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How to Use this Book

This book aims to guide the reader through the process of designing a creative arts curriculum for young children using a multi-strategy, child-centred approach. Each chapter offers the reader a variety of learning goals to explore. At the beginning of each chapter there is a list of learning outcomes for that chapter. These learning outcomes are taken from the NFQ Level 5 component specifications in Creative Arts for Early Childhood (awarded by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)). The learning outcomes (LO) covered in this book are:

- LO 1: Examine a variety of creative media opportunities with young children.
- LO 2: Summarise the benefits of exploration and participation in creative arts for the child.
- LO 3: Explore the role of the adult in creating an environment in which children feel secure and confident enough to take risks and explore new situations.
- LO 4: Plan opportunities for consultation with children to plan and engage in creative arts experiences.
- LO 5: Test open-ended materials and natural items for creative arts, in both indoor and outdoor environments, appropriate to different stages of children's development.
- LO 6: Explore challenges for adults in respecting choices and decisions of children.
- LO 7: Employ developmentally appropriate creative arts activities which promote the holistic development of the child.
- LO 8: Reflect on one's own role and responsibilities when engaging in creative arts activities with children (being mindful of health and safety).

You will notice that the learning outcomes overlap between chapters. This is because many of the learning outcomes are intertwined in a variety of ways. It is important to reflect on how chapters link with each other and begin to recognise where these correlations happen when working with young children. The NFQ Level 6 component 'Early Childhood Arts and Culture', leading to a Level 6 award in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) (awarded by QQI), also uses a set of learning outcomes that are

intended to build on the learning achieved in the Level 5 component. This textbook introduces the following concepts from the Level 6 learning outcomes 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10.

3. Provide artistic and cultural experiences that support the holistic development of the child.
4. Guide children to use their own values and artistic skills to explore, think about and communicate with their environment.
5. Assess a range of resources to support children's creative and cultural development.
6. Use appropriate space and materials to plan arts- and culture-based experiences that engage children in a supportive way.
7. Lead appropriate observations to evaluate the child's artistic and cultural development.
8. Appraise one's own range of specialised skills and those of colleagues in meeting the creative and cultural needs of the child in the ECCE setting.
10. Manage tasks within the parameters of professional conduct including relations with parents, guardians, children and colleagues.

Each chapter of this book aims to provide the reader with a mixture of theory, practice, national policy and guidelines. It would be ideal to read this book in collaboration with other aspiring early years practitioners or established early years professionals, which could be organised in an educational setting or a workplace.

In the 'Over to You' sections in each chapter the reader is offered a space to put new ideas into action using a variety of means, including:

- case studies
- debates
- designing creative arts programmes, play spaces and presentations
- designing, implementing and evaluating arts displays
- group discussions and practical tasks
- internet-based research
- reflective learning journal
- linking equipment and materials with play opportunities
- linking play with Aistear Themes
- observation
- planning, implementing and reviewing creative arts activities
- visualisations.

The chapters in this book are divided as follows:

