – 2010 is available, which describes how the programmes presents a local perspective on a growing national movement within the arts and education sectors to address the recommendations of the 2008 publication *Points of Alignment: The Report of the Special Committee on the Arts and Education*.

THE PROGRAMME

The seminar took place on Friday, October 7th, 2011; 9:30am – 4:00pm, at RUA RED, South Dublin Arts Centre.

Victoria Durrer, Youth Arts Co-ordinator for South Dublin County Council opened the seminar by explaining the aims of the day and the rationale behind encouraging creativity in teaching and learning across the curriculum.

Derek West, Arts and Education Officer for NAPD, spoke about the Creative Engagement Fund and Projects, managed by NAPD. He emphasised the importance of creativity in teaching in learning as well as explained supports available through the Creative Engagement Fund.

All workshops consisted of hands-on activities and lesson plans that link directly to national curriculum requirements and can be used directly and immediately in the classroom. These are listed below.



Movement and the Curriculum – Physical Literacy for Learning

Dancer and Choreographer Louise Costelloe led a workshop connecting the art of movement to curriculum areas such as English with practical ideas for improving physical literacy for learning.

Soundtracks

Peter Baxter from Songschool led a practical workshop on how songwriting promotes learning across curriculum areas such as Music, Geography, History, English, Religion and CSPHE.



Comics in the Curriculum

Comic Artist and Animator Maeve Clancy showed how visual storytelling can encourage learning, build confidence and communicate ideas across the curriculum. She looked at Geography, Art History, English, and Science.

Learning through Design Thinking

Designer and researcher Emma Creighton introduced Design Thinking as an approach to learning. Through a hands-on workshop, participants engaged in a real world design challenge that linked across multiple curriculum areas, including Business, Economics, Geography, Maths, CSPHE, Art and Design, and Technology. The workshop showed how this approach to learning gives students the opportunity to learn and practice key skills such as information processing, critical and creative thinking, communication, collaboration and problem solving.

The day closed with time to review and ask any questions.

ENROLLMENT

For the 2011 Creative Approaches seminar, twenty five individuals registered interest in attending. Fifteen attended on the day, with three of those who did not informing the Arts Office before hand that they were unable to attend. The 2011 year was the highest registration since the establishment of Creative Approaches. Though more people attended in 2010 than in 2011.



Those who registered and attended came from a variety of background. Some individuals are artists, some teachers and some work in the care profession. Individuals' specific foci and subject areas included:

- Teaching Music J.C/TY/L.C interested in all areas of the arts as well as music, especially theatre/drama
- Art teachers
- Deputy principal
- TY coordinator
- Artist in community arts, graffiti, urban, street, mural art
- IT facilitator
- English, history and film studies
- Development education, Intercultural integration
- Academics in areas of learning from University College, Dublin
- Academics in learning from Trinity College, Dublin
- Artist in Dance / Drama / Musical Theatre / Singing
- Care profession, with focus on Social Skills, Numeracy, Money Management, relationships and self-esteem, Advocacy and Mindfulness Meditation
- Health promotion and nutrition
- Arts – digital audio / video and Open source technology

EXPECTATIONS AND REASONS FOR ATTENDING

Those who registered gave emphasized the desire to learn new techniques for working in youth, community and educational sectors as well as a desire to network and connect with like-minded people. Some statements are below:

- “I hope to get some new ideas for the classroom and for creative learning in general in my subject area as well as co and cross-curricular. I hope to meet other like minded people who have found interesting ways of teaching/learning through an expressive and creative process. I hope to receive some knowledge about artistic opportunities in the area where I teach and what the students/schools possibilities are for inclusion therein.”
- “Some ideas for infusing creativity into all subject areas.”
- “A chance to network with secondary school teachers and programme co-ordinators. Also, I would like to build on my experiences to date with the school completion programme”
- “Networking, up-skilling and sharing knowledge and experiences.”
- “Develop new creative ideas, interesting discussion”
- “I have been a professional dancer / choreographer and teacher for the last 18 years, and as my knowledge of dance has expanded, I have become more interested in trying to get dance out to the masses. ie introducing dance into the local communities and national schools etc - this workshop would be a great platform for me to recognize the layout plan and schedule that would work in a schooling environment.”
- “Use of better practice and curriculum design which contributes to both learning and development.”
- “More interactive and enjoyable visual ways of learning”
- “To learn different approaches to teach through practical ways and to chat with other people and learn from this”
- “Better understanding and various approaches to learning”
- “I do a lot of training, to make the training less pedantic and more imaginative, to move away from left brain, pedantic teaching and make it more interesting.”
- “To learn alternative teaching methods. Work with other Teachers and gained experience!”
- “Share ideas”
- Learn more about the education sector
- “I would like to gain more of an insight into the opportunities possible with this Creative Project, Networking opportunities and funding issues.”

FINDINGS

“It will encourage me to think outside the box and be more creative”

Participant

Of the fifteen individuals who attended the seminar, evaluation questionnaires were returned by nine people.

Participants found out about the seminar via:

- Web search (1)
- Email from the Youth Arts Co-ordinator (4)
- From a colleague (2)
- The South Dublin County Council website

Upon completion of the seminar, all participants who returned feedback forms felt their expectations, describe above, were met. Some responses are quoted below:

- “Yes—good networking and info”
- Yes, great chance to network and get a few potential collaborative projects lined up”
- “yes, plenty of resources and ideas to put to practice in school”
- “Yes, especially around using movement etc... in delivery”
- “Yes. a little way out there, not practical at times, but inspirational”

Participants felt the seminar contributed the following to their professional development:

- “Nice bit of on-the-spot thinking and coming up with solutions with a group”
- Individual participants felt that some of the workshops gave them specific skill development, such as comic books—storytelling, design and SPHE
- “Opened my mind to new approaches, ideas; encouraged me to inspire pupils as much as possible through creativity”

Regarding highlights of the day, participants largely reflected on particular workshops as well as the opportunities provided to chat with fellow participants and facilitators. All workshops were mentioned as highlights by one or another participant and it was stated that the music workshop was a nice way to round off the day.

Some participants were challenged to step outside their comfort zone in some of the activities, in drawing and dance for example, but all rose to the challenge and felt they gained from the experience. Surprises were also met by participants on the day. One stated, “Initially the dance workshop took a while to get into but after a few minutes and just getting stuck in it was deadly fun”

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Overall the majority of feedback from the day was positive. Some areas of improvement are listed below:

Arts and Disability

Some participants were from a care organisation that serves young adults and adults with disabilities. These participants felt that the workshops were not always appropriate to the perception of ability they feel their users have. Building awareness of arts and disability is an area of need.



Timing

The day ended on time, but there were some workshops and talks that overran, which affected the workshops of colleagues. Keeping workshops to a tight focus will help to keep timing as, at times, things felt rushed.

Registration

While three individuals who registered explained they would be unable to attend as the day approached, there were still five individuals who did not get back in touch, nor showed up for the day. It may be worth looking into a returnable deposit for the next event.

Wider appeal and accreditation

Some teachers are unable to attend the event due to the cost of cover for their classes. South Dublin County Council's Arts Office should continue its efforts to get in touch with the Dublin West Education Centre to see if the seminar could be provided as part of an overall training programme.

"I thought the day was excellent and gave myself new ideas on how to work with groups. Thanks."

Participant