

ARTS AND EDUCATION: Where does Tenderfoot fit?

Tenderfoot fits in the intersection between EDUCATION, THE ARTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

In recent years, there has been increasing acknowledgement in Ireland that there is an important intersection between education, the arts and young people. The existence, and indeed the importance, of this intersection have not always been acknowledged:

Traditionally, Irish education has had a standoff relationship with the arts. The two were never completely comfortable, intellectually or organisationally. Other things, whether ideas of language, or history or nationalism, or in a more updated sense, [the idea] that the primary responsibility of education was to the economic well-being of the state, therefore technology, mathematics, science, [have been considered more important]. A kind of unhelpful dichotomy was established between the humanities and the arts on one hand and technology and science on the other. (Martin Drury)¹

However, there is increasingly an understanding of the importance and the value of artistic experience and engagement as part of a rounded education, as reflected in changing national policy and consequent changes in the Irish curriculum. As Martin Drury explained to participants of the 'Arts and Education Forum' at The Civic Theatre (28 September 2019), engagement with the arts is not only a route to understanding the experiences and cultures of others, but a way of understanding and articulating one's own experience as a human. He emphasized the importance of this two-way experience: what is 'of value' is 'young people not just experiencing the arts (i.e. consuming), but experiencing *themselves* in the arts, and particular aspects of themselves'. And this is what makes engagement with the arts so important for educators.²

This sentiment is echoed in the *Arts in Education Charter* (2012)³, which is underpinned by two 'convictions' around the value of the arts in education. The first:

Art, broadly defined, is a fundamental human enterprise: the making of meaning, individual and collective, through representation. In making art we make ourselves. In understanding art, we understand ourselves.⁴

And the second:

Arts education 'makes a vital contribution to the development of a range of intelligences'.⁵

¹ Martin Drury, talk at 'Arts and Education Forum', The Civic Theatre, 28 Sept 2019

² Ibid.

³ Dept. of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht/Department of Education and Skills. 2012. *Arts and Education Charter*

⁴ Submission by the Council of National Cultural Institutions, in the context of the preparation of the National Development Plan (2007-2013); cited in *Arts and Education Charter* 2012:11

⁵ Curriculum for the visual arts in Irish primary schools, cited in *Arts and Education Charter* 2012:11



Tenderfoot in action, The Civic Theatre

The Landscape of Arts and Education in Ireland

In 2019, the fortieth anniversary of the publication of *The Place of Arts in Irish Education* (1979), was commemorated. This report, written by Ciaran Benson, and often called '**The Benson Report**', is described as a 'radical foundation document', providing 'the first blueprint for the arts in Irish education'⁶. The report was the first to gather information on all the arts and their role in the Irish education system and claimed that 'positive change with regard to the arts [in education] is long overdue'. Benson makes a distinction between 'Arts-to-the-school' and 'Schools-to-the-arts', with the latter defined as 'any provision which enables pupils to visit, see or hear the arts outside the school and perhaps outside of school hours'⁷. This section also speaks about the role of local arts centres providing for the cultural needs of the community, as well as the many possibilities of public libraries as arts centres.

In 2008, a report entitled *Points of Alignment*, was published by the Special Committee on Arts and Education, and signaled movement towards an alignment between education and the arts.

Thirty-three years after the 'Benson Report', in December 2012, The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) made a joint commitment to promote and integrate the arts in education with

⁶ Professor Michael D. Higgins, 2019. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/michael-d-higgins-celebrates-radical-report-on-arts-in-education-1.3810411>

⁷ Benson, C. 1979. *The Place of Arts in Irish Education*. Section 5.10.

the launch of the *Arts in Education Charter*, thus acknowledging their shared organizational responsibility. The charter states that:

We believe creativity must be placed at the heart of our future as a society and a country. The arts are our first encounter with that rich world of creativity, and we believe in placing the arts, alongside other subjects, at the core of our education system.⁸

Echoing Benson's two strands - '*Arts-to-the-school*' and '*Schools-to-the-arts*' - the report outlines two similar strands to arts-in-education: one involving interventions by the arts world into the domain of formal education, and the other involving students engaging with the arts in the public domain, usually in publicly-funded arts venues, whether local or national. The key characteristics of arts-in-education are described as follows:

