I am Creative

Collaborating with artists in special education settings: A research report

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Glossary

BLAST . . . Bringing Live Arts to Schools and Teachers

CAP . . . . . Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit (Department of Education)

CPD . . . . . Continuing Professional Development

CYP . . . . . Creative Youth Plan (2023-2027)

DE . . . . . . Department of Education

ESC . . . . . Education Support Centre

MIC . . . . . Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick

MIREC . . . Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee

NABMSE . National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education

PLC . . . . . Professional Learning Community

SE . . . . . . Special Education

SENCO . . Special Education Needs Organiser

SL . . . . . . School Leadership

SNA . . . . . Special Needs Assistant

SSE . . . . . School Self-Evaluation

SSP . . . . . Student Support Plan

TAP . . . . . Teacher-Artist Partnership

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

'I am Creative' is a pilot initiative of the Government of Ireland's Department of Education (DE). The initiative was designed to explore ways in which teachers, artists, school leaders and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) could collaborate towards enhancing the provision for arts education in Special Education (SE) settings.

'I am Creative' was initiated by the DE in response to the [Creative Youth Plan 2023-27](#) (CYP, 2023). The CYP is integral to the Government of Ireland's Creative Ireland Programme 2023-2027. 'I am Creative' was managed by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office at the Tralee Education Support Centre, under the direction of the National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education. This Office also runs three other school-based initiatives involving creative practitioners and artists: TAP[1], BLAST[2] and Creative Clusters[3].

The six-member 'I am Creative' Design Team was led by the National Advisor for the Integration of the Arts in Education and comprised personnel (including the researcher) with expertise in SE and/or Arts Education. Three Design Team members were also members of the TAP Design Team.

Two Education Support Centres (ESCs)[4], Laois and Kildare, were nominated to participate in 'I am Creative'. These ESCs, in turn, nominated six (TAP trained) artists and six Special Education (SE) settings. Four of these settings were special schools[5] (two nominated by Kildare ESC and two by Laois ESC) and two were SE units in post primary schools (one nominated by Kildare ESC and one by Laois ESC). Each SE setting then nominated one SNA, one teacher and one member of its school leadership (SL) team to participate in the initiative.

This research report focuses on the pilot which ran from 21st April to 16th June 2023. (The initiative ended earlier in post-primary settings.)

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[1] Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP) provides training and follow-up residencies for teachers and artists to work in partnership in primary schools.
[2] Bringing Live Arts to Schools (BLAST) provides for artist residencies in primary and post-primary schools.
[3] Creative Clusters supports clusters of between two and five schools across the primary and post-primary sectors to collaborate on bespoke creative projects.
[4] These ESCs are part of a national network comprising 21 full-time Centres.
[5] Specials schools cater for children and young people between the ages of four and 18.

The initiative

The 'I am Creative' pilot initiative comprised three residential training weekends (Friday evenings and Saturdays) for six participating artists and four staff members from each of the six participating schools. One artist was assigned to each school for a residency period of 20 hours. (The only available TAP trained artists within the Kildare and Laois ESC catchment area for the duration of the initiative were visual artists.) Each training weekend was followed by at least one school-artist engagement. This enabled the generation of a shared, iterative learning loop throughout. Outside of this, the timeline and structure of the residencies were decided at local level, and determined by the needs of participating children and young people.

The research

The aims of the research study were to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of 'I am Creative' as a model for improving arts education in SE settings
- Uncover enablers and barriers to collaborations with artists in SE settings
- Provide illustrative exemplars of collaborations with artists in SE settings
- Contribute evidence-based recommendations for the national scaling up of 'I am Creative' across Ireland's special schools and post-primary SE settings.

A qualitative approach was designed to meet these aims. Since the research was carried out by a researcher from Mary Immaculate College (MIC), University of Limerick, ethical approval was received from MIC's Research Ethics Committee (MIREC). The following research and data collection methods were used:

- Document analysis: national and international policy and research; 'I am Creative' documentation
- Researcher field notes recorded during, and following, Design Team meetings, training weekends, and classroom observations
- Focus group interviews with participating teachers, SNAs, artists and SL team members.

Key findings

The pilot initiative delivered significant benefits in relation to visual art education in SE, which were evident in:

- The premium put by teachers, artists, and SNAs on children's and young people's agency
- Raised expectations for children and young people
- Greater enthusiasm and confidence among teachers, SNAs and artists
- High levels of experimentation
- Shared responsibility for children's and young people's learning

The key findings are summarised under the following headings:

- High national and local status
- Structure and duration
- Training content
- Role of the SNA

High national and local status

'I am Creative' was afforded high national status by means of DE investment, the research focus (though onerous for school staff in terms of obtaining the requisite consent and assent), and the presence throughout training of DE and Education Support Centre (ESC) personnel. The initiative's high status was strengthened by its alignment with the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process, which is currently being embedded in Ireland's primary and post-primary schools. The inclusion of school leaders in training ensured that the initiative was valued and supported at local level. The involvement of ESC Directors in nominating schools and artists and in hosting training enabled the initiative to run smoothly, while also reinforcing its high status. Furthermore, the embedding of school-artist teams in a larger community of practice generated a sense of being part of a larger movement for progressing arts education in SE.

Structure and duration

The residential training weekends provided time and space (outside of the school and the artist's studio) for teachers, SNAs and artists to make art and explore pedagogy within a supportive Professional Learning Community (PLC). The weekends also provided time and space for school-artist teams to establish the relationships of mutual trust required to share responsibility for children's and young people's learning. The provision of training in tandem with the residencies meant that participants' needs were addressed as they arose. While school-artist teams were free to structure the 20-hour residencies as they saw fit, artists struggled to 1) establish working relationships with children and young people in SE, and 2)

to consolidate their relationships with teachers and SNAs within this time frame over the short duration of the initiative. The location of the initiative in the final term of the school year made it feel rushed. An arts mentor with expertise in education and the arts could enable relationships to be brokered more effectively, though the duration of the initiative also needs to be extended.

Training content

During the training weekends, participants engaged in art making activities. These activities foregrounded the experience or process of making art (and, thereby, artistic agency), which broke with the traditional focus on the artistic product. They occurred within a supportive PLC and were embedded in the weekends' pedagogical content, which supported their efficacy in terms of enabling participants to negotiate the shift from product to process. Indeed, this shift in perspective and practice was the most significant outcome of the pilot and was bolstered by the pilot structure, whereby collaborative (teacher-artist-SNA) interventions were planned for on training weekends and implemented soon thereafter. Furthermore, the shift from artistic product to artistic process precipitated further shifts as teachers began to reevaluate their preconceptions of pupils and their pedagogical approaches, not just in the arts, but across the curriculum. It is important to note, however, that in order for changes in practice to be sustained over the longer term, school-artist collaborations also need to be sustained and supported long-term.

Role of the SNA

SNAs were positioned as equal partners in the 'I am Creative' pilot, which enabled them to play a meaningful role in the residencies alongside teachers and artists. This was particularly evident when residencies were located in the SNA's base class. Here, the SNA had established relationships with the teacher, children and young people, which is crucial in terms of sharing responsibility for supporting children's and young people's agency as art makers in SE. In this regard, training for all SNAs in classes hosting residencies needs to be prioritised. If the 'I am Creative' initiative is to be extended across an SE setting, training for all SNAs (and teachers) in that setting also needs to be prioritised. An arts mentor with expertise in education and the arts could play an important role in determining how training for SNAs and teachers might be delivered while ensuring that the dual focus on art making and pedagogy is maintained.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the future development of 'I am Creative' centre on five key areas:

- National and local contexts
- Training
- Structure and duration of the residencies
- SNAs
- Research and evaluation

National and local contexts

- The prioritisation and provision of funding for 'I am Creative' to be extended incrementally to all special schools and special education units in post-primary schools.
- The existing 'I am Creative' PLC, and others into the future, should be supported to ensure that changes in practice are sustained and embedded in schools.
- The appointment of arts mentors at local level is required for initiative development.
- The inclusion of a broad spectrum of arts in 'I am Creative'.
- The ESCs are best placed to support the initiative at local level (selecting artists, hosting training). As the initiative expands to include more SE settings, artists, PLCs, and mentors, existing supports will need to be expanded and funded.
- The provision of simplified procedures for obtaining informed consent for research purposes from parents and guardians of children and young people in SE.

Training

- Training (preferably residential) to be held in tandem with the residencies over the course of an academic year.
- The inclusion in training of school leaders, teachers, artists and SNAs involved in a residency.
- If 'I am Creative' is to become embedded in a setting, then training needs to be provided for all teachers and SNAs in that setting.
- The establishment and consolidation of relationships of mutual trust should be at the heart of all training.

- Training should provide for art making and the exploration of pedagogical theories and practices, within a supportive PLC.
- Training should foreground theories and practices that centre on children's and young people's agency in SE.
- Training should provide time and space to embed the principles and practices of 'I am Creative' in whole school planning and SSE.

Structure and duration of the residencies

- The duration of the residencies should be extended over the course of an academic year.
- The DE needs to increase the time allotted for artist residences in SE settings.
- Flexibility at school level, with the support of an arts mentor, to enable artists to support teachers and SNAs to make art, while being mindful that if changes in practice are to be sustained art making needs to be embedded in pedagogy.

SNAs

- Recognition of the important role of the SNA in 'I am Creative' and their continued inclusion in training.

Research and evaluation

- Continuing research is required to inform future directions of the initiative.
- There is a need to conduct case studies, over an extended period, to achieve in-depth insights into the ways in which children's and young people's agency is manifested and facilitated within the SE arts education context

1. Introduction

'I am Creative' is a pilot initiative of the Government of Ireland's Department of Education (DE). The initiative is managed by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office at the Tralee Education Support Centre, under the direction of the National Director and National Advisor for the Integration of the Arts in Education (DE, Curriculum and Assessment Policy [CAP] Unit). This pilot initiative was designed to explore ways in which artists, members of the school leadership team, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) could work together to enhance the provision for arts education in Special Education (SE) settings.

'I am Creative' marks a response by the Department of Education (DE) to the Creative Youth Plan 2023-27 (CYP, 2023). The CYP forms part of the Government of Ireland's Creative Ireland Programme 2023-2027. This Programme builds on the Creative Ireland Programme 2017-2022 and is grounded in a vision that locates creativity at the heart of public policy. The Programme comprises five areas:

- Creative Youth
- Creative Communities
- Creative Industries
- Creative Health and Wellbeing
- Creative Climate Action and Sustainability

Creative Youth is operationalised through the CYP which 'aims to provide everyone from birth to 24 years with … opportunities for creative engagement in every aspect of their lives'.[6] The CYP 2023-2027 emerged from the CYP 2017-2022 and prioritises the strengthening of 'equity of access to creative activities for the most seldom heard children and young people' (p.17), including those in SE. This priority is reinforced in the Plan's strategic objectives and associated actions, which commit to ensuring 'accessibility to the arts and creativity across the spectrum of additional and special needs' (p.17) through programmes providing 'targeted access … [for] special schools' (p.27).

The CYP is guided by the principle that 'Children and young people must have agency and a voice in decision-making' (p.13). The voice of children and young people was, thereby, integral to the national consultation process leading to the development of the CYP. The concept of

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[6] https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/blog/creative-youth-plan-2023-2027/

child agency and voice underpinning the CYP is based on the (revised) Lundy[7] (2007) model outlined in the Government of Ireland [Participation Framework: National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making](). (An overview of this model is presented on page 15 of the Framework.)[8] Issues of voice and agency are, however, exceedingly complex in the SE context (Goodwin and Griffiths, 2022).

The belief that 'educators, artists, and creative practitioners need to be supported to recognise the centrality and value of creativity to children and young people' (p.13) also underpins the CYP. Accordingly, the Plan advocates for the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for school leaders, teachers and 'creative practitioners working in schools' (p.19). It also pledges support for the continued delivery, expansion and enhancement of Teacher-Artist Partnership (TAP), a national initiative led by the DE CAP's National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education since 2014. This initiative, designed as a model of CPD for teachers and artists, provides training and follow-up residencies for teachers and artists to work in partnership with each other in schools (Roe and Egan, 2023; Kenny and Morrissey, 2016). The DE also runs two other school initiatives involving artists and other creative practitioners: Bringing Live Arts to Schools (BLAST)[9] and Creative Clusters.[10]

In its submission to the CYP consultation process, the DE – following consultation with schools and other stakeholders – noted that:

> Protected time and training [should be] given to creative/external practitioners to develop an understanding of specific physical or learning disabilities especially when working in a special school or class. In these cases, there is a need for inbuilt induction in creative programmes where learning is exchanged between artists, Teachers and SNAs. (p.51)

The need for specifically targeted programmes in SE was identified by the National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education (NABMSE) at the Association's

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[7] The Lundy model was revised, in collaboration with Professor Lundy, for the Framework.
[8] Child agency is also a priority in [The Primary Curriculum Framework for Primary and Special Schools]().
[9] [https://www.edcentretralee.ie/blast.html]()
[10] [https://www.edcentretralee.ie/creative-clusters/29-creative-clusters.html]()

annual conference in 2022 and in a recent evaluation of TAP (Roe and Egan, 2023). Both of these sources also highlight the need to include SNAs in these programmes.

