CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The (educational) market: a longitudinal ethnography. Exploring its impact on creative teaching and learning within the arts, in one Irish urban primary school
Authors	Conran, Eimear
Publication date	2025-07-11
Original Citation	Conran, E. 2025. The (educational) market: a longitudinal ethnography. Exploring its impact on creative teaching and learning within the arts, in one Irish urban primary school. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
Rights	© 2025, Eimear Conran. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Download date	2026-10-26 20:55:15
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/19277


UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

The (Educational) Market: A Longitudinal Ethnography. Exploring its Impact on Creative Teaching and Learning Within the Arts, in One Irish Urban Primary School

Eimear Conran

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Supervised by: Dr. Stephen O'Brien and Dr. Vanessa Rutherford

School of Education,
College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences,
University College Cork,
National University of Ireland.

July 2025

Abstract

This thesis explores the marketisation of education, influenced by neoliberalism, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement or GERM (Sahlberg, 2011, 2020), and its impact on creative teaching and learning within the arts, in one Irish urban primary school. It engages in a longitudinal, critical ethnography, aiming to capture the 'lived experiences' of educators and students within their field of practice (Bourdieu, 2023), as they engage in a form of cultural re-production, framed by broader marketised shifts.

The influences of the educational market are examined within the global (macro-level), national (meso-level) and cultural (micro-level) contexts, considering not only its effects on cultures of practice, but *affects* upon individuals (Ahmed, 2004). Central to this thesis is the exploration of a culture of 'performativity' that ensues within the educational market, as schools adapt to meet the needs of 'consumers' of education. Key trends associated with GERM (Sahlberg, 2011, 2020) are examined, including: competition and choice among schools within the marketplace, standardisation, emphases on 'core' subjects such as literacy, numeracy and STEM, and the dominance of outcomes-driven models of education and their perceived 'sign value' (Baudrillard,1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020) as products of education. These dynamics can, in turn, generate a sense of 'unreality' and 'intensification' (O'Brien and Rudd, 2020, p.158) of educators' roles, amidst the 'performativity pressures' to engage in 'image management' and 'fabrications' or 'simulacra' of 'reality' (Baudrillard, 2023), in effort to boost the ascribed 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2020) of these institutions within the marketplace. Consequently, the creative arts may also face marginalisation, with subsequent reconceptualisation and 'use' of the performing arts as an act of (marketised) 'production'.

Foucault's (1991) notion of 'governmentality' is examined, considering the bidirectional power relations between 'governance' and 'self-governance' as an exploration of how social

actors navigate these marketised changes within their fields of practice. Additionally, the concept of 'refraction' (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, 2016) provides a lens for understanding how educators mediate dominant waves of reform within their professional narratives; either by reproducing, re-contextualising or de-contextualising existing policies, thereby offering alternative visions for navigating marketisation.

This thesis contributes to knowledge by providing a critical ethnographic account of educators' 'lived experiences' and professional narratives as they navigate marketised educational reform, offering socio-historical insights into how educators interpret, respond to and mediate systemic change in their professional lives. This study captures the complexity of professional narratives and identities over time, offering a rich and detailed analysis of situated practice in one Irish primary school, and provides insight into how such reforms are negotiated.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a result of my own original research and has not been submitted, whether in whole or in part, for any other degree or qualification at University College Cork, or any other institution.

I further affirm that all sources of information, scholarly work and ideas drawn from the work of others have been appropriately and comprehensively acknowledged. I am the author of this thesis, which was supervised by Dr. Stephen O'Brien and Dr. Vanessa Rutherford.

This thesis fully complies with the academic regulations and ethical standards of University College Cork.

Signed: 

Date: 1st July 2025

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to the educators, students, and the leadership team of the school at the heart of this research. I am deeply grateful for your willingness to participate in this study with honesty and openness, offering valuable insights into the lived experiences of those navigating the complex dynamics of education shaped by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) and its market-driven shifts.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my esteemed primary academic supervisor Dr. Stephen O'Brien for his invaluable expertise, unwavering support, guidance and thoughtful critical reflections. I would also like to thank my second supervisor Dr. Vanessa Rutherford for her dedication, constructive input and insightful advice. Their encouragement and mentorship have been fundamental to the completion of this work.

Sincere thanks are also offered to the academic staff at The School of Education, University College Cork. The university's culture of inquiry and academic excellence have greatly shaped and enriched this research.

I am especially thankful to my family and those close to me, for their support, which has enriched me throughout this journey. Appreciation is also extended to Dr. Tim Rudd and Dr. Siobhán Dowling Long for their valuable expertise and close review of this thesis.

Table of Contents

Abstract……p.ii

Declaration……p.iv

Acknowledgements……p.v

Chapter 1……p.1

Introduction……..….p.1

Illuminating Creativity – A Snapshot in Time……...……p.1

Positioning the Research: Aims and Questions……p.2

Marketisation in Global Education Reform……..….p.5

Creativity Through the Arts Amid Market-Driven Pressures……..…p.11

Framing the Inquiry: Methodological Considerations……..……p.13

Roadmap of the Thesis……...……p.17

Significance of this Research……p.18

Chapter 2……..…p.20

The Marketisation of Education…….……p.20

Historical Impetus for Marketised Forms of Education…….……p.20

The Global Education Reform Movement…….....p.23

The Educational Market: A Brief Recent History in Ireland …… p.30

The Mercantile Paradigm……..…...…… p.30

Policy Making in Ireland……...…… …… p.32

The Educational Market: A force for Improvement or Performance? ……... p.36

Performativity, Standards-Driven 'Improvement' and Image-Management……..p.36

Conclusion…… p.52

Chapter 3…… p.54

The Creative Arts in a Marketised Education System…….. p.54

Implications of GERM on the Creative Arts……...……...… p.54

Exploring the Conception of 'Creativity'…….…….… p.64

Recent Policy Developments in Ireland……...…… p.71

New Primary School Curricula and Frameworks…….....p.71

Arguments for Creativity Through Provision of The Arts……. p.76

The Role of Arts Education in Building Creative Minds……p.76

Research-Informed Insights: How Arts Education Fuels Creativity ……...……..p.85

Conclusion……...…. p.91

Chapter 4……. p.95

Research Methodology……...…….……...…… p.95

Introduction……..… p.95

Theoretical Framework and Research Approach……... p.98

Constructivist Paradigm…….……..…… p.98

Critical Ethnography……...……..…….…… p.104

Research Design ……..... p.114

Rationale and Context of the Research…….…….. p.114

Sample…….…… p.118

Pilot Testing…… p.120

Research Methods and Data Analysis Procedures……...…..... p.121

Qualitative Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Group Interviews…….…… p.121

Critical Discourse Analysis…… p.127

Ethnographic Analysis using Grounded Theory……..…. p.131

Divergences within Grounded Theory Approach…….p.134

Grounded Theory Through a Constructivist Lens…….p.135

Ethical Considerations…….…….... p.138

The Research Process and Informed Consent…… p.140

Privacy and Confidentiality/Anonymity…… p.144

Respect for the Rights and Dignity of Research Participants……... p.147

Avoidance of Harm…….. p.148

Validity of the Study……p.150

Crystallisation…… p.150

Limitations of the Study…… p.152

Conclusion……...……p.156

Chapter 5……p.160

Contextual Framework……p.160

Navigating The Educational Market……..p.160

The Rise of Performativity, Standards-Driven 'Improvement' and Image-Management ….p.160