- **Chapter 1** introduces the reader to the underlying philosophies of the book, putting forward a method of child-centred, process-oriented play in the creative arts curriculum.
- **Chapter 2 The Creative Environment** focuses on setting the scene and outlines how to encourage creativity to flourish in early childhood environments. Using a 'SPICE' framework, as outlined by Brown (2003), we focus on the child's social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional space. We also look at the three Fs – fun, freedom and flexibility.
- **Chapter 3 Planning, Implementing and Assessing Activities** looks at the journey of planning, implementing and assessing a creative arts activity with an individual child, a pair of children and groups of children. This chapter is closely linked with the ethos of Siolta (CECDE 2006) and Aistear (NCCA 2009) as well as the 2006 Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations (DoHC 2006a).
- **Chapter 4 Creative Play and Developmental Stages** explores different developmental stages with young children in terms of their creative abilities. We address play behaviours of the young child, look at examples of creative arts activities for specific age groups and address the role of the adult in facilitating learning.
- **Chapter 5 Exploring and Creating** addresses how creative arts activities can be incorporated into spontaneous and planned play activities. Looking specifically at the music centre, the small world area, the discovery centre, the table-top area, the arts and crafts centre, the messy play area, the book corner, the construction area, the writing centre and the home corner, we address materials, equipment and types of activity that could be accommodated in these areas.
- **Chapter 6 Exploring and Creating: The Outdoor Play Space** discusses how to facilitate the creative arts in an outside space. In this chapter we also look at bringing creativity on outings with young children and using alternative materials in the early years environment to promote the creative arts curriculum.
- **Chapter 7 Creative Play and Positive Mental Health** focuses on promoting mental wellness in the early years environment. In this chapter we address adults' role in ensuring that children's rights are upheld as well as looking at creative arts as a therapeutic tool, using current and established research as a discussion point.
- **Chapter 8 Unlocking the Adult's Creativity** looks at how the practitioner's creativity can be nurtured using a series of creative arts activities designed specifically for adults. We discuss how an individual's creativity may be 'lost' as they move through childhood into the adult years and how to recapture some of the creative freedoms experienced in our youth.

- **Chapter 9 Creative Safe Environments** deals with how to balance safety with fun, looking specifically at Irish legislation relating to safety in the early years environment and focusing on the Childcare Act 1991, the Child Care (Pre-School Services) (No. 2) Regulations (DoHC 2006a), the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007. Chapter 9 also looks at the recommendations proposed for early years settings in Siolta Standard 9: Safety and Welfare.
- **Chapter 10 Creative Arts Assessment** is designed for the aspiring early years practitioner moving through the Level 5 component, Creative Arts for Early Childhood (awarded by QQI). It addresses the 'Collection of Work' and 'Project' and discusses how learning can be demonstrated in the Creative Arts for Early Childhood assessment framework.

Introduction

Working with young children is one of the most fun, challenging and exciting professions one can undertake. Each day brings with it new possibilities for learning, playing and creating. This book aims to offer the aspiring early years practitioner a chance to reflect on the use of creative arts when designing play programmes for young children.

Creative arts in the early years can be categorised as active play opportunities in the fields of drama, movement and dance, visual arts and music. When it comes to encouraging creativity and creative thinking with young children, it is acknowledged that creative play is more than what is found in the arts curriculum: creative thinking can also be found in areas such as science and the humanities.

Before we begin our creative arts journey, it is important to distinguish between *creativity* and *creative learning*. Ronsen (2010), in his foreword to the *Born Creative* project, puts forward the idea that when individuals engage in at least one of the four pillars of creative learning – investigating, discovering, inventing and co-operating – the learning can be described as ‘creative’.

Creativity differs from creative learning because creativity is concerned with an individual’s imagination and with bringing to life images, thoughts and feelings. According to Fumoto *et al.* (2012), creativity and creative thinking are best fostered in an environment where:

- Thinking or behaving using one’s imagination is founded on solid social fields through nurturing relationships with peers and adults.
- The child’s cognitive abilities are fostered through having a purpose in play as there is a planned objective to achieve.
- The child views the play as valuable and worthwhile, which builds strong emotional foundations in the child.
- The process generates something original and new for the child, motivating them to continue in their endeavours.

When we observe young children participating in the creative arts, we can see that the possibilities for them to use their imagination are endless. When young children engage with the creative arts a two-part creative process unfolds for them.

The first part of the creative process can be described as the ‘incubation’ period, in which young children gather ideas and hold them in their minds. During this stage children are becoming aware that they want to create something. This incubation process can take a long time to develop as children form new concepts in their minds, learn about the world around them and test ideas.