'I am Creative' is a direct response, by the DE to the CYP. The design process, under the direction of the National Advisor for the Integration of the Arts in Education, began in April 2023. The initiative itself ran from 21st April to 16th June 2023, concluding in post-primary settings at the end of May 2023. In alignment with the CYP's commitment to ongoing research 'into the opportunities and engagements provided within the ambit of Creative Youth' (p.22), this report presents the findings of the research undertaken throughout the course of the initiative.

1.1 'I am Creative'

The 'I am Creative' pilot initiative comprised three residential training weekends (Friday evenings and Saturdays) for six participating (TAP trained) artists and staff from six participating schools. The training took place at Laois Education Centre. Each residential weekend was followed by at least one school-artist engagement with participating children and young people. This combination of training and school engagement was designed to generate a shared, iterative learning loop throughout the initiative.

Two Education Support Centres (ESCs)[11], Laois and Kildare, were nominated to participate in 'I am Creative'. The project participants – six (TAP trained) artists and six Special Education (SE) settings – were, in turn, nominated by the ESCs. Four of these settings were special schools[12] (two nominated by Kildare ESC and two by Laois ESC) and two were SE units in post primary schools (one nominated by Kildare ESC and one by Laois ESC). Each of the SE settings then nominated one SNA, one teacher and one member of its school leadership (SL) team to participate in the initiative. Each school was assigned one artist for a residency period of 20 hours. (The only available TAP trained artists within the catchment area for the duration of the initiative were visual artists.). The timeline and structure of the residencies was decided locally, and was determined by the needs of the participating children and young people.

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[11] These ESCs are part of an national network comprising 21 full-time Centres.
[12] Specials schools cater for children and young people between the ages of four and 18.

1.2 Participants

1.2.1 Participating schools

Special schools: St Anne's Special School, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary; Kolbe Special School, Portlaoise, Co. Laois; St Anne's Special School, The Curragh, Co. Kildare; St Mark's Special, Newbridge, Co. Kildare.

Post-primary schools: St Brendan's Community School, Birr, Co. Offaly; Kildare Town Community School, Co. Kildare.

1.2.2 Participating SNAs, teachers and SL team members

SNAs: Fidelma Donnelly; Jackie Byrne; Adrienne Gilbert; Marina Scully; Sarah Delaney; Mary Whelan.

Teachers: Lorna Coolahan; Fiona Mahon; Niamh Brady; Clare Shanley; Sarah Carter; Sinéad O'Meara.

SL team members: Catherine Ryan (SENCO)[13]; Anne Comerford (Principal); Orlagh Mahon (Principal); Adeline Wall (Principal); Fiona Behan (Deputy principal); Aileen O'Brien (Acting Deputy Principal)

1.2.3 Participating artists

Vera McEvoy; Monica O'Meara; Mary Slevin; Orla McDonagh; Marta Golubowska; Liadain Butler.

Note: All participants identified as women.

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[13] Special Educational Needs Coordinator.

2. The research

In Ireland, as in many other jurisdictions, there is a dearth of research when it comes to arts education in SE settings, and even less when it comes to the role of artists in these settings. It is imperative, therefore, that emerging developments are informed by ongoing research. So, in alignment with the CYP objective to 'Initiate a sustained programme of research' (p.22), research was integral to 'I am Creative' from the outset. The researcher was, moreover, a member of the 'I am Creative' Design Team.

2.1 Aims

The aims of the research study were to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of 'I am Creative' as a model for improving arts education in SE settings
- Uncover enablers and barriers to collaborations with artists in SE settings
- Provide illustrative exemplars of collaborations with artists in SE settings
- Contribute evidence-based recommendations for the national scaling up of 'I am Creative' across Ireland's special schools and post-primary SE settings.

It is envisioned that this research report will 1) inform the design and delivery of future SE-artist policy and practice in Ireland and, 2) contribute to the development of sustainable SE-artist collaborations.

2.2 The role of the researcher

The researcher's role in this project was a participatory one. From the beginning, she was a member of the 'I am Creative' Design Team. She attended, and contributed to, all Design Team meetings and was present at the residential training weekends – for participating teachers, artists, SNAs and SL team members – in Portlaoise. This meant that, from the outset, she developed strong bonds with members of the Design Team and a good working relationship with the participants. Her presence throughout the residential training sessions enabled her (and, concomitantly, the research) to be viewed by the participants as integral to the initiative. It also facilitated open and frank dialogue in focus group interviews and on school visits, which enabled the collection of rich data.

2.3 The broader research context

In mainstream education, teacher expertise and enthusiasm have been identified as the key determinants of high-quality arts education (Bamford, 2012; Oreck, 2004). Yet, it is widely acknowledged that many generalist teachers lack confidence and competence in arts subjects (McDonald et al., 2019; Andrews, 2016; Snook and Buck, 2014; Bamford, 2012). In order to address this deficit and improve arts education in schools, many jurisdictions have employed school-artist collaborations. The potential for improvement offered by these collaborations has been widely documented (Morrissey and Kenny, 2023; Fahy and Kenny, 2023; Kenny and Morrissey, 2021; 2016; Christopherson and Kenny, 2018; Colley *et al.*, 2012; Wolf, 2008; Kind *et al.*, 2007). However, the quality (and sustainability) of the improvements achieved requires that:

- Artists are equipped with the skills to work in schools (Laycock, 2008)
- Collaborations are long-term rather than short-term (Kenny, 2020; Kenny and Morrissey, 2016; Bamford, 2012)
- There is sufficient time and space for all stakeholders (including school leaders) to build relationships, articulate shared values, engage in meaningful dialogue, negotiate goals and objectives, and plan and execute the means of implementing them (Fahy and Kenny, 2023; Kenny and Morrissey, 2021; 2016; Kind *et al.*, 2007)
- Learning is reciprocal, i.e. teachers learn from artists and artists learn from teachers (Kenny and Morrissey, 2016; Wolf, 2008; Kind *et al.,* 2007)

Additionally, Snook and Buck (2014) assert that collaborations need to be 'purposefully managed' (p.28) if improvement is to be maximised. A third-party broker or mentor with expertise in both the arts and education has been posited by others as a key enabler in this regard   (Morrissey and Kenny, 2023; Fahy and Kenny, 2022; Sinclair *et al.*, 2015; Kind *et al.*, 2007). Purposeful management is also necessary to mediate what many teachers perceive as the artist-teacher hierarchy which can hinder the development of reciprocal relationships (Morrissey and Kenny, 2023; Snook and Buck, 2014; Wolf, 2008; Kind *et al.*, 2007). This perception can result in teachers – even those with considerable arts expertise – relegating themselves, and being relegated, to roles as 'helpers, guards or mediators' (Christophersen, 2013) or withdrawing to the back of the classroom (Snook and Buck, 2014). Furthermore, collaborations with artists in schools are most likely to be effective, and to extend beyond

individual classrooms, when they are supported by school leaders (Kenny and Morrissey, 2016).

It is widely acknowledged that teachers – as the key determinants of quality arts education – need opportunities to make art, take risks and develop their own creativity if they are to educate their students to do so (Andrews, 2012; Oreck, 2004; Upitis *et al.*, 1999). Indeed, Greene (1995) sees art making (and receiving) as a conduit for enabling the 'breaks with ordinariness' (p.135) that make imagination, exploration and the realisation of alternatives possible. She asserts that:

> It is not uncommon for the arts to leave us somehow ill at ease or to prod us beyond acquiescence. They may, now and then, move us into spaces where we can envision other ways of being and ponder what it might signify to realize them (p.135).

Nevertheless, Upitis *et al.* (1999) contend that if teachers' art making is to impact on their classroom practice, it needs to be grounded in a sense of community that supports risk taking. Kenny and Morrissey (2021) maintain that the 'breaks with ordinariness' identified by Greene can also be enabled through collaborations with artists when conditions are optimal (see above). Accordingly, when teacher-artist collaborations are forged within communities that support teachers to make art, the possibilities for transformation are enhanced (Andrews, 2016; 2012; 2010; 2008). Andrews (2012) and Oreck (2004) contend too that when art making is complemented by an emphasis on pedagogy, this potential can be further increased (see also Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018).

In Ireland, most teachers working in SE are generalist teachers. So, like their generalist mainstream counterparts, many lack expertise and confidence in the arts. Furthermore, many specialist arts teachers in post-primary SE units lack expertise in SE. These observations are corroborated by Sjöqvist *et al*. (2021) who assert that:

> … specialist arts teachers find it difficult to provide instruction to pupils with disabilities, while special education teachers and generalist teachers, with their somewhat superficial subject knowledge, feel insecure when teaching the arts and are less likely to fully implement the [arts education] syllabi. (p. 464)

So, poorly positioned to 'encourage students to develop and monitor their own sense of aesthetic judgment and preferences' (MacLean, 2008, p.94), many teachers in SE tend to prioritise the product over 'the art production process itself' (p.94). This results in limited and

limiting arts experiences for students. The situation is often exacerbated by well-intentioned support workers (or SNAs) who become concerned about the quality of the product and 'step in to do the artwork for the student' (p.94). Hence, in SE as in mainstream education, the role of the teacher in 'creating an environment that is conducive to learning' (MacLean, 2008, pp.93-94) is crucial. So too, as MacLean indicates, is the role of the support worker (or SNA).

Although there is research literature attesting to the value of the arts in SE, there is not a 'consistent and coherent body of work on this subject' (Malley and Silverstein, 2014, p.39). Available literature on collaboration as a means of improving arts provision in SE, tends to focus on 1) collaboration mediated by a third party with expertise in both arts education and special education (Ponder and Kissinger, 2009) and, 2) collaboration between arts educators and special educators (Malley and Silverstein, 2014). While these collaborations can yield worthwhile results, the sorts of expertise they employ are not readily available (or, as yet, readily identifiable) either in SE or in mainstream education in Ireland (arts education specialists in post-primary schools being the exception). This is reflected in existing arts education initiatives in mainstream schools which centre on teacher-artist and school-artist collaboration: TAP, BLAST, and Creative Clusters led by the DE; Creative Schools[14] led by the Arts Council of Ireland; Music Generation,[15] and artist residencies run by local authorities. While SE participation in these initiatives is welcomed, they are not specifically designed to address SE needs (see 1). With a view to addressing these needs, and improving the provision for arts education in SE, the DE harnessed its experience of TAP, BLAST and Creative Clusters to generate a bespoke SE-artist collaboration: 'I am Creative'. This initiative, like TAP, BLAST and Creative Clusters was managed by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office based at the ESC Tralee, under the direction of the DE's National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education and the Director of the ESC, Tralee. A particularly innovative feature of 'I am Creative' was the provision of training for SNAs alongside teachers (and, indeed, artists), which though recommended in the CYP and elsewhere (see 1), was heretofore unprecedented in Ireland.

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[14] https://www.artscouncil.ie/creative-schools/
[15] https://www.musicgeneration.ie/

2.4 Research methodology

A qualitative approach was designed to meet the research objectives of the project. The overall data collection timeline began with the first 'I am Creative' Design Team planning meeting on 13 April 2023. Data collection continued for the duration of the residential training weekends held on 21/22 April, 5/6 May and 12/13 May 2023, and extended to two subsequent classroom observations on 18 May and 9 June 2023. During this time, the following methods were employed:

- **A document analysis** positions 'I am Creative' within national policy and national and international research contexts. This analysis informs the analysis of the research findings and feeds into the recommendations in this report.

- **Researcher field notes** were recorded 'in the midst', and following, each of the 'I am Creative' Design Team meetings, residential training weekends and classroom observations. These field notes permitted the learning enabled and challenges posed to be identified and tracked over time, and they also inform the analysis of the research findings. Additionally, researcher field notes were recorded during, and after, the classroom observations.