Influences of the Marketisation of Education on Creativity…….p.175

Performativity Pressures: Implications for Creative Practice……p.175

Conclusion……...…p.200

Chapter 6……p.202

Creative Expression within the Arts: Navigating Marketisation……...…p.202

Understanding Creativity: Perspectives from Teachers and Students…….….p.202

Creativity as an Individual, Expressive and Imaginative Process……p.202

Unlocking Creative Potential…….....p.211

Ethnographic Insights: Observing Creativity in the Arts Education…….....p.211

Playdough Creations: Metamorphosis in Motion……p.212

The Butterfly Lion: A Journey Through Drama and Music……...…p.214

Where Music Meets Imagination: Exploring Creative Compositions……..p.218

Celebrations at the Castle: A Dramatic Tale of the King's Birthday Banquet……...…p.222

Perspectives on Creative Opportunities: Educators' and Pupils' Reflections…….…….p.225

Extending Opportunities for Creativity in the Face of Marketisation……..……p.235

Policy Connections – Situating Creative Arts Practices……..……p.243

Fostering Creative Arts Partnerships……..……p.245

Conclusion…….……..p.249

Chapter 7……p.251

Revisiting the Research: A Critical Ethnography……...…… p.251

Introduction…….……p.251

Summary of Key Findings……..…p.253

Performativity and Pedagogical Shifts: School Culture in a Marketised System…….p.253

Creativity Under Constraint: Marketisation and The Arts in Education……..p.255

Cultivating Creativity Amid Neoliberal Educational Reforms…….....p.257

Critical Reflections of the Research: Strengths and Limitations……..p.262

Final Thoughts and Implications for Future Research……...…..p.264

References…….…….p.269

Appendices……p.284

Figure 1: Participant details and demographics……pp.4, 119

Figure 2: Methodological overview of the study……pp.13, 118

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms……p.x

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DES	Department of Education
EU	European Union
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
GOI	Government of Ireland
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SESE	Social Environmental and Scientific Education
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STEN	Standard Ten: a standard score from 1-10 on standardised tests, indicating student performance compared to the national norm.
SREC	Social Research Ethics Committee
TSR	The Song Room: an Australian non-profit organisation, advocating for the creative arts
UCC	University College Cork
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US	United States
USA	United States of America

Chapter 1

Introduction

Illuminating Creativity – A Snapshot in Time

It was a bright summer's day in June 2014, approaching the end of the school year. The sun shone through the window of the school's library, illuminating the flurry of excitement as children collaborated in their groups, creating imaginative drama compositions, based on their class novel, *The Butterfly Lion.* A creative space unfolded as furniture was moved, and children delighted in exploring the imaginative potential of props such as hats, scarves and classroom items. The lesson later evolved into creative musical compositions whereby children experimented with musical percussion instruments, inspired by the themes explored in their drama improvisations. I was truly grateful to the class teacher and pupils for affording me the opportunity to observe their imaginative lesson. A true privilege of undertaking an ethnographic approach to research is the opportunity to immerse oneself (as far as possible) in the 'lived experiences' of participants and witness these moments up close and personal. The creative energy in the room was electric. One child pondered that "creativity is when you see things through your own mind and let your imagination drift away", while another considered that "creativity is imaginative. You are creative when you create things by yourself and use your own thoughts". Children shared their positive experiences with one reflecting, "I like being creative as you can express your own individuality and your imagination", while another child observed that "you can be yourself when you are being creative". I wondered whether children engaged in exploratory and creative drama regularly, however their teacher explained that she did not undertake drama as often as she would like to or should:

> I don't do a lot of stand-alone drama, when I do drama, I integrate it with other subjects. I just don't have the time, especially with such focus on literacy and numeracy; you're

> just trying to get through the material and finish the topics and books for the monthly report and tick the boxes. I probably don't do as much creative stuff like that as I should, but you just don't have time. In the month of May I did no drama and didn't even get to do art because of the standardised testing. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, classroom observation, June 2014)

The burden that this teacher faced regarding performativity, attainment in literacy, numeracy and standardised testing, resulting in the marginalisation of the creative arts, was palpable. This is merely one example outlining the intensification of education and the shift towards how outcomes-based performance measures, related (but not limited to) literacy and numeracy have impacted the provision for the creative arts in this primary school context. These changes may be seen as driven by a broader force, namely the mercantile paradigm (or the marketisation of education) in the context of, what has become known as, the 'Global Education Reform Movement' or GERM (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021).

Positioning the Research: Aims and Questions

The title of this thesis is '*The (Educational) Market: A Longitudinal Ethnography. Exploring its Impact on Creative Teaching and Learning Within the Arts, in One Irish Urban Primary School'*. The principal aim of this study seeks to critically analyse and explore the impact of the marketisation of education, influenced by neoliberal forces within the context of the Global Education Reform Movement and its impact on creative teaching and learning within arts education. This longitudinal research presents a contextual framework exploring the macro-level impacts of the global educational market, alongside the meso-level effects nationally and the micro-level influences observed within this Irish ethnographic empirical study.

This critical ethnographic study aims to capture the 'lived experiences' of the participants within their field of practice (Bourdieu, 2023) as they engage in a form of cultural production, shaped by broader market influences. Research consisted of journalling and keeping detailed field notes regarding ethnographic observations, alongside analysis of policy documents,

artefacts and the visual environment, through the use of visual ethnography (Pink, 2021). Initial research conducted from 2013 to 2016, consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups with nine mainstream and one special education *teachers,* eighteen *students* and the *principal*. Further, the research consisted of ten individual interviews with teachers and four focus groups, one with teachers and three with students from middle and senior primary classes. In addition, four ethnographic observations were undertaken within classrooms, from lower, middle and senior primary, to ensure a varied and representative sample. In-class critical ethnographic observations explored creative teaching and learning within the arts, focusing on visual arts, drama and music. In an effort to further protect anonymity, lower primary refers to 1st and 2nd classes, middle primary to 3rd and 4th classes and upper primary to 5th and 6th classes.

A longitudinal critical ethnographic approach was undertaken, whereby I remained engaged in the field, up until 2025. This facilitated an exploration of participants' 'lived experiences' whilst capturing nuances and developments within the school culture, over time. Considering the extended duration of this study, some literature included in this thesis was published after the earlier phases of data collection. Accordingly, analysis and interpretation of the findings have been undertaken with careful consideration of the timing and context of data collection, while also engaging with relevant literature across the duration of the study. This research is situated within the context of the 1999-2025 Primary School Curriculum (DES, *Primary School Curriculum,* 1999), which framed primary education in Ireland during the period of data collection and analysis. The revised Primary Curriculum Framework (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023), introduced in 2023, with phased implementation from 2025, is also engaged with in later chapters, to contextualise and interpret research findings over time. The launch of the new *Primary Curriculum Framework For Primary and Special Schools*, developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), retains the

holistic and child-centred principles of the 1999 curriculum, while placing a renewed emphasis on these values. The revised framework also places an increased awareness of the interconnectedness and fluidity of curricular areas (DES, 2023), marking a departure from the more defined subject boundaries of the 1999 primary curriculum. The 2023 primary curriculum also emphasises "a broad experience in the arts", imagination and creative expression; advocating that children would be enabled to "reach their creative and expressive potential" (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.12). While the 1999 curriculum also recognised the significance of creativity and the arts, these were often situated within more defined subject boundaries. The newer framework, however, places a stronger and more explicit emphasis on integration, flexibility and the centrality of creativity across learning.