When the child feels comfortable with their idea the second part of the process emerges. This can be described as the ‘creation’ phase. During this period the child puts their idea into action through sounds, words and behaviours. The child may feel uneasy trying out this new experience and you may find that many creative thoughts are lost if the child feels uncomfortable or uneasy with the experience. The majority of young children’s creations are designed around a variation of a particular theme they may know well. Creations can also emerge through repetition of the same actions over and over again. Read the following anecdote and reflect on the questions below.

A CREATIVITY STORY

Clayton is four years old and has been attending his sessional preschool for eight months. He started in September and he will be finishing in June. Each morning Clayton’s key worker, Julia, has asked him where he would like to play, and every day for the last eight months Clayton has said ‘in the car corner’. Julia has introduced different activities into the car corner with Clayton, such as books about cars, houses and mini figures, construction materials, arts and crafts experiences; she even made another ‘car corner’ in the gardening space outside. One morning at the end of May, as Julia was asking each child where they wanted to play, she turned to Clayton, expecting his usual response, when he suddenly said, ‘With the paint.’ The room went quiet as Julia and the other children watched as Clayton walked over to the arts and crafts centre, put on a smock and started to paint ... a car.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What do you think might have inspired Clayton to go to the arts and crafts area that morning?
- Was Clayton able to be creative in the car corner?
- Thinking about creativity as a two-part process, how long did Clayton's incubation phase last?
- What might influence the length of time of an individual's incubation phase?
- How did Julia gently prompt Clayton's creativity?

Isbell and Raines (2007) remind us that it is an exciting time to be an early years educator. With advances in technology, as well as an increased respect for childhood, we have fantastic insights into how young children learn. With greater knowledge of how the brain develops, of the impact of relationships with young children, and the understanding that young individuals acquire dispositions, skills and knowledge through active participation with their environment, the early years practitioner is at an advantage when designing a child-centred curriculum. Over the last two hundred years, early childhood pioneers such as Rousseau, Montessori, Pestalozzi, Owen, Froebel and Steiner, and more contemporary educationalists, among them Weikart, Bruce and Hayes, have promoted the use of play to foster children's curiosity and meaning-making skills. These early childhood advocates have shaped the way we work with young children and their families in Ireland today.

It is interesting to note that despite the knowledge we have about how people learn it is well documented that creativity and the arts have been in a steady decline globally. The Irish education system has shadowed this global downturn in creative arts appreciation and moved away from promoting creativity, individual learning and inspiring children to have new and innovative ideas. Looking at the Junior Certificate as an example, we can wonder whether the focus on learning gives priority to exam results rather than the quality of learning. In 2012 changes in the Irish education system were introduced with the aim of moving away from the rote learning system encouraged in state examinations such as the Junior Certificate. It is proposed that over the next number of years the format of the Junior Certificate will change to focus on a process-based approach using a variety of assessment methods such as assignments, projects, case studies, performances, oral activities, written pieces and different kinds of test as well as incorporating ICT to enhance the learning experience. A process-based approach can be described as a journey that emphasises how learning is undertaken or 'done'.

You will observe that active learning occurs when children engage in activities using their senses and movements (Bruce 2004). This active process employs the use of

intellectual abilities such as thoughts and decision-making skills as well as overcoming a variety of holistic challenges that are initiated in the action. When children participate in play in an active and meaningful manner you may notice a 'learning product' forming. This learning product is a display of how children demonstrate their new knowledge. The role of the educator is to recognise the many varieties of ways in which children choose to demonstrate how they learn, and to celebrate these achievements with the child. This ability to understand children's learning is eloquently described in the Reggio Emilia approach as the 'hundred languages of children'. In Irish early education, process-based education is a practice that has been advocated for many years. Process-based learning is a useful tool when ensuring that children's rights are upheld in the education system.