- **Initiative documentation analysis** comprising analysis of the documentation of participants' expectations of the initiative at the outset, documentation (including video and photo documentation) produced by the Design Team and by participants during Design Team meetings and training weekends; documentation by participants and by the DE of in-school projects (photos, videos, notes, reflective journal samples); evaluation forms completed by participants after each training weekend.

- **Focus group interviews** with participating teachers, SNAs, artists and SL team members were conducted during the final training weekend on 13 May 2023. For the purpose of these interviews, participants were split into four occupational groups. Each focus group interview lasted about 30 minutes.

2.5 Data analysis

Data analysis across each of the data sets sought to elucidate the enablers and barriers to collaborations with artists in SE with reference to the aims of the research study (see 2.1). The analytic process was inductive as it explicitly set out to address these aims and deductive in that it allowed for the emergence of themes beyond this remit.

2.6 Ethics

Normal ethical procedures were adhered to throughout the project. All members of the Design Team, participating artists and school nominees (teachers, SL team members and SNAs) were issued with information sheets, and verbal explanations, and signed consent forms. Information sheets were also distributed to school Boards of Management and signed by Board Chairpersons. Information sheets and consent forms were, likewise, issued to, and signed by parents/guardians of children and young people in participating schools. These children and young people were, where feasible, issued by their teachers with appropriate assent forms, and verbal explanations. All parties were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. As an added safeguard, data provided by individual participants is presented numerically in this report (e.g. SNA 1 (SNA1), Teacher 1 (T1), School Leader 1 (SL1) etc.). Additionally, the numbers assigned to participants across data sets do not necessarily correspond. For example, T1 in the Focus Group and T1 in the evaluation of weekend one (E1) are not necessarily the same nor, indeed, are SL1 in the evaluation of weekend one and SL1 in the evaluation of weekend two (E2). Furthermore, since the research was carried out by a Lecturer at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, ethical clearance was sought, and granted by, the College's Research Ethics Committee.

2.7 Limitations

The short time frame did not allow for an in-depth study of the residencies over the course of the initiative. Only two classroom observations were conducted by the researcher: one in a special school and one in a post-primary SE unit. Observation of the residencies over time was not, therefore possible. The schools themselves documented the residencies on an on-line forum (using video, photographs and written reflections), which was accessible to all participants. The DE also compiled a video snapshot of the residencies. Since this documentation was compiled primarily for information sharing and dissemination purposes rather than for research purposes, it did not provide a confidential forum for individual participants to express their views. Accordingly, this documentation yielded little additional insight (to that provided by participants in focus groups and in course activities) into the ways in which 1) the residencies developed, or 2) pupil voice and agency were fostered.

3. Tracking the initiative

The 'I am Creative' pilot initiative was led by the National Advisor for the Integration of the Arts in Education under the direction of the National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education. In March 2023, the Advisor assembled a six-member Design Team (including the researcher) comprising personnel with expertise in SE and/or Arts Education (see Appendix A). Three members of the team were also members of the TAP Design Team. The parameters of the initiative were set out in advance by the National Director and National Advisor as follows:

- The initiative would run from 21 April to 16th June, ending at the end of May for post-primary schools
- There would be six participating schools (four special schools and two SE units in post-primary schools)
- Each school would be allocated a 20-hour artist residency with a TAP trained artist
- The structure of the residencies would be determined by the needs of participating children and young people, and agreed locally by educators and artists
- One teacher, one SNA, and a member of the SL team from each of the six participating schools would participate, alongside the six artists, in three residential training weekends
- The training weekends would be held in tandem with the residencies
- Each training weekend would be followed by an in-school engagement with the resident artist
- The design of the training weekends would be iterative in nature
- Art making would be an integral component of each training weekend
- The training would be explicitly set within the most up-to-date curriculum and policy developments in Ireland and would be informed by relevant research

The Design Team attended a residential meeting on 12/13 April 2023 to design the first training weekend and to sketch out the weekends to follow. Subsequent Design Team meetings were held via ZOOM and (in person) immediately prior to each training weekend. The design of 'I am Creative' was specifically informed by:

- CYP 2023-2027
- [The Primary Curriculum Framework for Primary and Special Schools](#)

- [Draft principles for engaging with the arts in early learning and care](#)
- [National Council for Special Education curricular material](#)
- [School Self-Evaluation: Next Steps](#), [Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools](#) and [Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools](#)

As outlined earlier (see 1), a core principle of the CYP is that 'Children and young people must have agency and a voice in decision-making' (p.13). Inevitably, this raises questions about what constitutes agency and voice in the SE-arts education context where many children and young people are non-verbal and may appear unresponsive. 'I am Creative' was centred on a collaborative exploration of these questions in an environment predicated on mutual trust, reciprocity and support. Art making too was a key component of the initiative, and was guided by the need to cultivate 'breaks with ordinariness' and move participants beyond taken-for-granted ways of being and doing in arts education in SE into spaces where alternatives might be envisioned and realised.

The following two sections (3.1and 3.2) draw on data sets 2 and 3 (see 2.4) to outline the trajectory of 'I am Creative'. The data are presented quasi-chronologically to reflect the iterative nature of the training weekends and the embeddedness of the six artist residencies therein (3.1). Findings related to the future development of 'I am Creative' from the World Café (3.1.2) and participant evaluation forms are included in Chapter 4, where findings from the focus group interviews are also presented.

3.1 'I am Creative' in action

The residential aspect of the initiative was intended to provide time and space for participants (artists, teachers, SNAs, and SL team members) to establish and/or build relationships grounded in the trust, equity and reciprocity which are necessary for successful collaborations to occur (Fahy and Kenny, 2021; Kenny and Morrissey, 2021; 2016). The focus on relationship building was reflected in the course content and in the pedagogical approaches employed throughout.

All participants were paid a stipend of 200 euro for attendance at training. The first residential weekend was attended by three SNAs, four teachers, four SL team members and all participating artists. The second was attended by four SNAs, five teachers, and all SL team

members and artists. The third, with the exception of one SL team member, was attended by all participants. All members of the Design Team – and the National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education – were in attendance throughout. A representative from NABMSE and a Director from either Laois ESC or Kildare ESC also attended part (or all) of each training weekend.

3.1.1 Taking off

Friday 21 April

'I am Creative' – in alignment with the centrality to the initiative of relationship – began with some 'getting-to-know you' activities. These were followed by:

- o A short presentation outlining the nature of the initiative
- o The collaborative viewing of a light/sound installation by visual artist and Design Team member, Caroline Conway
- o Dinner.

Saturday 22 April

Participants outlined their expectations for 1) themselves, 2) children and young people, 3) schools, and 4) training[16]. Interestingly, half of the artists, teachers and SL team members expected 'team', with SL team members expecting team to include the whole school. Only one SNA expressed an expectation of team: 'To finally be included in planning, which my role of SNA will require me to participate in' (F1SNA2). The others mentioned increased confidence and creativity. Participants' expectations for children and young people were largely aligned with those for schools. Artists and teachers expected to provide children and young people with new, and enjoyable, opportunities for creativity. SNAs expected to be better able to support children's learning and SL team members envisaged increased accessibility to the arts for all pupils. One artist expected the work to continue beyond the initiative and SL team members envisaged it becoming embedded in schools. All participant groups expected the training weekends to provide time and space for dialogue, collaboration and team building, and to afford structured support. There was, therefore, a fairly high degree of alignment between participants' expectations and those of the Design Team.

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[16] Forms F1 (Form 1) were provided for this purpose. See Appendix B.

The research dimension of the initiative, associated ethical issues and practicalities re informed consent and assent were addressed by the researcher (see 2.6). The location of the initiative within the CYP was elucidated with specific reference to the Lundy model of child and young person participation underpinning it (see 1). The limitations of this model within the SE context where many children and young people are non-verbal and/or may appear unresponsive were also explored. So too were the sense of wonder and awe generated by the arts, the draft principles for engaging with the arts in early learning and care, and the principles underpinning The Primary Curriculum Framework (see 1).
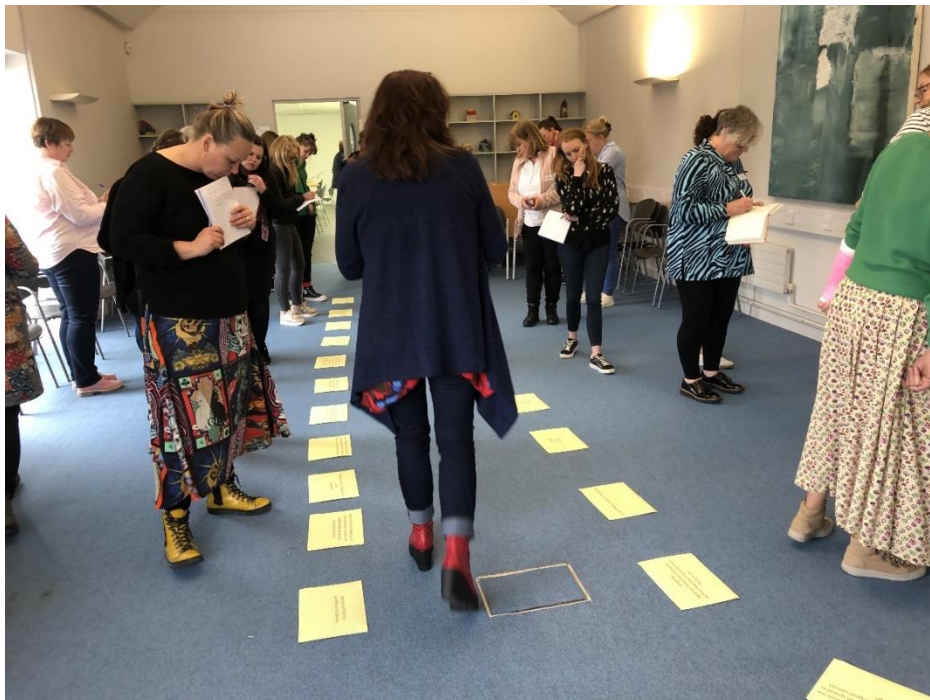
EXPLORING UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

The opportunities provided for participants to make art (described below) were inextricably intertwined in the pedagogical content explored. Together they provided the trellis on which participants, in their school-artist groups 1) pinned the values or guiding principles that would underlie their residencies, 2) planned for the artist visits that would take place prior to the next training weekend and, 3) decided how to document the residencies (all recorded on the planning document provided, see Appendix C).

The art making was designed to enable participants to:

- Engage in processes of play and exploration
- Experience 'breaks with ordinariness' (Greene, 1995, p.135)

- Find wordless places within and so 'envision other ways of being and ponder what it might signify to realize them' (p.135) in their encounters with non-linguistic children and young people

Participants were invited to contemplate the qualities of a safe space or refuge (textures, colours, shape, light, size etc.) and to choose from materials provided to make a personal refuge, guided by intuition and the senses.

MAKING A PERSONAL REFUGE

Some time was spent 'being' in the refuges created.

BEING IN A SAFE SPACE

As the participants reflected on their art making (and being) experiences, it became apparent that all occupational groups (artists, teachers, SNAs and SL team members) had felt 'ill at ease' (p.135) at some stage (or stages) of the process. All had experienced 'breaks with ordinariness' outside of their schools and outside of their studios in a third 'I am Creative' space.

Evaluation forms (E1)[17] were distributed online and completed by 20 participants: 6 artists, 6 SL team members, 5 teachers and 3 SNAs. Few suggestions were made in relation to either 1) improving the weekend, or 2) future training. Responses focused primarily on two questions:

- During the training, what did you find useful to you?
- Where did the event take you that you might not otherwise have gone?

Across all occupational groups, the input on agency and voice in SE was seen as very useful, with the SNAs viewing it, and other direct inputs, as particularly useful. Among teachers, artists and SL team members opportunities for relationship building and collaboration (team) were seen as most useful. The SNAs were prompted to reflect on their role in the arts education classroom. Artists were induced to consider how they might interact with children and young people with diverse and specific needs. And, teachers and SL team members were provoked to embrace their creativity, 'to think differently' (E1SL4), and 'to see that one size does not fit all' (E1T4).

3.1.2 In flight

Friday 5 May

The second residential training weekend, like the previous one, began with a relationship building activity, which was followed by dinner.

Saturday 6 May

The overall design of the day addressed participants' expressed needs for dialogue, collaboration, team building and structured support. Building on the experiences of the previous weekend, embodied ways of being were foregrounded with a view to supporting participants to:

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[17] E1: Evaluation one (see Appendix D)

shift their mindset from 'doing' to 'being' and become more in touch with an embodied sensory awareness in themselves … [so that] they may be more likely to find an authentic (meaningful) connection with the cognitively disabled young person.' (Goodwin and Griffiths, 2022, p.30).