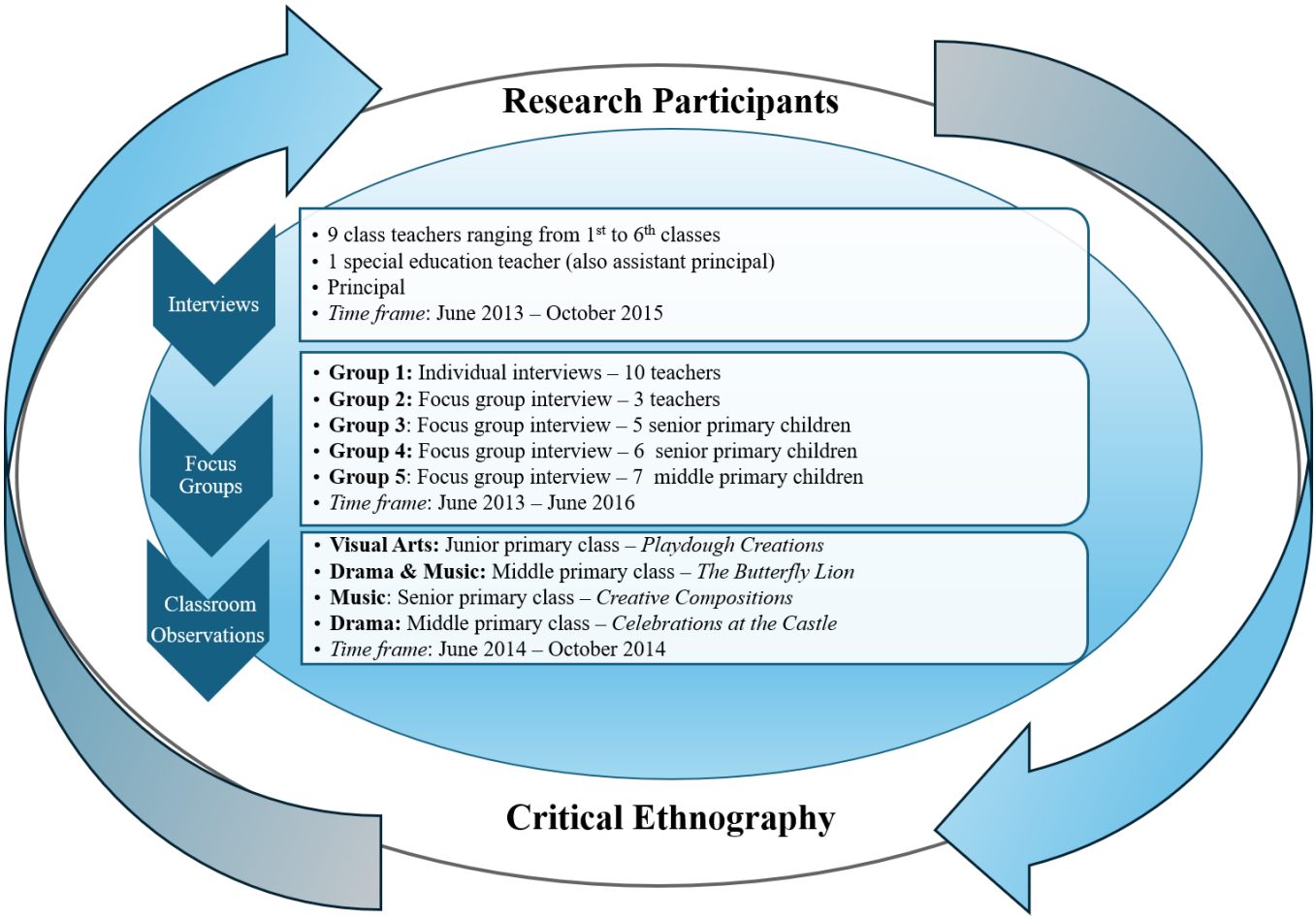


Figure 1: Participant details and demographics

This research is framed by these guiding research questions:

- What are educators' perceptions and experiences of change within an education system that is being increasingly shaped by market forces?
- How do children perceive and explore creativity within their learning experiences?
- What are the effects and 'affects' (which concern the emotive domain), including consequences of increased market forces on creative teaching and learning, within one urban primary school?
- How does the increased emphasis on learning outcomes and performativity (exemplified by literacy and numeracy attainment) impact on creative teaching and learning?
- What barriers are there for creative teaching and learning in the case study research context?
- What opportunities remain for creative teaching and learning in the case study research context?

This research is contextualised within mercantile paradigm (or the marketisation of education), shaped by the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021), which will now be explored.

Marketisation in Global Education Reform

Education is widely considered to be vital to society, not only as a means of developing society, but as a key vehicle to individual and deep personal growth. Learning is often understood as being an inherent part of human nature, whereby education serves to shape and guide us in our quest for lifelong learning. This thesis investigates the impact of the educational market, through a longitudinal ethnographic study, exploring its impact on creative teaching and learning in the arts, within one urban Irish primary school context. To begin, let us examine

the educational research milieu which frames this study. The landscape of education has undergone significant transformation over the last number of decades, as it has been increasingly shaped by the mercantile paradigm (or the marketisation of education) in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2021). What influenced these changes? The pursuit of educational 'freedom' and 'improvement' can be seen to lie at the core of marketised education systems, which in turn are often described as being influenced by a paradigm of 'marketisation' deeply rooted in capitalism and free-enterprise ideals (Friedman, 1955). A significant influence behind the rise of neoliberalism and the marketisation of education was the work of Milton Friedman (1912-2006), a prominent economist of the post-war era. He espoused notions of 'freedom' and 'liberation' aligned with capitalist ideals such as the free-market economy, competition and choice. Friedman (1955) advocated that parents become critical 'consumers' of education, ultimately denationalising or privatising education, bolstering competition and delivering greater investment in 'choice'. Milton Friedman advocated a type of economic freedom known as "monetarism", whereby "as early as 1955, his ideas reflected and later shaped a powerful *neoliberal agenda*" (O'Brien, 2016, p.73). These principles may be interpreted to have influenced the marketised shifts that impacted the global educational landscape over the subsequent decades that followed (Friedman, 1955; Sahlberg, 2021).

Education systems, now influenced by marketisation and the ideology of neoliberalism, can be seen to present education as a product of investment, with strong prominence being placed on outcomes-based models that carry a market (sign) value (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020), although such marketised principles are often associated with efforts to enhance standards, accountability and quality in education. According to Baudrillard (1981), 'sign value' refers to how objects signify social status and convey symbolic meaning within a deeper sociocultural context. The marketisation of education can be

understood as conceiving education as a commodified product within a consumer-driven value system.

Pasi Sahlberg (2021), a Finish renowned educator, identifies at least five "globally common features of education policies and reform principles [that] have been employed in attempts to improve the quality of education, especially in terms of raising student achievement" (Sahlberg, 2021, p.178). These are core principles of what he calls, the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM):

- Increasing '*competition'* among schools.
- *'Standardisation*' in education with emphasis on an outcomes-based model of educational reform.
- *'Focus on core subjects'* in the curriculum, such as literacy and numeracy.
- *'Test-based accountability*', emphasis on students' achievement and performativity.
- *'School choice'* whereby parents are consumers within the educational marketplace. (Sahlberg, 2021, pp.179-181)

In recent decades there too has been a shift in Irish education policy, impacted by global capitalism and marketised education principles (Lynch, 2012). Educational policy in the Irish landscape has transitioned from what was a 'theocentric paradigm' (traditionally governed by a doxa Catholic-centred state) to a 'mercantile paradigm' (O'Sullivan, 2005), influenced by the Global Education Reform Movement. While the role of the church lessened, the dominance of the neoliberal state has increased and became more prominent. The 'improvement' of the quality of education in endeavour to meet the needs of the 'consumers' of the education system can be seen as a broad aim of marketised education systems. Schneider (2001, p.72) states that educational reform seeks to "create market-like forces to which schools must respond - by becoming more flexible, more responsive to the needs of their students and parents, by improving the quality of education".