Arts-in-education practice involves skilled, professional artists of all disciplines working for and with schools in the making, receiving and interpreting of a wide range of arts experiences. Arts-in-education practice can happen within or outside the school. It ranges from once-off visits, through more extended programmes, to intensive, collaborative projects.⁹

The charter outlines an **onus on schools** to develop policy to reflect this commitment to the arts:

Second-level schools shall develop school policies and plans to reflect this commitment to arts-in-education as an important aspect of enriching the curriculum and the wider life of the school.¹⁰

In parallel, there is an **onus on publicly funded arts organizations** to address arts-in-education 'explicitly and in a policy-based fashion'. There is an expectation that they 'shall invest a proportionate amount of time per annum in a local education initiative, subject to agreement and to the appropriate Department of Education and Skills' protocols and guidelines'¹¹.

The **Creative Ireland Programme**, established in 2016, has been an important development in this journey of incorporating the arts into state-provided education. The five-year programme (2017-2022) is 'designed to promote individual, community and national wellbeing'. The core proposition is that 'participation in cultural activity drives personal and collective creativity, with significant implications for individual and societal wellbeing and achievement.' The programme has a significant focus on young people, with one of its five pillars being 'Children and Youth', and aims to work in parallel with existing school programmes that support creativity. The document 'Creative Youth' acknowledges the importance of the integration of arts in education, and the impact this can have on other areas of the curriculum, and on the overall development of the child or young person:

⁸ *Arts in Education Charter* 2012:4

⁹ *Arts in Education Charter* 2012:10

¹⁰ *Arts in Education Charter* 2012:6

¹¹ *Arts in Education Charter* 2012:13

The importance of the arts in education is self-evident and has been increasingly recognized in recent decades. The arts are fundamentally important for developing the creative capacities of the individual child and as such as indispensable to education as a whole.

and:

Arts participation is also crucial to developing the young person's understanding of the wider cultural environment in which we all live. Putting arts and culture at the centre of education is important not just for developing creative capacities and skills but for encouraging social responsibility and personal qualities such as resilience, empathy, and a capacity for friendship'.¹²

The funding of this period of reflection and research undertaken by Tenderfoot highlights the commitment of Creative Ireland to initiatives which make the connection between cultural organizations and schools, and which fit in with an arts-in-education agenda.

More specifically, Creative Ireland states the need for increased connection between schools and theatre/drama initiatives in its arts education action plan. Action 8 (of 17) states that: '**Measures will be developed to expand participation in drama/theatre outside of school**'.¹³

Changes in curricula

The importance of the overlap between education and the arts, with the arts as a leader in the field of creativity, has also been reflected in changes in curricula at both primary and secondary level.

On 4th October 2012, Minister Quinn published his new **Framework for Junior Cycle**, the first three years of secondary education. The Framework supports a holistic approach to learning and to education, with creativity at the heart of this. The framework is underpinned by eight principles, which include 'creativity and innovation', 'engagement and participation' and 'well-being', both individual and collective.

The learning at the core of the Junior Cycle is described in twenty-four '**Statements of Learning**'. These statements describe what students should know, understand, value and be able to do through fully engaging with the Junior Cycle programme. According to these statements, the student will develop the ability, among other skills, to:

- Communicate effectively using a variety of means in a range of contexts.
- Create, appreciate and critically interpret a wide range of texts.
- Create and present artistic works and appreciate the process and skills involved.
- Bring an idea from conception to realization.

In addition to this, the framework lists eight **key skills** which the student should aspire to acquiring throughout the Junior Cycle. These include 'communicating', 'staying well',

¹² Creative Ireland. '*Creative Youth 2017-2022*'

¹³ *Ibid.*

‘managing myself’, ‘working with others’ and ‘being creative’.

The recent changes in the Junior Cycle, with its attention to communication, flexibility and creativity among other areas, are indicative of future shifts in education. Following these changes in the Junior Cycle, the Senior Cycle (the final three years of secondary education) is now under review. The Tenderfoot programme fits very clearly with these recent shifts in priorities in education, as well as with the existing Transition Year programme, which is the first part of the Senior Cycle. Transition Year offers learners an opportunity to mature and develop without the pressure of an examination, with a focus on personal development and learning through experience.