In their school-artist groups, participants reviewed their learning from the initiative thus far, focusing on: 1) Learning for you, children, school 2) What questions/ideas/directions are emerging? 3) What has been a) most challenging, b) helpful? 4. What does 'I am Creative' need?

WORKING IN SCHOOL-ARTIST GROUPS

A World Café comprising four stations was set up, each with a flip chart sheet containing one of the above questions/prompts. In their occupational groups, participants visited each station for 10 minutes and responded to the prompts. Notes from each occupational group were recorded in different colours on the flip chart sheets.

WORLD CAFÉ

The flip chart sheets were shared with the whole group.

WORLD CAFÉ SHARING 1

The World Café revealed interesting findings across all occupational groups. SNAs, teachers and artists now reported that the understood the process or experience of art making as more important than the product. They also reported a deeper appreciation of children's and young people's individuality and creativity, and of the importance of adapting/modifying activities to cater for individual needs. The artists – some of whom had spent time observing and interacting with children and young people as part of their residencies – valued 'getting to know the children' and the various ways in which they participated. They also reported learning to 'let go' and 'when not to intervene'. While teachers acknowledged the 'vital role of the SNA', SNAs themselves were less clear, noting that 'I am Creative' was the first opportunity they had to engage in CPD alongside teachers. All occupational groups valued co-planning, sharing ideas/strategies, and collaboratively re-evaluating plans and approaches (teamwork). The most challenging aspect of the initiative for all groups was the work generated by the research i.e. obtaining informed consent from parents/guardians, and obtaining assent from children and young people. (Findings from question 4 are discussed in Chapter 4).
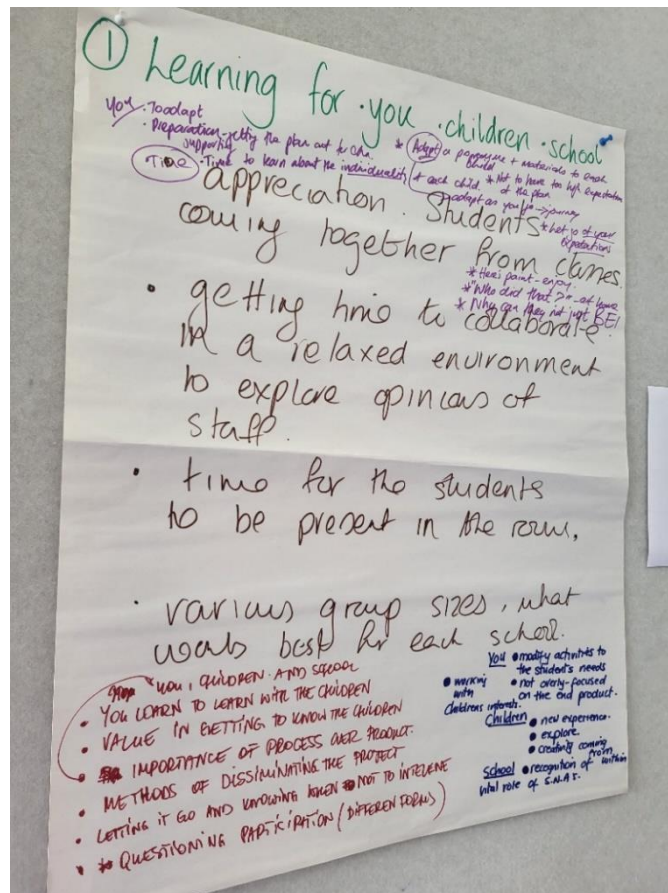
WORLD CAFÉ SHARING 2

Following a short input on SSE (a mandatory component of all DE approved CPD), participants in their school-artist groups considered:

- The school's current focus in terms of SSE
- How 'I am Creative' can support the school to develop this focus

The outcomes were 'embodied' by each school-artist group and presented to the whole group.

EMBODIED REPRESENTATION OF 'I AM CREATIVE' AND SSE

The progression pathways (see Appendix C), provided as a planning tool by the DE for special schools, were used to unpack the various ways in which children's and young people's voice and agency in SE 1) is constituted, 2) can be acted upon, and 3) can be embedded in the SSE process. (This was not the purpose for which the pathways were designed.) In school-artist groups, participants were invited to consider a particular child and to use the pathways to identify how that child might embody agency and exert influence. The participants, as observed by Design Team members, and as revealed in participant evaluation forms, struggled with this exercise.

The art making component of the weekend focused on mark making, and was designed to enable participants to:

- Engage in processes of play and exploration
- Interact with materials without expectation of an outcome (emphasising process and experience over product)
- Experience 'breaks with ordinariness' (Greene, 1995, p.135)
- Foster an embodied sense of awareness
- Engage a range of senses
- Generate ideas for the SE classroom

Three stations were set up as follows:

1. Tactile mark making: dough, clay, foam, mirrors

2. Mark making with movement: Chinese calligraphy cloth, water, brushes, pastels, brushes, bamboo, crayon, masking tape

3. Mark making with light: projector, candles, sheet, acetate

MARK MAKING WITH FOAM ON MIRROR

MARK MAKING WITH FOAM ON BAKING TRAYS

MARK MAKING WITH WATER ON CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY CLOTH

MARK MAKING WITH LIGHT

MARK MAKING WITH A VARIETY OF MATERIALS

Hard copy evaluation forms (E2)[18] were distributed, with a view to getting more comprehensive responses than previously. 22 forms were completed by: 6 SNAs, 6 teachers, 5 artists, and 5 SL team members. Responses relating to the learning thus far were generally in line with those recorded in the World Café, with collaboration/sharing, the value of the creative process, and the centrality of child voice (however manifested) reiterated throughout. Participants also commented on the value of the residential aspect of the course in enabling relationship building and collaboration. The evaluations revealed that while many participants had been discomfited by the safe space activity the previous weekend, they had, at the same time, found the experience valuable. It had, for many, precipitated action (or being): one teacher was relating better to the children she worked with; one SL team member was entering 'into the mind of the student' (E2SL2); and another was 'thinking outside the box' (E2SL1). The mark making activities, by contrast, were seen as being both playful and enjoyable. As one artist put it, there was 'less pressure to perform/produce - likely as an outcome of day one experience, certainly in my case enjoyed more but I see that this was common to participants' (E2A2). Another artist commented that the mark making activities clarified 'what process based art is and its values' (E2A4). She had 'felt last week there was a big expectation on the final product which now has shifted in my team.' Others found the mark making activities inspiring and readily transferrable to the SE classroom. The participants used the following words and phrases to summarise their experience of 'I am Creative' so far: challenging, positive, supportive, collaborative, new partnerships, opportunities to work with colleagues. SL team members also expressed a keen interest in including 'I am Creative' as a core aspect of SSE.

3.1.3 Preparing to land

Friday 12 May

The third residential training weekend began with a short reflection followed by dinner.

Saturday 13 May

The day was designed to build on participants' previous experiences. Hence, it continued to foreground, and expand, participants' awareness of embodied ways of knowing and being.

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[18] See Appendix E

There was a strong focus throughout the day on sharing and collaborative planning. In their school-artist groups, participants returned to the values they had identified the first weekend and made changes in light of their experiences since. Each group recorded three key values on a new planning document (see Appendix C) and presented them to the whole group in tableau format, accompanied by a soundtrack.

OUR VALUES SOUND LIKE THIS

There was a short input on the Creative Habits of Mind developed by Lucas *et al.* (2013) and the OECD creativity/critical thinking rubrics. In their school-artist groups, considered what creativity meant in *their* settings, with *their* children.

The questions/prompts used in the World Café guided participants in their review of their learning to date in their school-artist groups. Each group then presented on its residency to the whole group. A short summary of the residencies – based on researcher observation of the presentations and documentation provided by the participants – is presented below.

Residency one

This residency was set in a co-educational special school, catering for pupils between the ages of 4 and 18 who have been assessed as having either a moderate or severe/profound general learning disability. Initially, the children selected to participate in 'I am Creative' were members of the School Council. However, as the residency progressed, the whole school became involved in some way. The artist visited the school for up to three hours at a time and worked in both indoor and outdoor spaces. The children and young people engaged in fabric printing, shed painting, tyre painting and mosaic making.

FABRIC PAINTING

The project was designed to incorporate school goals in relation to Green Schools and SSE, as well as in relation to Student Support Plans (SSPs). There was an expressed focus on process throughout the residency.

Residency two

This residency took place in a co-educational special school, catering for pupils between the ages of 4 and 18 who have been assessed as being within the severe to profound learning disability spectrum and/or with autism. The residency was located in a single class. In the early

stages, the artist dedicated much time to building relationships with the participating young people and gaining their trust. This was experienced as challenging. The project was located in both indoor and outdoor spaces and the primary medium was paint. The children and young people painted and printed on a variety of surfaces including table tops, paper, and tyres. The challenge to focus on process was described as a 'brain-shift' by the school-artist team.

PAINTING ON A VARIETY OF SURFACES

Residency three

This residency was located in a co-educational special school for pupils between the ages of 4 and 18 who have been assessed as having either a moderate or severe/profound general learning disability. The residency was located in a single class. At the outset, the artist visited the class on two occasions to observe and to gain the trust of the children and young people. Aligned with the school curriculum, the residency centred on the theme of summer. In the early stages, the focus was on product but soon shifted to process – to the exploration of materials (e.g. clay, fabric/felt, pastels, felt pens). The school-artist team strove to enable individual agency and influence by attending, in the first instance, to the pace at which individual children and young people were working. Managing such an array of materials –

though with a view to enabling pupil choice – proved challenging.

WORKING WITH A VARIETY OF MATERIALS

Residency four

This residency involved two classes (first years and fourth years) for students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in a large urban post-primary community school. The classes comprised two and three students respectively (five students in total). The residency focused on 1) exploring fabric and fibre, and 2) engaging in the process of felt making. Each residency period was one hour long. The children and young people engaged in sensory explorations of fabrics and fibres of varying textures, looking at and touching (rubbing and massaging) them. They explored line, traced lines of fabric with their fingers, and reproduced those lines as drawings. They also explored the artist's own work. These explorations preceded children's and young people's engagement in the process of felt making itself.

EXAMINING THE ARTIST'S WORK
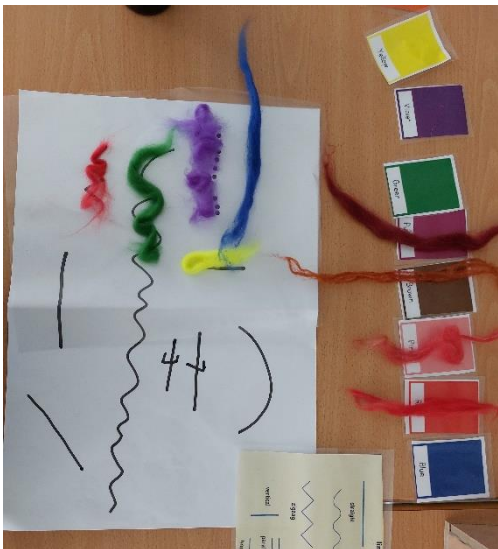
EXPLORING LINE

Residency five

This residency was located in a co-educational special school for pupils between the ages of 4 and 18 who have been assessed as having a mild general disability. The residency was located in a single class. In the first instance, the artist visited the school to observe the class and joined in the lesson. This enabled her to establish rapport with the children and young people. The residency focused on mark making (which included perforation marks) and line drawing using a variety of media, in both indoor and outdoor spaces. The children and young people also engaged in some printing.
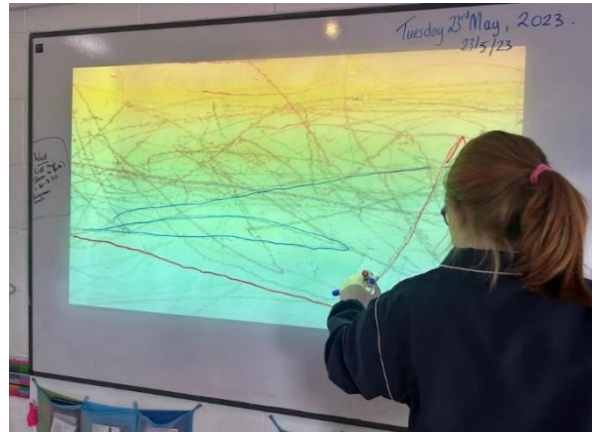
MARK MAKING ON THE INTERACTIVE WHITEBOARD
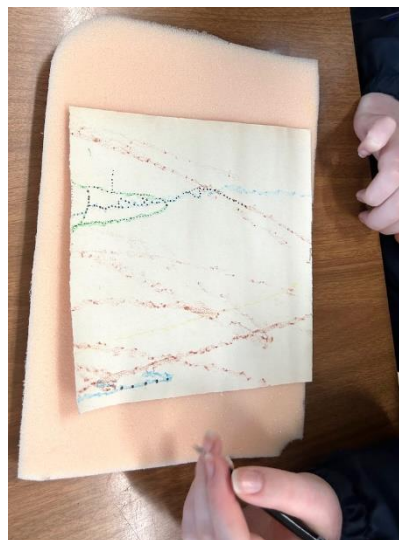
PERFORATING

Residency six

This residency involved students from special classes in a large post-primary community school. The students had either elected to participate in the residency or had been selected to do so on the basis that they were likely to enjoy or benefit from it. The children and young people had a variety of needs. This residency focused on clay, with the students themselves choosing whether to work in 2D or 3D. The children were also gently encouraged to move out of their comfort zones.