The establishment of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1961, espoused the view that education should be regarded as a key factor in economic development, and this view is sedimented by human capital theory (Walsh, 2009):

"The OECD officials were greatly influenced by human capital theory, which held that investment in people produced a greater return of investment than investment in physical capital" (Walsh, 2009, p.64). Additionally, the *Investment in Education Report* (1965) "strongly endorsed human capital theory as a guiding principle in education policy" (Lynch, 2012, p.93). Clancey (1998) and Lynch (2012, p.93) observe how discourses from the 1960s onward placed "emphasis on shaping educational system to meet the demands in the labour market". The establishment of The Education White Paper in 1995, placed a renewed focus on measuring educational outcomes and specified 'performance indicators' as a means of quantifiable measurement (Lynch, 2012). The Department of Education (DES) shifted to using market-oriented language in key policy documents "beginning with *Implementing the Agenda for Change* in 1996. Strategy statements from the DES retained this orientation into the new millennium where the market language of 'customers and clients' replaced that of students and learners" (Lynch, 2012, p.94). Lynch (2012) notes that shifts towards marketised education systems in Ireland greatly accelerated from 1997, when Ireland was governed by a strong neo-liberal coalition government. Furthermore, the establishment of the Education Bill (1997) promoted increased ownership and control of education by the people, within the context of the growing establishment of non-denominational schools and the positioning of individuals as 'consumers of education', as influenced by the marketised framing of education.

One of the significant developments to arise from the establishment of the OECD was the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2003. Ball (2013) contends that "perhaps one of the simplest and yet most effective of the OECD's policy instruments has been the three-yearly PISA study results (first published in 2003), carried out in 41 countries" (www.pisa.oec.org/, cited in Ball, 2013, p.39). The PISA league tables measure "student performance in standardised tests in mathematics, reading, and science, which are administered by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)"

(Robinson and Aronica, 2015, p.7). Since 2022, PISA has also endeavoured to measure creativity in its standardised assessments, measuring "students' capacity to engage productively in the generation, evaluation and improvement of ideas that can result in original and effective solutions, advances in knowledge" (OECD, 2023, Creative Thinking - PISA (oecd.org)). While the inclusion of 'creativity' may be regarded as a progressive addition by PISA regarding their international assessments, upon examination of their 'PISA 2022 Creative Thinking Framework' it seems apparent that the OECD have wider economic gains in mind regarding the 'knowledge economy'. The OECD (2023, p.140) argues that "organisations and societies around the world increasingly depend on innovation and knowledge creation to address emerging challenges, giving urgency to innovation and creative thinking as collective enterprises".

The publication of the 2009 reading literacy results prompted significant concern, at the perceived decline regarding educational standards in Ireland, signalling a sense of crisis within the education system (Conway, 2013). The Department of Education (2011) responded to the marked decline in student results from the PISA 2009 assessments, compared to previous years, by publishing the *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*, first launched in 2011, and updated in 2020 (DES, 2011, 2020). It has since been succeeded by *Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood* (DES, 2024).

The *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*, outlines the directive for increased provision and priority of literacy and numeracy education in schools. It emphasises school improvement, benchmarks of attainment, standardised testing and learning outcomes, the 'safeguarding' of 'core' literacy and numeracy skills, over *all* other curricular

areas. The Department of Education contends that "including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in the curriculum runs the risk that the time available in school for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills may be eroded" (DES, 2020, p.44). Additionally, they argue that "we have to acknowledge that understanding and using literacy and numeracy are such core skills that time for their development must be safeguarded, sometimes by delaying the introduction of some curriculum areas" (DES, 2020, p.44). While the *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy 2024-2033* (DES, 2024) adopts a more holistic discourse than its predecessor, promoting the development digital literacy and "positive learning dispositions such as independence, creativity [and] imagination" (DES, 2024), it still upholds a strong focus on skills-based learning and literacy and numeracy standards, as well as an emphasis on maintaining 'investment' in these areas:

> Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy are fundamental skills. We are fortunate in Ireland to have remarkably high levels of numeracy and literacy, but it is vital to maintain investment and ambition in this area and to further digital literacy skills. (Minister for Education, cited in DES, 2024, p.3)

Dowling Long (2015, p.275) warns of the possible reduction in time provision for the creative arts within primary schools and considers it "worrying then that more attention is not given to the value of arts education in the *National Strategy*". She further cautions that:

> In Ireland, at present, there is a danger that teachers will take time away from the teaching and learning of compulsory core areas, such as music, the visual arts and drama, to focus solely on the task of children's attainment of literacy and numeracy skills. (Dowling Long, 2015, p.275)

Fiona Patrick (2013) outlines her concerns that "there is a risk that neoliberal ideologies will remain entrenched while the aims of education are eroded to a set of functionalist outcomes" (Patrick, 2013, p.1). Ball (2003) too warns of threats to a holistic education in what he coins "the terrors of performativity". Sahlberg (2011) maintains that standardising teaching and learning through the lens of the Global Education Reform Movement and an outcomes-based model of education, is the worst enemy of creativity, arguing that "a good education system

and high educational performance is much more than measured academic scores" (Sahlberg, 2011, p.56). Alternatively, Sahlberg advocates for the development of broad holistic education, self-directed learning, collaborative processes, innovation and creativity (Sahlberg, 2009, 2010, 2011). When we envisage 'creativity', how would one define creativity? Why is creative teaching and learning significant and what impact has creativity upon individuals and society?

Creativity Through the Arts Amid Market-Driven Pressures

To begin, several theoretical perspectives on the essence of creativity will be explored. What does it truly mean to be creative? Is creativity universally innate to mankind? Is creativity a quality that we can define, observe and measure? Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982, p.76) attest that "every child is born creative. The urge to explore, to investigate, to discover, is not limited to human behaviour, but it is experienced by the whole animal kingdom". The late Ken Robinson (2022) disputed the belief that creativity is limited to a select few, arguing that "everyone has huge creative capacities as a natural result of being a human being. The challenge is to develop them" (Robinson, 2011, p.4). Craft (2008, p.114) views creativity as a universal human trait, arguing that "the ordinary person can be creative" (Craft, 2008, p.114). Lancaster (1990) argues that the creative spark lies within all of mankind and that opportunities can be provided to unlock children's creative potential:

> There is a creative urge in every human being – young and old alike – for we all have a natural desire to use our hands and materials for artistic expression. If given the right opportunities even pre-school children (some may be only a few months old) will take delight in expressing themselves with art materials. (Lancaster, 1990, p.6)

Eisner (1972) too believes that the fostering of creativity should be a central goal within any high-quality education system. He further attests that that "the freedom to enquire and create should be available to all free men" (Eisner, 1972, p.237).

As mentioned, the marketised shifts including (but not limited to) the establishment of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1961, the Programme

for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2003 and the *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020) have been significant in shaping the educational landscape. Educators face increased performativity pressures, including demands pertaining to standardised testing and learning-outcomes, as well as the intensification and simultaneous de-professionalisation of their roles. One may wonder what possible threats these changes may have regarding the provision of creativity within arts education. Robinson and Aronica (2015) maintain that "standards culture is harming students and schools" (Robinson and Aronica, 2015, p.x):

> One of my deepest concerns is that while education systems around the world are being reformed, many of these reforms are being driven by political and commercial interests that misunderstand how real people learn and how great schools actually work. As a result, they are damaging the prospects of countless young people. (Robinson and Aronica, 2015, p.x)

Sahlberg and Doyle (2019) further attest that standardised testing is a substantial threat to creative thinking, individual expression and imagination:

> Standardized testing is a huge time-waster and energy diverter. And standardization, by definition, also works against risk-taking, creativity, imagination and innovation in schools, the very traits that education should be promoting… It gives priority to teaching in the same way, to all students, while crushing creativity, personal expression, diverse talents, and imagination. (Sahlberg and Doyle, 2019, p.121)

Diane Ravitch, former assistant secretary for education at the Clinton administration warns that market-driven education systems built upon a standards-based model "stifle the very creativity and ingenuity that our society needs most" (Ravitch, 2013, p.241). Nevertheless, Ravitch (2013, p.241) contends that "creativity and ingenuity stubbornly resist standardisation", suggesting that the passion and spark to be creative withstand limitations imposed on it.