Tenderfoot at The Civic Theatre

Tenderfoot came into being in 2007, one year before the publication of the *Points of Alignment* document, and five years before the publication of the *Arts in Education Charter* in 2012. In 2007, The Civic Theatre laid the foundations for a county-wide annual youth arts programme through a pilot initiative in collaboration with South Dublin County Council Arts Office.

The pilot joint initiative between the SDCC and The Civic Theatre would be for a part time theatre residency, with the following objectives:

- To provide young adults with the experience of writing for theatre
- To interest young adults in theatre in a hands-on and sustainable way and to establish an ongoing relationship between them and The Civic Theatre.

It was initially envisaged that participants would be drawn from youth theatre groups or youth clubs as well as Transition Year. This initial parameter was redefined, as access and inclusivity became a primary priority during the development of the programme. The decision was made to focus on schools, as schools provide the widest access to the young adult population.

Since Tenderfoot was established in 2007, the landscape connecting education and the arts has changed and developed, as outlined above. The programme continues to be extremely successful, with fifty Transition Year students having the Tenderfoot apprentice theatre experience every year. The programme could successfully and meaningfully continue as it is for many years to come. However, the changing landscape provides fertile ground for positive change; it invites ambitious and visionary thinking. Through IMPACT, in the context of the changed arts and education landscape, Tenderfoot will achieve what would have been impossible to imagine in 2007.

Tenderfoot’s role in the changing landscape of arts and education:

Tenderfoot fits with new priorities in education, as reflected in the new **Junior Cycle**.

Tenderfoot fits with the needs of **Transition Year**, in terms of providing work experience, creative engagement and learning through experience, providing fifty Transition Year students annually with an apprenticeship at The Civic Theatre.

Tenderfoot **connects schools in South Dublin County with local arts institutions**, a need which is emphasized in the *Arts and Education Charter* and by Creative Ireland.

From its foundation, Tenderfoot has had an emphasis on **inclusivity and accessibility**. Through expanding its programme, Tenderfoot will include all schools in South Dublin County, shifting its model from local to regional, and creating a model for a national applicability in theatre as well as other art forms.

Changing priorities in education point towards a shift towards creating a **'culture of creativity'**, both in schools and in society more generally. Through its expansion and development, Tenderfoot is contributing towards this vision, locally, regionally and nationally. The importance of a broad 'culture of creativity' across schools is pointed to, not only by Creative Ireland, but also by other studies. As recently as **2016, an Arts Council/ESRI** study found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage with artistic expression. Thirteen of the thirty-five schools in South Dublin County are designated 'DEIS' schools. The **'Growing Up in Ireland'** study emphasizes the importance of cultural activities in school, pointing out that 'school may be the main point of access to arts and cultural activities for many students':

The study findings show that schools with a strong emphasis on cultural activities appear to promote out-of-school engagement, not just in the kinds of structured activities provided on an extracurricular basis but also in reading for pleasure. This influence can be direct - through the provision of after-school cultural activities in the school itself - and/or indirect - by fostering a love of reading and arts among children and young people.¹⁴

The same study found that:

Young people attending schools providing **drama** are also more likely to read frequently outside school, so school provision appears to play a broader role in fostering interest in cultural activities.¹⁵

In addition, Tenderfoot is operating in the **context of South Dublin County**, a context which is fertile for both development of the arts, and development of the arts with young adults.

South Dublin County is one of the most youthful and culturally diverse regions in Ireland. According to the latest data from the 2016 Census of Population, there were 278,767 people residing in South Dublin County, with over ninety-three nationalities and over 17.5% of the overall population born outside of Ireland. **Over 35% of the population is made up of children and young people, higher than both the state**

¹⁴ Smyth, Emer. 2016. Arts and Cultural Participation Among Children and Young People: Insights from the *Growing Up in Ireland* study (p82)

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 78/79

average and the Dublin average. There are thirty-five secondary schools in the area, catering for young people between the ages of eleven and eighteen.

South Dublin County Council is committed to the development of the arts in the county, in particular the development of an arts service that is ‘inclusive, accessible and sustainable’, as evidenced by their *Arts Development Strategy 2016-2020*. The Council ‘recognises that the arts contribute substantially to a county’s growth and viability and makes an essential contribution to local quality of life’. It also recognises the ‘need to create conditions that sustain a concentration of artists, creative people and arts organisations within its boundaries.’¹⁶ The document outlines four themes in its development strategy. Under the second theme, ‘Engagement, Learning and Participation’, South Dublin County Council aims to ‘provide opportunities for children and young people to explore their creative potential and expand their experience of the arts’¹⁷. Tenderfoot at The Civic Theatre is named here as one of several ‘creative learning initiatives’ which will support the provision of these opportunities.