WORKING WITH CLAY

In response to participant feedback (and Design Team observations), the use of the DE progression pathways to identify how particular children and young people might embody agency and exert influence, was revisited. Input re same was positioned in relation to 1) the Lundy model (see 1) for child participation, and 2) the SSE process. The participants were also presented with examples of ways in which the pathways might be used for the aforementioned purposes. (see Appendix F). An input on the implications for practice in SE of the work of Mark Solms – who posits that feelings are the bedrock on which all human experience is constituted – was also provided.

The weekend's art making activity began with a sensory outdoor journey. During the course of the journey natural materials were gathered. These materials were then used to make patterns. The entire process was conducted in silence. The emphasis throughout was on engaging the senses.

MAKING PATTERNS WITH NATURAL MATERIALS

Evaluation forms (E3)[19] were completed by 21 participants: 6 teachers, 5 SL team members, 5 SNAs and 5 artists. Reflecting on the influence of 'I am Creative' on their practice in the past week almost all respondents mentioned 1) focusing on the process or experience of art making and 2) slowing down, attending and 'being with' children and young people and providing opportunities for them to make choices. Some of the artists and teachers had also used/adapted the course activities in their practice. Commenting on the most useful aspects of this weekend, most mentioned 1) the inputs from other school-artist groups and 2) the opportunities for collaboration. As one teacher put it, 'We learned a lot from reflecting on our two sessions with our artist. We also learned from listening to the other groups' (E3T1). Five participants, however, thought that more planning/collaboration time would be useful, and seven commented on the usefulness of the focus groups for sharing insights and challenges with occupational peers. Most participants commented on the value of the sensory

[19] See Appendix G

journey and art making experience, with one artist remarking 'How much can be achieved by taking the time to be simple. Taking the time to appreciate every action and acknowledge it' (E3A2). Many also mentioned the usefulness of the input on Mark Solms's work, which, for one SNA, explained 'how things appear in my classroom in special education … [and provided] A good reminder that emotion is everything' (E3SNA2). Respondents were unanimous in their support for bespoke initiatives like 'I am Creative' in SE, 'as opposed to a programme being modified for special ed which doesn't always work. It's also prioritising a minority group and giving them a voice.' Many recommended too that the 'I am Creative' training and residencies be extended over a longer period, that more hours be made available for artists in schools, and that whole school staffs engage in similar training.

3.2 Summary

The above findings highlight the significance of 'I am Creative' for the participants (teachers, SNAs, artists, SL team members and children and young people in SE settings). The explicit grounding of the initiative within national arts, education, and SE policy contexts validated the initiative as an important one. The residential aspect of the initiative, and the nature of the training provided, allowed time and space for school-artist teams to build relationships and lay down the foundations necessary for successful intra-team collaborations to occur. These school-artist teams were situated within a broader PLC, which facilitated inter-team collaboration as well. Inter-occupational collaboration at local level and within this broader 'I am Creative' PLC was also enabled. The inclusion of SNAs in training and co-planning alongside teachers (and, indeed, artists) aligned with the collaborative and child-centred nature of the initiative, and was welcomed by SNAs and teachers alike. It also enabled SNAs' knowledge of, and commitment to, individual needs – evident in all documentation completed by them (F1, E1, E2, E3) – to be harnessed towards enabling children and young people in SE to 'be', to be listened to, and to exert influence in the visual arts classroom.

All participant groups highlighted the value of the opportunities provided by the initiative to make art and take risks within a supportive community of practice. These art making experiences facilitated 'breaks with ordinariness' and concomitant shifts in perspectives. Accordingly, participants developed a deeper appreciation of 1) their own sensory 'beingness' and 2) the process and experience of making art. This, in turn, deepened their appreciation of the sensory beingness of individual children and young people in SE and of the value for them

too of experiencing the process of art making. These new perspectives were, moreover, evident in participants' planning for, and documentation of, the residencies.

The short time-frame of the initiative meant that many participants felt that it was rushed. Such conditions are far from optimal in terms of developing meaningful relationships in which learning can flow in all directions. However, the positioning of 'I am Creative' within SSE enabled SL team members (in particular) to see how they might embed aspects of the initiative in schools, though training for the rest of the school/unit staff was identified as essential in this regard.

4. Key findings

In this chapter, key findings from the focus group interviews (coded as FGA, FGT, FGSNA and FGSL) key findings re the future development of 'I am Creative' from the World Café and participant evaluation forms (E2 and E3) are presented. These findings are informed by 1) the findings presented in chapter 3, 2) two in-school observations (one in a special school and one in a special unit in a post-primary school) conducted by the researcher and 3) documentation of the residencies by the participants and by the National Advisor for the Integration of the Arts in Education.

In 4.1 the key findings from the four focus group interviews are presented as a single data set, in order to represent the data as holistically possible.

In 4.2 the key findings from the other data sets are also presented as a single data set due, in this instance, to the limited amount of data they contain.

4.1 Perspectives from the focus group interviews

The findings are presented under the following headings:

- The SNA
- The organisation of the residency within the school
- The artistic process and 'breaks with ordinariness'
- Shared responsibility for children's and young people's learning
- The whole school and beyond

4.1.1 The SNA

All occupational groups referred to the role of SNAs in SE and to their inclusion in training alongside teachers (and artists) in 'I am Creative'. As one SNA remarked: 'fifteen years as an SNA and this is the first time something like this has been offered' (FGSNA2). Indeed, this innovation was enthusiastically welcomed by all participants, as the following comments illustrate:

'I just think it's great that we're involved in this project at all, to be honest … We were never involved in any kind of planning or preparation that goes on. We might be involved in our own school, but, you know, out in the general world SNAs are never really included in anything, so this is the first project … What I liked the first day was the first thing we were told in the room was that in this we are all equal, which is really important.' (FGSNA1)

'Especially the fact that you're with your peers … you're with teachers, you're with principals so you feel that you have a voice, that your opinion is valued … it's never been asked for before.' (FGSNA3)

'It's super having the SNAs here actually (yeah). They never get to go on courses with you. You're always trying to bring it back but you're probably forgetting the main part of it …' (FGT1)

'And I think for, even as a teacher, for an SNA to see how much … it gave to them by being invited to take part (yeah).' (FGT6)

'I think it's wonderful that the SNAs are included in this initiative. You know it's not just with teachers. We're getting the opinion of everybody that's involved because … really in schools we need everybody on board to understand where it's going. So that to me makes a huge difference.' (FGSL1)

The inclusion of SNAs as collaborators in 'I am Creative' provided recognition for the important role they play in SE settings. All participant cohorts agreed that SNAs tend to know children and young people best, and are, thereby, most attuned to their individual needs and preferences. At post-primary level 'where teachers are changing around all the time but the constant is the SNAs' (FGT4), this knowledge was seen as particularly useful.

4.1.2 The organisation of the residency within the school

Over the course of the four focus group interviews (with artists, SNAs, teachers and SL team members), the organisational details of the residencies emerged piece by piece. In two of the four participating special schools, the residencies were located in the participating teachers' and SNAs' classes. In another special school, the residency was located in the participating teacher's class, while the participating SNA was located in another class (though the SNA was involved in the residency). In the fourth participating special school the residency, in the first instance, involved members of the School Council (comprising a cross-section of pupils from

each class who were used to coming together) and was subsequently extended to include all pupils. One of the two post-primary settings involved two classes (first years and fourth years), one of which was the participating teacher's and SNA's usual class. (The teacher, an art teacher, was in the class only for the duration specified on the class timetable for art.). The second class was also the participating teacher's usual class. In the second post-primary setting, a selection of pupils from various classes participated in the residency. While it was possible for the participating SNA and the participating SE team leader to be present throughout this residency, it was not possible for the participating teacher to be.

The most straightforward arrangement (and intended, if not explicitly stated, arrangement) occurred when the residency was located in the participating teacher's and SNA's base or usual class. This arrangement, as one teacher observed, alleviated the need to deal with complicated external factors and convoluted timetabling arrangements. It also meant that the participating children and young people had an already established relationship with both the teacher and the SNA, which is crucial in the SE context (see 4.1.3).

In terms of organisation too, 'I am Creative' provided for dedicated time for art making outside of the normal school routine. And, while teachers reported that much advance preparation was required for this to happen, they were enthusiastic about the benefits:

'Practically having the time was great. Just dedicating the time … it flew … I couldn't believe … flew by … We gave them the time. I had time to relax. You know there was no pressure.' (FGT1)

'It's great that we … were just concentrating on this and I think as teachers, we'd all acknowledge that we're busy and being pulled in all directions … And having the time and space just to do this.' (FGT6)

This dedicated time supported teachers and SNAs to replicate the conditions they had experienced on the training weekends for the benefit of their pupils (and themselves, see 4.1.3).

School participants reported that the location of the residency in the final term of the school year – and its concomitant short duration – was challenging from a school organisational perspective, and particularly so for post-primary schools, as the following comments illustrate:

> '… if we're going to do it as a school, it needs to start in Sept and it doesn't need to finish until May or summer. To have a good lot of time … in September I'd be thinking … how can I incorporate that into what we're already doing in SSE and the arts … that that would be fairly clear, fairly simple and how it fits in with everything else that we're doing, and that would be of benefit for the children.' (FGSL2)
>
> 'We're in exam season. Part of our decision is who's even able to make these weekends. And then we're trying to switch from Leaving Certificate on a Friday evening to come into a creative space on Saturday … with summer exams and everything coming in.' (FGSL3)
>
> '… and more time between our meetings and if we had a couple of more weeks with the artist we might have got a bit more out of our time spent reflecting on lots of hours of work in the classroom … It was just condensed into too short a period.' (FGSL1)

The short duration also posed challenges in terms of 1) the time for artists to build rapport with children and young people (see 4.1.4), and 2) logistical issues for artists (see 4.1.4).

4.1.3 The artistic process and 'breaks with ordinariness'

All participant cohorts extolled the value of the training weekends, the course content and the high quality of the facilitators. All agreed, moreover, that the most significant outcome of participating in 'I am Creative' was a new appreciation for the artistic process. This marked a move away from prioritising the artistic product. However, school teams found this move incredibly challenging. Teachers and SNAs identified 'us doing it [art making] ourselves' (FGT1) and 'observing the shift in the children' (FGT5) as key catalysts in this shift. They commented, moreover, on the supportive community of practice in which the former was facilitated and on the space provided by the initiative for them to observe their pupils. Additionally, making art and observing their pupils encouraged teachers to reflect on their teaching more broadly:

> 'I think it's given us the space to be, to think about the creative process that we use in school and giving us a new light on the situation … needs to be broader … look at the bigger picture' (FGT1)
>
> 'As teachers, we've forgotten, I suppose to reflect on what you're teaching and what has the child gained from this activity' (FGT1)
>
> 'Almost across the board. Across all of the curriculum, it's made me think of everything differently in my classroom; the experience that the children have with us like …' (FGT3)

It is worth noting here that the art making activities were complemented by the pedagogical inputs described in Chapter 3.