Framing the Inquiry: Methodological Considerations

This research is framed within the constructivist paradigm. As Mertens (2010, p.7) outlines, "a *paradigm* is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action". A fundamental assumption of the constructivist paradigm within research, is the notion that knowledge is socially constructed by people, in endeavour to capture the 'lived experiences' and viewpoints of research participants, offering a window into their world as they experience it (Schwandt, 2000; Mertens, 2010). Rejecting the notion of what Schutz (1972, p.74) would refer to as a 'taken for granted' reality, researchers using the constructivist paradigm call for a comprehensive analysis and (re)construction of 'reality'. A central and defining principle of the constructivist paradigm is its multifaceted complexity and qualitative and interpretative nature, whereby understanding is constructed authentically within the naturalistic setting of the research field (Coe et al., 2021).

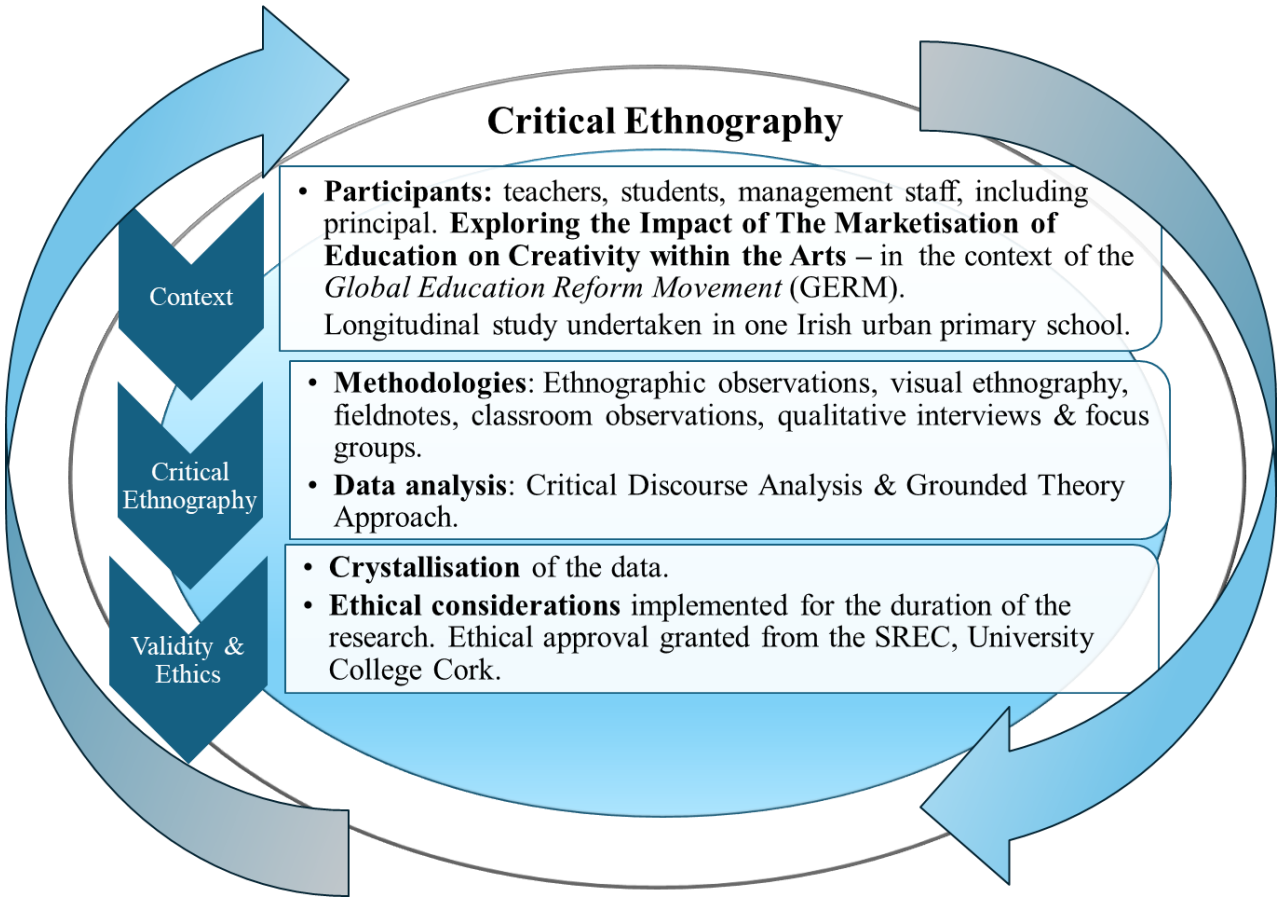


Figure 2: Methodological overview of the study

The guiding research approach framing this research is critical ethnography. Ethnographic research is a form of naturalistic inquiry within social research, developing a critical understanding of the complexities of cultural norms and the 'lived experiences' of people, challenging our perceptions of reality that we have previously know or accepted. How does critical ethnography differ from conventional ethnography? Traditional notions of ethnography explore 'being there' among participants 'in the field' "with the ambition of understanding and theorizing the meaning of lived experience" (Trondman et al., 2018, p.31). In contrast, critical ethnography delves further to consider wider political and cultural power relations and influences. Thomas (1993) conceives critical ethnography as a critical investigation and analysis of culture, knowledge and practice, questioning existing socially constructed norms and assumptions. In essence, "critical ethnographers describe, analyse, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centres, and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain" (Thomas, 1993, pp.2-3).

Research from this longitudinal study began in 2013, set within one Irish urban primary school, where I have worked for over sixteen years. Being a longstanding staff member of the school provided me with extensive access to the research field, enabled me to construct a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences, and allowed me to reflect on my own positionality within this study. The complexities of engaging in 'back yard research' (Malone, 2003), although hugely enriching regarding data collection and analysis, too comes with ethical considerations such as power dynamics, researcher subjectivity, and issues of confidentiality and anonymity. However, the in-depth nature of this ethnographic research and the richness of the data collected and analysed over a sustained period, I believe adds significant value to this study. Prior to the undertaking of this study, I ensured that all research conducted met the highest ethical standards in accordance with University College Cork's *Code of Research Conduct* (2010, 2021). I sought ethical approval from the Social

Research Ethics Committee at The School of Education (SREC) at University College Cork (see appendix 12). Informed consent and voluntary involvement of participants of this study was paramount regarding ethical considerations pertaining to this research. I further attained verbal and written permission from the study school's Board of Management and participants, including parental assent on behalf of child participants of this study (see appendices 1-6) (Vargas and Montoya, 2009; Mertens, 2010).

The study sample of this research included the *teachers*, both mainstream and learning support teachers, as well as *management staff* including the *assistant principal*, and *principal*. I was also interested in eliciting the *student voice*; hence I sought children's perspectives through focus group interviews as well as analysis of conversations within ethnographic observations. The mixed demographic and array of participants allowed for an inclusive representation of participants' lived experiences within the field.

The research was undertaken through the lens of critical ethnography, aiming to capture and understand the lived experiences of participants within this study. In alignment with the constructivist paradigm framing this study, qualitative focus groups and semi-structured interviews enabled me to gain insights into people's opinions, feelings and experiences (Coe et al., 2021). Interviews and focus groups allowed for flexible and in-depth interactions among the participants and myself as the researcher, enabling rich and multifaceted data collection, as well as a comprehensive construction of insights. Ethnographic observation, supported by the use of my researcher diary (for fieldnotes), was a fundamental approach used in this research. I observed day-to-day practices within the school, documented formal and informal conversations, examined policy documents guiding teaching and learning, explored the school culture, and observed lessons across various class levels, with a focus on the exploration of creativity within the arts. Visual ethnography (Pink, 2021) was also utilised in this research, offering rich data collection and deeper insights. It enabled me as researcher to look beyond

the obvious and assimilate and construct meanings through a multi-faceted approach (Pink, 2021).