Taking Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA 2009), as an example, we can see how process-based learning is actively promoted in early education in Ireland. This framework celebrates early childhood as a time of being, a time of enjoying and learning from experiences as they unfold. Aistear (which is the Irish word for 'journey') acknowledges the importance of solid early learning foundations, as they have a significant impact in later life experiences. The Aistear guide highlights to the educator that young children learn best through respectful, loving and trusting relationships with the adults and children in their lives. Aistear also promotes the use of play, exploration and collaborative discussion in the early years environment. Using twelve child-centred principles in conjunction with four integrated Themes – Well-Being; Communication; Identity and Belonging; and Exploring and Thinking – the educator is equipped with a framework to design personal learning plans for children that focus on process-based play and learning. Throughout this book we will be using the principles and themes of Aistear, as well as the ethos of *Síolta*, to underpin ideas for the early years creative arts curriculum.

Play and exploration are especially important for the creative arts curriculum as active learning is central to creativity. Isbell and Raines (2007) remind us that the creative arts have held an important place in human civilisation throughout history. Painting, singing, dancing and playing have been constant personal and interpersonal communication tools across countless generations. Creative arts inspire children to think in innovative ways, find out new ideas about themselves and the world around them as well as offering opportunities to challenge themselves in fun and original ways. Wright (2010) highlights that our imagination reaches its peak in the early years and gradually declines as we grow into middle childhood and beyond. Encouraging children to place high value on the arts in the early years can promote the ongoing development and nurturing of their imagination in its declining years. Sir Ken Robinson, in his February 2006 TED Talk on creativity, maintained that for children to be successful in their lives

their imaginations must be nurtured. In his presentation he emphasised that in the formal schooling system creativity is as important as literacy and should be given the same status. This idea is interesting because in the field of early education it is recognised that the creative arts curriculum is a fantastic medium for encouraging the development of other modalities such as language, movement, science, mathematics and countless others. Robinson puts forward the intriguing thought that as children grow older educators start to move learning away from bodies and focus their efforts towards the brain, specifically the left-hand side of the brain, which aids logical thinking, analysis and accuracy. The role of the early years educator is to ensure that young children are offered a solid and balanced foundation of active play experiences which engage minds, bodies and hearts. We have a duty to refocus our values so that the creative arts are viewed as an educational philosophy rather than simply a set of ‘activities’.

In this book we categorise the arts into four main areas: dramatic play; movement and dance; visual arts; and music. Using the National School Curriculum (DES 1999) in conjunction with Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, let us now look at what each of these categories encompasses.

Dramatic play

Young children begin acting out the world around them from a very young age. Traditionally, drama is associated with the theatre, television shows, films, performance, costumes, setting and stages. With young children, drama comes in the form of socio-dramatic play. This type of play allows children to make sense of their environment and the people they interact with, and to make meanings out of the unknown. Socio-dramatic play gives children the chance to test out ‘what if’ situations, experience new and different feelings in a safe space and make their imagination come alive. You can observe socio-dramatic play taking these forms:

- improvisation through ‘making’ up fantasy scenes or recreating real-life situations
- embodying other personalities and creating new situations
- re-enacting life issues, new or old pieces of knowledge or themes in a role-play fashion
- communicating a message to other people
- ‘living’ a story, or making the story up as they go along; this also involves solving problems in both the real world and fictional worlds and can include co-operation with peers or/and adults
- reflecting on and conversing about events in life so that the outcome of the play reflects the child’s perception of their world.

Movement and dance

From the moment young children are born their movements are innate. Movement is a primal force in the human body and most of the body's movements are unconscious and unscripted. In early years education we try to capture these natural movements and intertwine them with everyday learning. Dance can be described as the 'art of motion' and it is the action that is involved in dance that allows us to explore our body movements in new and creative ways. Through dance we can discover:

- the movements the body can create
- the dynamics of bodily movement
- how a body moves in a particular space
- the relationships that develop when the body interacts with other people or objects.