The aforementioned 'breaks with ordinariness' also unsettled teachers' preconceived ideas about children and young people, and their taken-for-granted ways of working with them, as the following comments illustrate:

> Did you see … did you see the way he went up and he did that by himself? And the independence and the autonomy. They had to go and set up their own little station out here and work together collaboratively … (FGT5)
>
> I feel maybe I'm too …you're just watching the kids all the time. You're like … he could make a bolt for the door. Whereas when you weren't watching, they were doing … That little gang had gone off into a corner to, you know, work on their own little project. It's like wow they're not running for the door. So maybe we're too … controlling.' (FGT6)

The artists too found the shift from product to process challenging, though considerably less so than the school teams. They were also convinced of the value for teachers and SNAs of making art, and expressed an interest in providing them with further opportunities to do so. As, in the words of one artist:

> '… most times when you're going in you're doing something the teachers have a basic understanding of what you're going to do. But if they understood it a little bit more and they're able to take that away and you know do it themselves with another group or …' (SGA1)

The artists reported that teachers had identified the need for further art making experiences as well. And they suggested that dedicated time be provided within 'I am Creative' for them to facilitate this.

Despite the acknowledged shift in focus from product to process by all participants, the product continued to exert a strong influence on all parties, as the following comment illustrates:

> 'I don't know how many times we sat at our table and asked what's our finished product … that's exactly what we're not supposed to be doing. And then we were … now we're back on the process but like we'll still hit this hurdle next week.' (FGT2)

Heretofore, the product had provided teachers with a tangible means of validating their own work. And, with the shift to process, they struggled to find an alternative. As one teacher remarked:

> 'I think as teachers we always have to have the evidence of our success. As in the success of what we've done ….' (FGT5)

At the same time, the teachers experienced success through art making, with one teacher remarking that:

> '… no one put any demands on me, but I still learnt something. I still took a whole new route that I never would have thought and I'm an adult. And I still achieved learning goals. I still achieved everything, that I can still tick off my box. But I just did it in a whole different way …' (FGT6)

Yet, teachers still felt the need to evidence success in their classrooms. And, for this purpose, they settled on an alternative 'product': photographic displays of the art making process.

4.1.4 Shared responsibility for children's and young people's learning

All participant cohorts acknowledged the premium put by 'I am Creative' on building relationships within school-artist teams. Indeed, strong intra-team rapport was considered by all as the bedrock on which shared responsibility for children's and young people's learning rested. Sharing responsibility with SNAs and artists enabled teachers to feel supported, to relax, and to have fun in the classroom, as illustrated in the following comments:

> 'I was in collaboration with the artist who was as invested in it (yeah) as I was, and the SNA, and we were all together on this. And I felt. I think that's why I was so much more relaxed. I think that's why everyone had fun …' (FGT2)
>
> 'I suppose you knew the SNA and the artist knew where the lesson plan was going. We make our lesson plans ourselves. You don't collaboratively make your lesson plans. You make them on your own like the SNAs aren't involved. So for them to be involved and actually be clear on what the outcome was going to be, or where we were going to go with the lesson, meant an awful lot. We were all on the same page.' (FGT1)

Sharing responsibility also provided space for teachers to stand back and observe. As one teacher remarked: 'No one else ever leads our lessons, we're always going …' (FGT4). Furthermore, as described above (4.1.3), these observations enabled teachers (and SNAs too)

to 1) value the artistic process, 2) gain new perspectives on their pupils, and 3) reflect on the ways they worked with them.

 The artists too reported on the benefits of sharing responsibility with teachers and SNAs. In contrast to much of her experience as an artist in schools, one artist remarked:

'… they're [teachers] coming in. They're not standing back … they're in doing it too … They're not normally doing that. You go ahead with your art and they're on the computer.' (SGA4)

The following diary entry[20] exemplifies the benefits to artists (and ultimately to children and young people) of shared responsibility:

… the SNA has not worked with this class previously and it was interesting to have her observations and reflections, as she was getting to know the different personalities during the creative tasks. It was helpful for me to notice how her observations varied (they were from a different viewpoint) from what I was observing and how the two observations combined to get a bigger, better picture of each child.

[Teacher] and [SNA] spoke about the elements of the session that the students really enjoyed, especially the last large collaborative drawing they did outside - with pastels attached to the end of long bamboo canes and the large roll of paper placed on the tarmac.

For me I felt this part of the session had a change of energy and I was wondering if it was a good idea to have brought the session outdoors. I was feeling unsure about this part, was this of benefit at all to the students, was it a low exercise to finish with?

I would have been left with this uncertainty, if we had not reflected and discussed this while in Portlaoise. The reality was that I was under pressure to leave the school to be somewhere else teaching, following this session. I was fully engaged in the session until we moved to go outdoors and as we did I checked my watch and became aware that I had 15 mins to complete this session. In fact the energy change was all mine, and mine alone. [SNA] and [Teacher] both spoke about how much the children really enjoyed this part, outdoors.

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[20] The insights described here derived from a conversation involving the artist, SNA, and teacher on one of the training weekends in Portlaoise.

> If we had not reflected as a group I would not have known this and would have dismissed this collaborative task from further sessions. Instead we are planning it again for next week. (RDA2)

The SNAs reported that sharing responsibility with artists and teachers in 'I am Creative' enabled them to feel respected and included. One SNA commented that:

> 'Even for the artist coming in as well, she's not just talking to the teacher. She's also talking to me … so like the three of us are included in it rather than … they [outsiders] come in and it's directed to the teacher and we're just bystanders to it. Or the teachers are taken out …' (FGSNA2)

Shared responsibility with artists was, however, reported as being difficult to achieve in the context of a short-term residency with children and young people with severe to profound learning disabilities. One teacher described how:

> '… in my class there's two children who are visually impaired. So even a voice change is a huge factor and they … didn't participate as much with the artist because the relationship wasn't there. And the artist said when you came in, she just came alive … but it was that relationship we have from a whole year together …' (FGT4)

Another teacher explained that for some of the children in her class to benefit from a short-term residency she (or the SNA) would need 'to actually physically be there beside that child for the entirety of the project' (FGT3):

> 'For her to benefit, for it to be open for everyone. I think a couple more sessions where she would have gotten used to [Artist's] voice, got used to [Artist] coming to her … I could step away. Or not just me, one of the SNAs. But, two [SNAs] are with a change. I'm there with five others [children]. Something else could be happening over here that I just have to deal with. The phone's ringing … realistically it's just not practical.' (FGT4)

Yet another teacher observed 'that it takes so much time to build a relationship … especially in my class.' (FGT6). So, while some teachers and artists and SL team members felt there was adequate time within 'I am Creative' for artists to build relationships with children and young people, most did not, as the following comments exemplify:

> 'These children need more time to get used to us as well, not walking into a normal mainstream class.' (SGA5)
>
> 'I think the relationship with the teacher needs time. I need time too. I've just met the class. I need time to digest … I need time to think it out and be ready for the next one. Everything feels quite rushed.' (SGA1)
>
> I think the premise of the whole project is on time and trust and I really think it was done well in terms of giving us time and trust as professionals, artists, teachers, SNAs that are here. I don't think enough time and trust was given for the children who were involved in the project … it's just a condensed amount of time. Our children take a long time and need time for that person to just even be in the room. We're talking all the time about letting our children be and be with them … a lot more time needs to be given to the children who are the focus of what we're doing here.' (SGSL1)

The notion of being rushed was a recurrent theme throughout the artist interviews and related to 1) actual time in classrooms 'without the pressure of having to create something' (FGA5), and 2) the difficulties for artists of making time for a number of school visits within their existing schedules in such a short period of time. Artists also expressed the need for more time to engage in dialogue with school teams. As one artist commented:

> 'So again it's all down to time and the relationship with the teacher … reflecting on and having a conversation with her which is hard for the teachers … when you're there she's in the room with the class, and you know her time is with this class. So I don't think it can be done there so it's a follow up afterwards to touch base with her. I mean I did it today [on the training weekend]. How did she think my last session went. What about this child? To get that time, on the day … but sometimes you need to reflect on something: how did that go? was that a bit much? Was that a bit fast? At times it can be difficult to get quality time … you ask four things on an email and they might answer one. They're rushing. They've a lot on.' (SGA1)

This artist also mentioned that the lack of time for dialogue meant that she experienced herself as an outsider in terms of what she perceived as the teacher-SNA unit. Neither this experience nor the experience of being rushed are conducive to developing the requisite rapport for artists to share responsibility for learning.

4.1.5 The whole school and beyond

SNAs, teachers and SL team members identified the need for all teachers and SNAs involved in a residency to have a shared understanding of the values underpinning it. Training for all SNAs in classrooms hosting residencies was identified as a priority in this regard. In one school, efforts were made by the school-artist team to address this gap:

> 'After our last session [Artist] actually sat down with me and [SNA] and the other SNAs just to allow them to know that this is a group project and their opinion is valued as much as ours. They can say I don't think this is working and we'll change whatever if it's not working, if we all agree.' (FGT5)

Participants also remarked that when (and if) residencies are extended beyond individual classrooms, there is a similar need to provide training for all teachers and SNAs involved:

> 'I would love an opportunity to develop … or time … to bring what we've been doing here, and a way of sharing that at whole school level.' (FGSL6).
>
> '…to actually share something with our staff team or your 20 or 30 SNAs or whatever you have, and the rest of your teachers, that they get to value ['I am Creative'].' (SGSL1)

However, the location of the initiative within SSE was seen as a stepping stone in this regard, as the following comments illustrate:

> 'For me it's about thinking in the wider school context of the school looking at SSE and having that time to be with a teacher and an SNA and an artist in a space that's not a staff meeting; that there's nothing formal about it but we're thinking about our students. We're thinking about what we want for them. We're thinking about the type of experience we want to provide in the school so it's kind of allowing … [us] to lay foundations for wider development across the school.' ((FGSL4)
>
> 'Normally it's just the principals and the teachers talking about the pathways … Our SNA has gone on to identify the pathways through this programme, and I think because of … the collaboration and the various ways this programme has facilitated the activities allows us all to make those links. It's not just a project. It's a project that meets the requirement for SSE, that meets the needs of children. It has Learning Outcomes. It has collaboration. So it's SSE across the board.' (FGSL1)

Indeed, all principals welcomed the opportunity afforded by 'I am Creative' to include SNAs in whole school planning and SSE. (This move was also welcomed by the participating SNAs.) The location of the initiative within SSE, and the inclusion of SNAs in the process, meant that the notion of shared responsibility extended beyond the inaugural 'I am Creative' school team from the outset. The potential for shared responsibility thus generated, combined with the actual experience of 'how collaborative this work is' (FGSL1), meant that school leaders could envisage building on the residency into the future. They were also keen to build on the inter-school collaboration facilitated by the initiative.

The participation of SL team leaders in creative activities alongside teachers, SNAs and artists enabled their meaningful participation in the residencies. As one SL team member remarked:

'… school leaders were invited to the three days and part it of it makes us think of creativity in a different way. I think a lot of our skill-set are … strong administration and organisation and then for us having to be creative, it's more of the process. And for us to be going back and having those conversations … and you know it's quite meaningful.' (FGSL5).

The artists observed that the participation of SL team members enabled them to experience themselves as valued team members, as the following comments illustrate:

'… the principal might meet you in the corridor and she doesn't say well you're the artist in room 4, how are you getting on? And you say fine and she's gone. You know here they actually know what you're doing. They have input into it … I feel they're really tied into it.' (FGA2)

'You're together on equal ground if the principal is involved.' (FGA1)

SL team leader involvement also led to 'much more project reinforcement throughout the school' (FGA2). And it ensured that budgetary issues were dealt with in a timely manner.

4.2 Perspectives on future developments

In this section key findings re the future development of 'I am Creative' from the World Café and participant evaluation forms (E2 and E3) are presented. Since, many of the findings presented in these data sets reiterate those above (4.1), they are presented in summary format and, for ease of reference, under the same headings:

- The SNA

- The organisation of the residency within the school

- The artistic process and 'breaks with ordinariness'

- Shared responsibility for children's and young people's learning

- The whole school and beyond

4.2.1 The SNA

- Recognition of the centrality of the SNA

- Need for training for all SNAs involved in 'I am Creative' residencies

- Need for training for all SNAs (and teachers) in the school if the initiative is to be embedded across the school

4.2.2 The organisation of the residency within the school

- Need for simplified method of obtaining informed consent from parents/guardians

4.2.3 The artistic process and 'breaks with ordinariness'

- The value for children and young people in SE of sensory experience and the artistic process

- The value of challenging educator pre-conceptions

4.2.4 Shared responsibility for children's and young people's learning

- The value of the time afforded by the initiative to develop mutual trust and the importance of the residential aspect of 'I am Creative' in this regard

- The value of professional collaboration/teamwork

- Need for more time in the classroom for the artist, to develop rapport with pupils

- Need for more time for SNAs, teachers and artists to develop the requisite rapport to share responsibility for children's and young people's learning in deep and meaningful ways[21]

4.1.5 The whole school and beyond

- Recognition of 'seldom heard' children's and young people's creativity

- The value of bespoke initiatives in SE, tailored to meet the specific and diverse needs of children and young people in a context where staff 'are are constantly adapting any course offered to meet the needs of their pupils' (E3SL4)

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[21] This point was reiterated many times, and by all participant cohorts.