Critical discourse analysis was used as an analytical approach throughout my research to assist in constructing meaning from discourses gathered from literature and through ethnographic observations, including visual ethnography, fieldnotes, interviews and focus groups. Critical discourse analysis differs from conventional discourse analysis as it too examines how power structures and political forces influence and shape social practices in nuanced and complex ways. Gee, (2011, p.68) argues that:

> Critical discourse analysis argues that language-in-use is always part and parcel of, and partially constitutive of, specific social practices and that social practices always have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power.

Grounded theory was also a fundamental tool used alongside critical ethnography, through which theory is generated and grounded in data which is systematically gathered and analysed (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Mertens, 2010). The use of grounded theory alongside ethnography focuses primarily on the phenomenon or process being studied, rather than a mere description of the research field (Charmaz, 2012). "Thus, from the beginnings of their fieldwork, grounded theory ethnographers study what is happening in the setting and make a *conceptual* rendering of these actions" (Charmaz, 2012, p.22).

Crystallisation or assimilation of the data, emerged through a multifaceted approach that embraced the complexity, multiple perspectives and nuances within the research findings. In postmodern research, the concept of validity moves beyond more rigid traditional models of validity, such as triangulation, towards a more flexible and multidimensional understanding, as in 'crystallisation':

> Crystallisation, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of "validity"; we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves. Crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know.

> Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p.963)

The scope of methodologies (further explored in Chapter 4), approaches and tools used in undertaking this research offered rigor and increased the validity of this study and crystallisation of the data. The use of critical and visual ethnography, which included ongoing fieldnotes and classroom observations, as well as interviews and focus groups with a representative population offered a multi-layered, nuanced and in-depth exploration within the field. The use of critical discourse analysis and grounded theory framed by an ethnographic approach ensured intimate and comprehensive analysis of the data within this longitudinal study.

Roadmap of the Thesis

A brief outline of the chapters that follow will now be provided. Chapters 2 and 3 engage a critical review of the literature. Chapter 2 focuses on the marketisation of education in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement and how this has manifested in the Irish context, while Chapter 3 examines the influences of the marketisation of education on creativity, especially within the arts. Chapter 4, then explores the research methodology undertaken, offering a comprehensive analysis of the paradigm, ethical considerations, research and analysis approaches and methods that underpin this study. Chapters 5 and 6 delve into the research findings of this study. Chapter 5 examines how marketised forces manifest within the context of this study, considering both its effects and affects upon educators and students, and its impact on pedagogical practice and the broader school culture. Chapter 6 reflects on the impact of the marketisation of education on creativity within the arts and explores the transformation of this shift over the last decade. To conclude, Chapter 7 reflects on the significance of this research as whole, exploring key findings, problematisations (Foucault, 1991), and implications for future research.

Significance of this Research

This study explores the impact of the marketisation of education on creative teaching and learning within the arts, influenced by the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021). The research, framed by critical ethnography, investigated how global policy trends shape educational practices and impact school cultures at macro (global), meso (national) and micro (cultural) levels. This thesis focuses specifically on one urban Irish primary school, highlighting the marketised pressures that impact provision for creativity within the arts, whilst too acknowledging that despite these challenges, creativity is an innate component of being human and has the potential to be developed universally (Craft, 2008).

While this research is context specific and not generalisable, it may nevertheless reflect broader trends both globally and nationally. It may also resonate on a personal and professional level, as educators navigate a changing educational landscape, shaped by marketisation. Considering my dual role as both researcher and educator within the field, navigating this research has prompted me to consider my own role in the cultural (re)production of established social norms within this field of practice (Ball 2020; Bourdieu 2023). I also feel compelled to consider Foucault's philosophy of governmentality, demonstrating the bi-directional power relations between governance by the state upon the subjects (educators) and the self-governance by the subjects as they conform to, perpetuate and embody the demands that are placed upon them (Foucault, 1980, 1983, 1991). A significant finding of this research for me, was the simultaneous desire of social actors within the field, to challenge established cultural practices, and find avenues of resistance or 'refractions' (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, 2016), to meaningfully explore the creative potential of the arts in imaginative and inspiring ways. For we all have an innate urge to be creative (Lancaster 1990). Robinson (2011, p.17) speaks of the sparks of imagination that we all have as individuals and argues that "we all have unlimited powers of creativity… because creativity is what it is to be human". He cautions us that, "now

more than ever, we need to exercise the unique creative powers that make us human in the first place" (Robinson, 2011, p.17).

Chapter 2

The Marketisation of Education

Historical Impetus for Marketised Forms of Education

Education is integral to us as a society and more importantly as *individuals.* Learning is an inherent component of the human condition. There is undoubtedly a fundamental drive within us all, as we enquire and investigate the world around us, constructing meaning and making personal connections. The pursuit of educational *'freedom'* and 'improvement' is conceived within a marketised context, through which the evolution of education has been profoundly shaped by the paradigm of 'marketisation', rooted in capitalism and free-enterprise agendas. However, when considering the notions of 'freedom' and 'improvement' in this marketised context, the evolution of education has been vastly influenced by a paradigm of 'marketisation' deeply rooted in capitalism and free-enterprise agendas. A dominant impetus and driving force for the evolution of marketised education systems and neoliberalism was Milton Friedman (1912-2006), a renowned post-war era economist who espoused notions of 'freedom' and 'liberation' with capitalist ideals such as the free-market economy, competition, and choice, whose impacts infiltrated into the educational field (Milton Friedman, 1955). Friedman (1962, p.23), argued that the "role of the market, is that it permits unanimity without conformity; that it is a system of effectively proportional representation". Freedom here is seen as a core value for Friedman. O'Brien (2016, p.73) too notes that Milton Friedman advocated a type of economic freedom known as 'monetarism', whereby "as early as 1955, his ideas reflected and later shaped a powerful *neoliberal agenda*". For Friedman, "freedom" was a definitive value in his advocacy of a free educational marketplace that uses "effective competition" as an incentive for improvement:

> I shall assume a society that takes freedom of the individual, or more realistically the family, as its ultimate objective, and seeks to further this objective by relying primarily on voluntary exchange among individuals for the organisation of economic activity. In such free private enterprise exchange economy, government's primary role is to preserve the rules of the game by enforcing contracts, preventing coercion, and keeping markets free. (Friedman, 1955, p.123).

Friedman had made direct connections between 'free market' principles and the values of 'democratic freedom'. Accordingly, "to argue against the 'market' was to argue against human freedom itself" (O'Brien, 2017, p.150). Friedman (1955) envisages freedom as the *ultimate* objective of mankind but notably links this objective primarily to market values and activities. Friedman (1955) advocates that parents become critical 'consumers' of education, in alignment to meeting the needs of their children. O'Brien (2016, p.74) observes how in Friedman's view, "a system that 'denationalises' or 'privatises' education is favoured and is assumed to 'free' up competition and deliver greater investment 'choice'". For Friedman, the denationalisation and privatisation of education would bring a healthy "variety of educational institutions available and in [private] competition among them. Private initiative and enterprise would quicken the pace of progress in this area [education] as it has in so many others" (Friedman, 1955, p.136). Notions of educational 'choice' and 'freedom' are core values of Friedman in relation to his ideals of education in a free-market economy (Friedman, 1955). O'Brien (2016, p.74), theorises these concepts of freedom in the context of neoliberal agendas:

> Rooted in neoliberal agenda, this 'freedom' represents a *politicised* worldview on education, one that speaks to a certain way of being in the world and acting upon it. In Friedman's political vision, the real role of government and specifically its role in education, is to promote a *workfare* state (one that encourages *individual* 'net contributions' to society via 'human capital' investments and obligations), over-and-above a *welfare* state (one that supports *public* responsibility for education and other facilities and provides assistance therein).