These discoveries can be labelled the 'principles of movement' and through dance you may notice that children explore:

- their movements in response to a noise, tempo, theme or idea
- how they choose movements to express ideas, thoughts and feelings they are experiencing
- how to create a simple movement sequence in response to an idea, theme, sound, etc.; and they may develop this sequence into a dance.

Visual arts

The visual arts allow for artistic expression and communication through the medium of concrete images. This form of creative arts gives the young child the opportunity to create tangible links between their imagination and the real world. The medium of visual art allows the child to reflect, organise and express their life experiences, wonderings and feelings in a physical form. Visual arts can take shape in many ways:

- mark making/drawing
- painting and use of colour
- printing
- cutting/tearing and pasting (collage)
- dough/clay sculpture
- construction
- fabric and fibre creations
- photography.

As we can see, visual arts can be created using a two- or three-dimensional format and the young child should be offered balanced opportunities across the different types of visual artistic form. A well-integrated visual arts curriculum in the early years will enable the child to:

- develop personal aesthetic responses to art and beauty in their environment
- explore and develop an awareness of line, shape, colour, tone, texture, pattern, spatial organisation as well as three-dimensional qualities of form
- communicate messages with a sense of fun and purpose.

In addition, the child will:

- depending on their age and stage of development, be able to play in a spontaneous, imaginative and structured way with a variety of materials, such as paints, paper, crayons, chalks, pencils, ink, dough, clay, fabric, fibre, papier mâché and construction materials. They will begin to include focused design and planning in their visual art work
- begin to apply particular skills and techniques in their visual art work and demonstrate awareness of particular elements in their artwork
- begin to look at other artists in their environment with curiosity and openness
- begin to identify a variety of visual arts media in their world and imagine the creative processes involved in their fruition
- become astute in describing their artistic processes and be able to discuss specific elements in their work that hold personal importance
- be able to critically reflect on their artwork and that of their peers
- show an interest in responding to visual arts experiences in a variety of imaginative ways, such as recreating a visual arts piece through another artistic medium such as dramatic arts, dance, music, etc.

Music

Music is an art form that is deeply rooted in the psyche. It is a medium in which messages, thoughts, feelings and actions can be shared in a unique and evocative way. Each person is born with an innate and individual relationship with music and with their own individual musical abilities. Music is embedded in one's culture and heritage. In the early years setting it can be employed as a valuable medium for learning. When introducing the musical arts to young children we should employ three main strands:

- 1 **Listening and responding:** When young children are given the opportunity to listen to a piece of music they are transported to a different world. Musical listening should include a range of different types of music, from classical to contemporary and everything in between. While listening to music young children will engage in responses that engage both their senses and abilities in an active and purposeful manner.
- 2 **Performing:** Young children are not burdened by the constraints of inhibitions and a fear of societal judgement. It is a wonderful event when a child performs a song or piece of music using their voice and/or a musical instrument. When performing, the child actively experiences musical concepts such as rhythm, pitch, tempo, beat, melody, harmony, intervals, etc. In addition, musical performance elicits a sense of accomplishment that brings with it a specific type of confidence and joy.
- 3 **Composing:** Young children will instinctively make repetitive sounds and sound patterns. We can hear this in the cooing of very young babies and it continues throughout early childhood. In the early years setting this innate ability can be fostered and developed through encouraging the child to compose and record their own pieces of music and song. This act of composition channels the child's creativity in a very unique way and provides a medium for reflective self-expression.

OVER TO YOU

Create a learning journal. Use this personal log to write and reflect on any ideas, reflections and activities that inspire you when reading this book. If you begin to feel lethargic or if your mind wanders while you're reading, put the book down, take a break and come back to it when you are able to focus! Note these concentration lapses in your journal and reflect on what may be distracting you. Remember to allow your creativity to flourish during your journey through this text and keep a record of your personal discoveries. A note to remember at this point: if you are completing your Level 5 component in Creative Arts for Early Childhood (awarded by QQI), a learning journal will serve you well when it comes to completing your assessments.