- Need to extend the initiative to all SE settings

- Need for initiative, including (more) training, to be extended over a longer period (beginning in September) to enable meaningful and ongoing development. One teacher, however, suggested that: 'instead of three weekends maybe one or two would suffice and then maybe more in school collaboration with the artist, teacher. SNA and school leader would be better. That way the group of four are building a relationship at the coalface and tailoring the project to the needs of children they're directly working with'. (E3T1)

- The importance of a whole-school approach to creativity and the arts

- Need for opportunities to build on learning achieved (follow-up meetings/networking events; community of practice)

- The usefulness of the inter-school sharing and collaboration afforded by the initiative and the value of providing for this on an ongoing basis

- Need for further CPD for all participants

- Need to identify ways in which the initiative can be progressed at whole school level

4.3 Summary

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the significance of 'I am Creative' at school level, while also highlighting issues of national importance. The residential aspect of the initiative provided space and time for participants to get to know each other and to establish the requisite foundations for developing relationships of mutual trust within, and beyond their school-artist teams. Many participants felt, however, that more time, outside of the training weekends, was needed to nurture and consolidate school-artist team relationships. While relationship building takes considerable time, it is essential for ensuring 1) shared responsibility for children's and young people's learning 2) the development of artist-pupil rapport. In SE too, it is difficult to achieve the latter within a short timeframe.

The inclusion of SNAs in training alongside teachers (and artists) was enthusiastically welcomed by all participants. It provided recognition for, and accorded value to, their key role in SE, and their close knowledge of children and young people. However, the research findings reveal that for participating SNAs, their inclusion in the 'I am Creative' pilot uncovered some sensitivities in a system in which they may sometimes feel undervalued and in which their established role has been to attend to children's and young people's care needs.

The inclusion of SL team members in 'I am Creative' ensured that the initiative was prioritised in schools. The positioning of the initiative within a whole school planning, and SSE, context reinforced this priority status. The involvement of SL team members also meant that artists were more likely to experience themselves as part of the school team and that budgets were efficiently dealt with.

The single biggest impact of the initiative on all participant cohorts was the shift in focus from the artistic product to the artistic process. A key factor in this regard was the opportunity provided for participants to make art, and to experience the process for themselves. This shift from product to process also provided the impetus for other shifts, many of which extended beyond arts education.

The key issues identified in this chapter, in terms of developing 'I am Creative' into the future, include:

- Time and space to develop the requisite rapport for shared responsibility within school-artist teams
- Time and space for artists to develop rapport with children and young people
- The need to extend the duration of the initiative (including training) over the course of an academic year (beginning in September)
- Time and space to embed the initiative in schools and to upskill school staffs

5. Conclusion

'I am Creative' addressed an identified need for bespoke initiatives tailored to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in SE, in alignment with the Creative Youth Plan (CYP). The initiative has, moreover, delivered significant benefits in relation to arts education, and visual art education in particular, in SE. Throughout the research process there was demonstrable commitment from all stakeholders to high quality engagement in the arts that would endure beyond the initiative itself. This was evident in raised expectations for children and young people; increased enthusiasm and confidence among teachers, SNAs and artists; high levels of experimentation; shared responsibility for learning; and the embedding of the initiative in whole school planning and SSE. Throughout the report, it is evident that teachers', artists' and SNAs' knowledge, skills, and understandings can complement each other in meaningful and significant ways when time and space for collaboration are provided. It is worth noting here, however, that long-term collaborations are essential if changes thus achieved are to be sustained.

The inclusion in 'I am Creative' of SNAs on an equal footing with artists, teachers and SL team leaders provided recognition for the important role played by SNAs in SE. It also ensured that they shared responsibility with teachers and artists for children's and young people's learning in the arts education classroom. Additionally, the inclusion of SL team members in the initiative ensured support for the residencies at school level. The positioning of 'I am Creative' as integral to SSE also meant that the initiative was embedded in a whole-school context from the outset.

Time and trust were the distinguishing features of the initiative. The residential training weekends provided time and space for school-artist teams to lay the foundations for relationships centred on mutual trust which are essential to sharing responsibility for children's and young people's learning. On each of the three training weekends too, there was a dual focus on pedagogy and the experience (or process) of art making. This dual focus is, according to Andrews (2012) and Oreck (2004), a key element in effecting change. Furthermore, the emphasis on process was significant for all participants as it troubled their hitherto taken taken-for-granted understandings of the product-process hierarchy. This shift in focus from product to process precipitated further shifts, for teachers in particular, who

began to reevaluate their preconceptions of their pupils and the pedagogical processes they were employing not just in the arts but across the curriculum.

The many rewards of forming education-arts collaborations in SE have been exemplified in the examination of 'I am Creative' presented in this report. These rewards are particularly evident in the premium put by participants on children's and young people's agency. They are evident too in the shared responsibility for facilitating this enabled by teacher-SNA-artist collaborations. When school teams are supported by school leaders, and located within a broader PLC in which there are opportunities to make art and explore pedagogy, their potential is further enhanced. Such a collective, shared approach is crucial to ensuring 'equity of access to creative activities for the most seldom heard children and young people' (CYP, 2023, p.17) in SE.

5.1 Enablers

This section outlines the enablers for the success of 'I am Creative' into the future. It is based on the research findings presented in this report and informed by relevant policy (see 1) and literature (see 2.3).

5.1.1 Local and national support for 'I am Creative'

'I am Creative' as a bespoke initiative in SE was afforded high national status by means of DE investment, the research focus, and the presence throughout training of the National Director for the Integration of the Arts in Education and a representative from NABMSE. At national level too, the initiative was administered by the National Arts in Education Administrative Office at the ESC, Tralee. The location of the initiative within SSE, which is currently being embedded in Ireland's school system, reinforced the initiative's high national status while also confirming its value at school level. Additionally, the inclusion of school leaders in the initiative ensured support for the initiative at school level. At local level, the initiative was supported by local ESC Directors, who nominated participating schools and artists and who were present at training. In addition, the Saturday training sessions were hosted by Portlaoise ESC. The embedding of school-artist teams in a larger PLC reinforced the notion of being part of a larger community progressing arts education in SE. These sorts of connections are crucial in terms of developing 'I am Creative' into the future. Any future development of the initiative

will require increased investment to ensure that the high quality of the residencies evidenced in this report can be replicated and, indeed, enhanced.

5.1.2 Training weekends

The residential training weekends provided time and space for school-artist teams to get to know each other and to lay the foundations for the development of reciprocal learning relationships in which all parties could 1) learn from each other, and 2) share responsibility for children's and young people's learning. The formation of these school-artist teams within an 'I am Creative' PLC also encouraged inter-team collaboration and learning. Additionally, the training weekends provided time and space for school-artist teams to 1) articulate shared values, 2) plan for the implementation of the residencies in schools, 3) consider ways in which individual children's and young people's agency and influence could be cultivated through art making, and 4) work out how to embed the initiative in whole-school planning and SSE. The inclusion of SNAs in training meant that they had the opportunity, alongside teachers (and artists) to get-to-grips with 'I am Creative' first-hand. So, from the get-go, they were positioned as equal partners and equipped with the requisite information (and experiences) to contribute meaningfully to the residencies on the ground, as well as to school planning for 'I am Creative'.

The training weekends provided a third space (outside of the school and the artist's studio) in which participants could make art within a supportive community of practice (Upitis *et al.,*1999). The art making was guided by the need to cultivate 'breaks with ordinariness' and move participants beyond taken-for-granted ways of being and doing in arts education in SE into spaces where alternatives might be envisioned and realised (Greene, 1995). With a view to increasing its efficacy in this regard, the art making was embedded in the pedagogical content explored (Andrews, 2012; Oreck, 2004). As the participants made art, they were encouraged to 1) play and explore, and 2) interact with the materials without expectation of an outcome. The resultant focus on the process or experience of art making represented a break with participants' heretofore taken-for-granted preoccupation with the end product, and led to further shifts in perspective, some of which extended beyond arts education. Additionally, the art making activities enabled participants to appreciate their own sensory 'beingness' and, concomitantly, that of individual children and young people in SE, and of the value for them too of experiencing that process.

5.1.3 Dedicated time for art making in schools

'I am Creative' provided for dedicated time for art making outside of the normal school routine. That time was, moreover, validated by the inclusion of SL team members in training and the positioning of the initiative within the SSE context. While preparation for this posed challenges for teachers and SNAs, it also supported school-artist teams to replicate, as far as possible, the conditions for art making they themselves had experienced on the training weekends.

5.1.4 The organisation of residencies within schools

The location of residencies in participating teachers' and SNAs' base classes alleviated the need to deal with complicated external factors. It also meant that the participating children and young people had an already established relationship with both the teacher and the SNA, which is crucial in the SE context (see 4.1.3).

5.1.5 Freedom to determine the structure of the residencies in schools

Each school was allocated a 20-hour artist residency with a TAP trained artist. School-artist teams had the freedom to structure these 20 hours however they saw fit. In some schools, time was allocated for artists to observe and get to know the children before engaging in any art making activities. This proved invaluable to the artists involved.

5.1.6 The concurrency of training weekends and residencies

The training weekends were held in tandem with the residencies which facilitated the development of an iterative learning loop. This ensured that the participants had agency and could influence the development of the training as it progressed. It also meant that the Design Team could respond to their expressed needs and to other needs as they arose.

5.2 Constraints

This section outlines the constraints that need to be addressed in order to ensure the successful development of 'I am Creative' into the future. It is based on the research findings presented in this report and informed by relevant policy (see 1) and literature (see 2.3).

5.2.1 The duration of the initiative

The most significant constraint posed by 'I am Creative' was its location in, and confinement to, the final term of the school year. This is a busy time of the year in schools, and in post-primary schools in particular. The extension of the initiative over a longer time period

(beginning in September) would alleviate the sense of being rushed and provide time for teacher-SNA-artist relationships to be nurtured and consolidated.

5.2.2 The 20-hour residency

While the 20-hour residency allocated to schools participating in 'I am Creative' replicates that provided in TAP, the collaboration or partnership involved in 'I am Creative' involves at least three people (teacher, SNA and artist), while that involved in TAP involves just two (teacher and artist). At a basic level, it takes more time to nurture and consolidate a three-way reciprocal learning relationship than a two-way one. Furthermore, the range of specific and diverse needs in SE means that artists need more time to establish relationships with children and young people in this context. They may also need to spend a substantial amount of time observing and getting to know children and young people.

As outlined in Chapter 4, one teacher suggested that:

> … instead of three weekends maybe one or two would suffice and then maybe more in school collaboration with the artist, teacher. SNA and school leader would be better. That way the group of four are building a relationship at the coalface and tailoring the project to the needs of children they're directly working with. (E3T1)

While this suggestion appears to be at odds with some of the enablers presented above, it is worth further consideration in light of other suggestions. The artists suggested that time should be allocated within the initiative for them to facilitate teachers and SNAs to make art and so build their confidence and skills towards making art with children and young people in turn. So, merging both suggestions, it might be worth considering allocating (or permitting schools to allocate) time for this to occur within the 20 hours. (Art making experiences could be open to other SNAs and teachers in the school as well.) However, this would need, in the words of Snook and Buck (2014), to be 'purposefully managed' (p.28) to ensure that the integration of pedagogical theory and art making at the heart of 'I am Creative' (and essential for sustaining changes in practice) is maintained (Andrews, 2012; Oreck, 2004; see also Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). The services of a third-party arts mentor with expertise in both education (and, perhaps, SE) and the arts would be required for this purpose. This mentor could also have responsibility for the 'purposeful management' of teacher-SNA-artist and school team relationships (Morrissey and Kenny, 2023; Fahy, 2022; Sinclair *et al.*, 2015; Kind *et al.*, 2007). A teacher with the requisite proficiencies would be ideal for this role, as

'teachers have professional standing with schools, curriculum expertise and opportunities for secondment/leave' (Kenny and Morrissey, 2016, p. 92; see also Morrissey and Kenny, 2023).