Friedman envisaged that creating marketised environments with increased choice and competition within education would "widen the opportunity of individuals [as consumers of the system] to make productive investments in themselves" (Friedman, 1955, p.136). Education here is conceived as a product of investment, with clear emphasis being placed on

an outcomes-based model of education with a market value. In marketised paradigms, education is valued for its worth in regarding the potential gains for individuals and society as a whole, in relation to their 'human capital' and economic 'sign value' (Baudrillard,1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020). For Baudrillard, "the concept of 'sign value' was symbolic of the position and rank of objects relating to social value and "the status of objects as expressive symbols" (Gottdiener, 1994, p.36, cited in Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011, p.511). Indeed, the marketisation of education denotes consumer-driven assigned value systems, positioning education as a commodity. Sociologist Jean Baudrillard began his sociocultural investigations by exploring the 'semiotics' of advertising and consumption; noting that "reality was being increasingly replaced by sign systems that recodified and replaced the real" (Baudrillard, 1994, p.365). These simulations of reality or *'hyper-reality'*, are what Baudrillard (1994) refers to as 'simulacra'. Here, the simulacra or constructed product, is often valued more than reality itself. The *sign* value that a product has therefore depends on its *perceived* value, depending on its production or transmutation (simulation). Baudrillard (1981, p.2) notes that:

> The process of production and systemization of economic exchange value has been described as essential, and in fact it is: political economy is the immense transmutation of all values (labour, knowledge, social relations, culture, nature) into economic exchange value.

Emphasis is placed on the symbolic exchange value of the product and its simulacra, over the process or indeed the actual physical reality itself. Within the mercantile (market) paradigm, education is valued as a product, service or commodity, whereby immense emphasis is placed on educational outcomes or attainment, perhaps often at the expense of the *process* of learning: "The *sign* of learning outcomes, then promises more than its *substance*" (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011, p.512).

Pierre Bourdieu, a renowned French sociologist also offered a noteworthy contribution to socio-cultural understandings which can be applied to the marketisation of education.

Brancaleone and O'Brien note how Bourdieu's (1977, 1997) concept of '(educational) field', a structured site of forces and struggles, "operates unequally in accordance with different social groups' access to economic, social, cultural and symbolic forms of capital" (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011, p.551). Bourdieu sees 'field' as a system or structure of *"cultural production"* and *"symbolic legitimation"*, the *lived experience* in which people express and reproduce their identities (Bourdieu, 2023, p.289). There is an intrinsic relationship between Bourdieu's concept of field and what he terms *'habitus'*, which encompasses social norms and propensities that guide societal behaviour (cultural production). Whereby education is reproduced as a product, emphasising an outcomes-based model, the process itself is habitually overlooked and disregards "education as a 'lived' socio-cultural experience" (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011, p.511). O'Brien (2017), further questions the 'freedom' that is associated with neoliberal ideologies of education and holds that, in fact, education is in danger of being exemplified as a product; for its 'immaterial value' rather than its intrinsic value:

> How 'free' is education itself, as a practice? Taking a critical (neo-Marxian) perspective, learning outcomes exemplify educational commodification (O'Brien and Brancaleone 2011; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011). Thus, when education 'steps forth' as a commodity it becomes packaged for exchange; and its 'product' becomes not only concreted (in that it holds 'real' exchange value), it becomes transcendent (it holds immaterial value, is 'desired, fetishized'). Moreover, in exchange, the educational commodity produces new social relations; new consumption patterns; even new means of imprinting market consciousness. (O'Brien, 2017, p.153)

The Global Education Reform Movement

Having examined some of the preliminary influences shaping the marketisation of education, it will next be explored how this inception manifested within the educational field on a global level. Educational reform is often a highly debated and contentious arena, both within education and the wider community. Market forces that exemplify a business model of education emerged on a large-scale global level, whose impacts can now be seen on a

widespread basis, prevailing over decades, infiltrating, and pervading education systems on a mass scale, globally. The initial idea of the phenomenon that we call the 'Global Education Reform Movement', or GERM (coined by Pasi Sahlberg, 2011, 2021), was initiated by Andy Hargreaves, an educational research professor at Boston College, as his research explored how "standardisation affected teachers' work in schools in the 1990s when the 'standards-based reform' movement began gaining international popularity among policymakers" (Sahlberg and Doyle, 2019, p.105). Hargreaves and Shirley (2022), exemplify the emphasis on an outcomes-based model that has saturated the global educational landscape since the 1980s and 1990s:

> If you look at most educational policies since the 1990s you might imagine that success is what really matters and sometimes practically *all* that matters. Test scores, examination results, and international comparisons of educational performance have all exalted literacy, mathematics and science scores as the be-all and end-all of education. There have been some attempts to update these metrics with 21st century skills or global competencies [perhaps Hargreaves and Shirley are referring to the recent drive towards the promotion of creativity in education by the OECD], but even these metrics have been primarily driven by economic and modern workforce needs. (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2022, p.xi)

Thus, the landscape of education has changed immensely on a global scale over the past decades. These educational changes, as shaped by neoliberal ideals, are what Pasi Sahlberg terms, the Global Education Reform Movement or GERM:

> GERM has emerged since the 1980s and is one concrete offspring of globalization in education. It has become accepted as "new educational orthodoxy" within many recent education reforms throughout the world, including reforms in the United States, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdon, some Scandinavian countries, and an increasing number of countries in the developing world. (Sahlberg, 2021, p.177)

The marketisation of education, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement, has numerous doctrines which shape it. These include an emphasis on performativity and educational standards, data-driven improvement, an outcomes-based model of education, a narrowing of the curriculum, emphasis of standardised testing, increased accountability measures, competition, consumer choice, free-market principles, de-professionalisation of educators, and an increased emphasis on literacy, numeracy and STEM (Science, Engineering,

Technology and Mathematics) subjects. However, these 'priorities' can often come at the expense of meaningful provision for creativity and Arts Education (Sahlberg, 2021; O'Brien, 2016; Ravitch 2013). Diane Ravitch (2013, 2020) has noted how billions of dollars are 'invested' into public education systems across the United States, further being regulated and moulded by marketised management concepts, arguing that "by doing so, it promotes the viral spread of GERM not only within the United States but globally" (cited in Sahlberg, 2021, p.177). The Global Education Reform Movement, although not a formal global policy, strives for educational 'improvement':

> The idea of the Global Education Reform Movement, or simply put GERM, evolves from the increased international exchange of policies and practices. It is not a formal global policy program, but rather an unofficial educational agenda that relies on a certain set of assumptions to improve education systems. (Fullan, 2011; Hargreaves et al., 2001; Hargreaves and Shirley 2009; Sahlberg 2016; cited in Sahlberg 2021, p.177)

When we conceive 'educational improvement' in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement, typically 'improvement' is deduced to 'data-driven improvement', a measurable, reckonable, outcomes-oriented conception of 'improvement'. Hargreaves and Shirley (2022, p.72) denote this crusade as a "burgeoning movement" that "put data and measurement at the centre of school reform". They further note how these educational reforms are "obsessed with maximising economic growth and improving performance numbers" (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2022, p.72). GERM "became fixated on top-down accountability, education for economic competitiveness, standardized teaching and learning and relentless high-stakes testing in the pursuit of constantly improving performance results" (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2022, p.73). The Global Education Reform Movement was well underway in the 1980s through to the 1990s in the United Kingdon and numerous states in the United States (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2022). O'Brien (2016) notes how "President Reagan's administration, *A Nation At Risk* (1983), had warned against 'a rising tide of mediocrity' in public schools" (O'Brien, 2016, p.76). George H.W. Bush's administration introduced *Goals* 2000 which established a "standards framework

that focused on outcomes-based measures of education, with attendant student improvement standards" (O'Brien, 2016, p.76). President Clinton's administration (1993-2001,) upheld the sentiments of *Goals* 2000 as they encouraged states to establish their own testing regimes and achievement targets (O'Brien, 2016). Diane Ravich, who was assistant secretary for education, at the Clinton administration at the time, once had been "hopeful, even enthusiastic about the potential benefits of testing, accountability, choice and markets" (Ravitch, 2010, p.1). However, Ravitch has since spoken out vehemently against the educational standards regime, warning that "anyone who truly cares about children must be repelled by the insistence on ranking them, rating them, and labelling them" (Ravitch, 2013, p.241). She further contends that "whatever the tests measure is not the sum and substance of any child" (Ravitch, 2013, p.241). Hargreaves and Shirley (2022) note that it was not until onslaught of "George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 and Barrack Obama's Race to the Top legislation of 2009, however, that the US variant of GERM became pervasive throughout the land" (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2022, p.74). According to Sahlberg (2021, p.177):