Acknowledgment of the importance of the overlap between arts, education and young people in Ireland is relatively new, and has led to changes in policy and in curricula in both primary and secondary education, with more changes in the pipeline. There is now an explicit acknowledgement of the importance of and the need for increased ‘culture of creativity’ in schools, with exposure to and participation in the arts recognized as one means of creating this. **While curricula are changing to create a more creative and flexible population, schools need structured guidance and financial support in order to implement required changes.**

Our findings on theatre and drama provision in second level schools in South Dublin County (*see details of these findings [here](#), in the section entitled ‘Research with Schools in South Dublin County’*) point towards a generally narrow and limited engagement with theatre, with a general lack of engagement with theatre, both in school, and outside of school; a lack of engagement with contemporary theatrical work; and a lack of importance placed on the development of writing, and articulation of voice, of young people themselves.

However, from our discussions and the results of our survey, this lack of engagement does not translate into a lack of interest on the part of second level teachers. There is a sense from them that they are limited by pressure and a sense of responsibility to work that is directly related to the curriculum. We have also found a real desire from our liaison teachers to expand theatre-related activities, both within and outside of school, and to engage with Tenderfoot as part of this.

In order to move towards creating a ‘culture of creativity’ in schools, with the ultimate aim of fostering a more creatively engaged population, capable of flexibility and critical thinking, more funding and engagement are needed for schools and for teachers to be able to both engage with contemporary theatre and have a framework of support and training to deal with complex issues which may arise from this.

¹⁶ *South Dublin County Council Arts Development Strategy 2016-2020*: p8

¹⁷ *South Dublin County Council Arts Development Strategy 2016-2020*: p10, paragraph 2.3

Tenderfoot is a prime model to bridge the gap between arts and education by:

- **Working closely with schools** in South Dublin County, connecting them to a local arts organization, in the form of The Civic Theatre, and fulfilling a need expressed both in the *Arts in Education Charter*, and by Creative Ireland. It fulfills Action 8 of Creative Ireland's *Creative Youth* document, connecting schools to theatre/drama initiatives outside school, and also more broadly aligns with the five pillars which form the core of the Creative Ireland programme (*see Appendix*).
- **Working with a changing education system** to help fulfill the needs of new educational agenda, through responding to the needs of the new Junior Cycle curriculum, Transition Year and a changing Senior Cycle through the fostering of creativity, critical thinking, flexibility and well-being, among other skills.
- Fostering a '**culture of creativity**' in schools, through the direct involvement of students in the apprentice theatre programme and through the engagement of their peers and school community in the work as audience members.

APPENDIX:

The development of Tenderfoot at The Civic Theatre aligns with the five pillars which form the core of the Creative Ireland programme.

Pillar 1. Children and Youth/Enabling the creative potential of every child

In providing young people with the opportunity to function as artists and to engage in a creative process, mentored by professional theatre artists who are experts in their field, Tenderfoot provides for the creative potential of young people. Through the expansion of the programme, every school in South Dublin County will have access to this programme.

Pillar 2. Creative Communities

Through its expansion, Tenderfoot is aiming to contribute towards the development of a 'culture of creativity' in every school. In stimulating meaningful conversation through the presentation of young people's creative thought and image, with their peers, their friends and families, and members of the wider population, Tenderfoot enables creativity in the community.

Pillar 3. Cultural Investment

In looking forward and expanding to become a comprehensive programme across the entire region of South Dublin County, and in providing empirical data supporting a replicable model, with applicability for other art forms and in other regions, Tenderfoot is investing in Ireland's creative and cultural infrastructure.

Pillar 4. Creative Industries

In the development of a model of excellence, Tenderfoot adds to Ireland's reputation as a centre of creative excellence, with a global reputation as being a creative and cultural nation.

Pillar 5. Global Reputation

Connecting with international theatre companies and organisations which are creating challenging and boundary-pushing work with young people will enhance both Tenderfoot's reputation as an organization, and Ireland's reputation as a centre for creative excellence.