5.2.3 Role of the SNA

SNAs were positioned as equal partners in 'I am Creative' pilot and, accordingly, equipped with the requisite knowledge (and experiences) to play a meaningful role in the residencies. At the same time, their inclusion revealed some systemically embedded sensitivities.

5.2.4 Lack of training for *all* SNAs involved in residencies

If the residencies are to foster children's and young people's agency as art makers, then training for all SNAs in classrooms hosting 'I am Creative' residencies needs to be prioritised.

5.2.5 Lack of available data on children's and young people's agency

While all participants identified children's and young people's agency as a core component of the residencies, it was not possible – in the absence of detailed case studies – to provide an in-depth analysis of how agency was either manifested or facilitated within the context of 'I am Creative'. The compilation of detailed case studies within the time-frame of the initiative was not feasible.

5.2.6 Workload associated with the research dimension of the initiative

The workload for school staff of obtaining informed consent from the parents and guardians of participating children and young people was identified as a significant constraint. The requirements re obtaining informed consent were determined by the research ethics committee at Mary Immaculate College (Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee, [MIREC]) where the researcher is employed as a Lecturer in Education.

5.2.7 Concentration on a single art form

In order to provide 'equity of access to creative activities for the most seldom heard children and young people' (CYP, 2023, p.17) in SE, arts residencies should enable access to a variety of art forms.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations arising from this research report centre on five key areas. These key areas – rooted in the findings, enablers and constraints presented in the report – are presented under the following headings:

- National and local contexts
- Training
- Structure and duration of the residencies
- SNAs
- Research and evaluation

National and local contexts

- The prioritisation and provision of funding for 'I am Creative' to be extended incrementally to all special schools and special education units in post-primary schools.
- The existing 'I am Creative' PLC, and others into the future, should be supported to ensure that changes in practice are sustained and become embedded in participating schools.
- The appointment of arts mentors at local level is required for initiative development.
- The inclusion of a broad spectrum of arts in 'I am Creative'.
- The ESCs are best placed to support the initiative at local level (selecting artists, hosting training). As the initiative expands to include more SE settings, artists, PLCs and mentors, existing supports will need to be expanded and funded.
- The provision of simplified procedures for obtaining informed consent for research purposes from parents and guardians of children and young people in SE.

Training

- Training (preferably residential) to be held in tandem with the residencies over the course of an academic year.
- The inclusion in training of school leaders, teachers, artists and SNAs involved in a residency.
- If 'I am Creative' is to become embedded in a setting, then training needs to be provided for all teachers and SNAs in that setting.

- The establishment and consolidation of relationships of mutual trust should be at the heart of all training.
- Training should provide for art making and the exploration of pedagogical theories and practices, within a supportive PLC.
- Training should foreground theories and practices that centre on the agency of children and young people in SE.
- Training should provide time and space to embed the principles and practices of 'I am Creative' in whole school planning and SSE.

Structure and duration of the residencies

- The duration of the residencies should be extended over the course of an academic year
- The DE needs to increase the time allotted for artist residences in SE
- Flexibility at school level, with the support of an arts mentor, to enable artists to support teachers and SNAs to make art, while being mindful that if changes in practice are to be sustained art making needs to be embedded in pedagogy.

SNAs

- Recognition of the important role of the SNA in 'I am Creative' and their continued inclusion in training.

Research and evaluation

- Continuing research is required to inform future directions of the initiative.
- There is a need to conduct case studies, over an extended period, to achieve in-depth insights into the ways in which children's and young people's agency is manifested and facilitated within the SE arts education context

7. Researcher biographical notes

Dr Dorothy Morrissey is Lecturer in Drama Education at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick where she coordinates the College's Theatre Artist in Residence Programme. She also teaches on the arts and creativity on the College's undergraduate and postgraduate education and humanities programmes. She holds an EdD from the University of Bristol and has published and presented nationally and internationally on the arts, arts education and teacher education. A former primary teacher, Dorothy also worked as a trainer and curriculum support person with the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) and as Regional Co-ordinator of the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI). She has designed and delivered many training of trainer and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for primary, secondary and third-level teachers. Email: dorothy.morrissey@mic.ul.ie

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9. Appendices

APPENDIX A: 'I AM CREATIVE' DESIGN TEAM

Jennifer Buggie, National Advisor for the Integration of the Arts in Education, has been seconded since September 2022 from her post as a primary teacher in the Holy Family Junior School in Portlaoise. Jennifer has been involved in TAP since its inception in 2014, both as a teacher and as a TAP summer course facilitator.

Dr Jill Goodwin, Independent Artist/Researcher, previously worked as a teacher in primary and special education in the UK for over 25 years.

Bríd Lawless, Assistant Principal St Brendan's BNS, Loughrea, has been involved in TAP since 2015, both as a teacher and TAP summer course facilitator. Bríd also taught in SE for 16 years.

Caroline Conway, Visual Artist, has been involved in TAP since 2016, both as an artist and as a TAP summer course facilitator. She has also worked as a Creative Associate with Creative Schools.

Orlagh Mahon, Principal Kolbe Special School, Portlaoise, has taught in SE for over 20 years and is Vice-Chair of Laois Education Support Centre.

Dr Dorothy Morrissey, Researcher (see 7).

The Department of Education's **I am Creative** pilot project has been developed in response to research and feedback given at the end of the Creative Youth pillar of Creative Ireland 2017-2023. **I am Creative** aims to develop arts in education practice for children and young people who attend special school settings.
This community of practice will bring teachers, artists, special needs assistants and school leaders to work collaboratively and iteratively with children and young people to develop approaches to creative practice and learning in their school communities. Before the project begins we would like to ask you...

Professional Role: _____ Name (optional): _____

1. What do you want from **I am Creative**...
for you?
for children & young people?
for schools?
for artists?
2.   What do you think this training needs?

Children develop as creative thinkers

within their body, mind, feelings and spirit

Creativity is a process

which encourages a sense of self, agency, wonder and awe

Draft Principles for Engaging with the Arts in Early Learning and Care

Residency Practicalities	Training Dates	Creative Residency
Adapt the process, timescale and practice to meet the children & young people Relationships Time & Trust	Friday 21 st & Saturday 22nd April Friday 5th & Saturday 6th May Friday 12th & Saturday 13th May	20 hrs duration 6 hrs planning & relationship building 14 hrs engagement - being or doing €200 materials
Key Competencies Primary & Special Schools	**Key Skills Junior Cycle**	**Key Competencies Senior Cycle**
Being Creative Being Well Being an Active Citizen Being a Digital Learner Being Mathematical Being a Communicator & using Language Being an Active Learner	Being Creative Staying Well Working with Others Communicating Being Literate Managing Myself Being Numerate Managing Information & Thinking	Being Creative & Innovative Information Processing Critical & Creative Thinking Communicating Being Personally Effective Working with Others

Pathways	The young person is...
Experiencing	Is present, awake, exposed to the activity/environment. Beginning to acclimatise: objects, people, sounds & sensory experiences.
Attending	Attentive/Engaged, changes gesture, posture, vocalisation, gaze, movement. Acclimatised to the environment.
Responding	Demonstrates capacity to actively take interest in the environment. Indicates preferences. Actively responds with or without support.
Initiating	Show curiosity about the environment. Actively & independently seeks opportunity to engage with/influence the environment.
Acquiring	Demonstrates that knowledge/concept/skill is being learned. Explores & participates.
Becoming Fluent	Moves toward fluency & accuracy in the familiar. Independently & consistently demonstrates recall/mastery of the knowledge/concept/skill.
Generalising	Transfers & applies knowledge/concept/skill to familiar & new contexts.

Our values	Time & Trust

Children & Young People - Voice & Agency	
Creative Experience/Practice	Sensory Approaches
Curriculum	School Self Evaluation - how will you integrate IaC?
Finding Wonder & Awe	Documentation

What is your professional role?

During the training, what did you find useful to you?

What would you recommend doing differently?

Where did the event take you that you might not otherwise have gone?

Any comments

What did you take from Day 1 and how did this influence your practice or perspective?

What was useful to you on Day 2 and why?

What would you recommend doing differently?

Where has IaC taken you that you might not otherwise have gone?

Please comment on the further development of IaC?

If you were to summarise your experience of IaC so far, what would you say and why?

IaC has been designed to create a community of practice and to support professional learning that is built on relationships between practitioners, as well as with children. Please comment on if/how the provision of dinner, accommodation or time to build relationships has influenced your experience of IaC so far. Is this valuable?

APPENDIX F: USING THE PROGRESSION PATHWAYS

Primary Languages Curriculum: Special Educational Needs Pathways		Influence - Agency - Voice	
Pathways	**The young person …**	**The response may look like this …**	**We might support them and their agency by …**
Experiencing	is present during a learning activity, s/he is exposed and/or awake and/or exposed to the learning environment. S/he is beginning to acclimatise to the learning environment such as objects, people, sounds and other sensory experiences.	May not show an observable response.	Build deep knowledge of, and relationship with, the young person. Prepare the environment for the young person's comfort, needs and learning e.g. passive stretching, change position appropriate stimulation i.e. remove directions to allow focus (e.g. if the focus is listening, avoid unnecessary touch/other sensory stimulation). Be with them. Consider a rich range of experiences that you can offer. Consider positioning your body in relation to theirs to maximise sensory experience e.g. the child's body supported by adults to feel voice vibrations through the body.
Attending	becomes attentive to and/or engaged with the learning activities presented by changing gesture, posture, vocalisation, eye gaze, movement etc. S/he is acclimatised to the learning environment.	Eye movements, breath change, stilling, facial expression, turn their head, vocal sounds, becomes animated, change in posture.	As above. Allow SPACE and heightened attunement to the young person's responses; 'hold the space', respect the energy, mirror/synchronise where appropriate. Be mindful of your potentially distracting responses.

Responding	demonstrates capacity to actively or purposefully take an interest in the learning environment. S/he begins to indicate likes, dislikes or preferences. S/he actively responds to a learning activity with or without support.	Demonstrates active engagement in activity (facial expression, vocal sounds, looks at adult/object). Appears to demonstrate preference. Appears to demonstrate pleasure/displeasure in an activity or is no longer animated.	Allow them to withdraw and an option on return - actively look for changes in engagement, energy and mood. Give the young person the time they need to actively respond to the activity - allow flow where possible. Redesign activity if it doesn't work.
Initiating	shows curiosity about the learning environment. S/he actively and independently seeks opportunities to engage with and/ or influence that environment.	Will join/ show interest in joining an activity (posture, gaze, vocalisation). Will leave an activity or push it away/disengage with activity. Makes definite choice between 2 or 3 items (e.g. song, painting, story). Moves slowly over time to new activities/situations. Curious, enthusiastic, happy, open – observes and responds as needed. Actively seeks to engage. Makes eye contact. Makes choices when appropriately offered (e.g. choice board)	Look for signs of initiation e.g. change in energy, gaze, posture. When a young person is physically unable to join an activity, give greater attention to any/all subtle signs of initiation. Presenting an example paired with corresponding materials - visual/practical example. Add tools, materials, encouragement to experiment using their language. May need physical or verbal prompts e.g. support under the elbow, response to small muscular movements and extending.
Acquiring	demonstrates that knowledge, a concept or a skill is being learned. S/he explores and participates in the learning.	Acknowledges and responds to stimulus. Focused, engaged, relaxed posture & body. Anticipates what is coming next and initiates own response.	Observing and assessing. Allow time to process.

		Engages in activity physically, moves back with finished/has enough.	
Becoming Fluent	moves towards fluency and accuracy in familiar learning contexts. S/he independently and consistently demonstrates recall mastery of the skill /concept / knowledge learned.	Interacts independently with peers and support/adult staff. Repeats activity independently? Completes a prescribed task independently, retaining from week to week.	
Generalising	transfers and applies learned skills, knowledge or concepts to familiar and unfamiliar contexts.	Able to produce a piece of work/demonstrate learning without visual aids or props. Makes links between different subject areas (can depend on how often the activity is repeated).	Provide opportunities for the student to demonstrate new learning in a new environment at other times.
Comment			

Children may move in and out of activities based on their likes or dislikes:

- Allow to continue
- Stop
- Redirect
- Modify

Did anything from 'I am Creative' training influence your practice this week?

What was useful to you today (Day 3) and why?

What would you recommend doing differently?

Is there a need for IaC (creative initiatives tailored to special education settings)? If so, why?

What would make the future roll out of IaC the best it could be?