> Tellingly, GERM is promoted through the strategies and interests of multinational private corporations, supernational development agencies, international donors, private foundations, and commercial consulting firms through their interventions in national education reforms and policymaking processes around the world.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has been of significant influence in the perpetuation of core facets of global educational reform, especially regarding the establishment of the Program for International Student Assessment in the early 2000s. Ball (2013, p.36), observes that, "for the past two decades the World Bank has increased its economic and ideological influence in setting the educational policy agenda, particularly in relation to less developed countries". Ball (2013), refers to what Novoa (2002), coins a new 'policy speak' whereby "global trends and convergences are discernible" (Ball, 2013, p.1). Jones (1992, p.xiv) also affirms how "the World Bank lies at the centre of the major changes in global education of our time…. It has served as a major purveyor of western ideas about

how education and the economy are, and should be connected". These global trends in the context of the marketisation of education and the Global Education Reform Movement have undoubtedly been framed, largely influenced and directly perpetuated by the impact of the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD):

> World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and European Union (EU) have also had an impact on policy commonsense in relation to issues such as public sector reform, the quasi-markets, quality assurance and education as business opportunity. (Ball, 2013, p.2)

Ball (2013) argues that "perhaps one of the simplest and yet most effective of the OECD's policy instruments has been the three-yearly PISA study results (first published in 2003), carried out in 41 countries" (www.pisa.oec.org/, cited in Ball, 2013, p.39). Ball's (2013) reference to the 'effectiveness' of the OECD's PISA, alludes to its 'usefulness' as an instrument to perpetuate the standards movement for the OECD's wider objective of influencing educational reform with the agenda of economic advancement. Ball (2013, p.38), notes how, "the OECD operates through a form of rational peer pressure to disseminate 'what works' in policy terms, in particular policies that have proved to be 'successful' responses to international competition". It is noteworthy to consider that:

> The OECD differs in particular from other supranational organisations in that its influence over the education policy of the 30 member states is based on the collection, processing, classification, analysing, storing, supplying and marketing of policy information. (Ball, 2013, p.38)

Indeed, there is a systematised and strategic approach upheld by the World Bank (OECD) as they methodically per(*use*) the data generated, to bolster Global competitiveness, strategise future economic advancement, and sustain authority over future educational policymaking:

> The OECD has developed an advisory role to policy makers at the highest level and thereby exert a widespread influence on the social and economic policies of its member states in multiple but indirect ways. Policy instruments such as evaluation studies and 'quality monitoring' have sometimes had considerable influence on national education policy. It is a 'globalising agency', an instrument of, forum for and actor in policy, with a central role in the flow of international education ideas. (Ball, 2013, p.39)

Robinson and Aronica (2015), observe that since 2000, the standards movement has been 'turbocharged' by performance indicators and the international rankings of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). These standardised assessments in mathematics, reading, and science; designed and administered by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), rank pupils internationally, based on their attainment scores. Sahlberg and Doyle (2019, p.20) argue that:

> There are a host of skills, talents, and competencies that PISA does not measure, and most of these skills should not ever be reduced to standardized test data – things like creativity, empathy and compassion, leadership, presentation skills, curiosity, teamwork, and a host of other skills.

Since 2022, however, PISA has also begun to measure creativity in its standardised assessments. On its website, the OECD outlines the premises of the creative thinking assessment:

> The PISA 2022 Creative Thinking assessment measures students' capacity to engage productively in the generation, evaluation and improvement of ideas that can result in original and effective solutions, advances in knowledge, and impactful expressions of imagination. (OECD, 2023, Creative Thinking - PISA (oecd.org))

Although the inclusion of 'creativity' may be conceived as a progressive addition by PISA on their international assessments, upon examination of their *PISA 2022 Creative Thinking Framework*, it appears evident that the OECD have wider fiscal gains in mind regarding the 'knowledge economy'. They note that, "organisations and societies around the world increasingly depend on innovation and knowledge creation to address emerging challenges, giving urgency to innovation and creative thinking as collective enterprises" (OECD, 2023, p.140). The inclusion of creativity by the OECD on the PISA assessments will be discussed later, as the impact of the marketisation of education on creativity will be explored, in Chapter 3. Clearly, the OECD and its administration of the Program for International Assessment, specifically, have undoubtedly shook the foundations of education globally with far reaching consequences.

Regarding the tenets of the Global Education Reform Movement, Pasi Sahlberg (2021), identifies at least five globally common features within global educational policy reforms. These reform principles have been employed in attempts to 'improve' the quality of education, particularly with regard to raising student achievement (Sahlberg, 2021, p.178). He identifies these principal areas as follows:

- Increasing '*competition'* among schools.
- *'Standardisation*' in education with emphasis on an outcomes-based model of educational reform.
- *'Focus on core subjects'* in the curriculum, such as literacy and numeracy.
- *'Test-based accountability*', emphasis on students' achievement and performativity.
- *'School choice'* whereby parents are consumers within the educational marketplace. (Sahlberg, 2021, pp.179-181)

As previously noted, Pasi Sahlberg (2021) refers to this 'infectious' global movement as the 'Global Education Reform Movement' (or GERM). Sahlberg and Doyle (2019), argue that the Global Education Reform Movement:

> Instead of supporting proven global best practices like teacher professionalism, education research, system-wide collaboration, equity of resources, a whole-child approach, physical activity and learning through play, it is pushing failing education policies into our schools. They include pitting schools against each other in a Darwinian race for higher test scores, one-size fits all teaching, the universal standardised testing of children, pushing schools and teachers based on testing data, forcing young children to prematurely absorb academic material at the expense of other critical subjects like the arts and physical activity. (Sahlberg and Doyle, 2019, p.101)

Interestingly, Finland (where Sahlberg is a native), although among the consistently highest-scoring of nations in the PISA assessments, does not conform to the stipulations of global education reform. They instead promote a child-centred curriculum, as well as teacher professionalism and autonomy, with a significant emphasis on fostering creativity (Sahlberg, 2022). Aside from the outliers, such as the Finnish model, Robinson and Aronica (2015), note the 'contagious' movement that is GERM, as well as the priority it is given by governments worldwide. Sahlberg and Doyle (2019), caution against the pervasive nature of the Global Education Reform Movement, denouncing, "this 'GERM' is, in other words, a virus spreading

around the world, infecting school systems" (Sahlberg and Doyle, 2019, p.101). Robinson and Aronica (2015, p.6), further caution that:

> The modern standards movement is global. Pasi Sahlberg, a leading commentator on international trends in education, deftly refers to it as the Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM. It certainly does seem to be contagious, to judge by how many countries are catching the bug. National education policies used to be mainly domestic affairs. These days, governments scrutinize each other's education systems as earnestly as their defence policies.

Having examined the infiltration of the Global Education Reform Movement on an international (macro-level), we will next examine the historical context in Ireland (meso-level) regarding these shifts in educational reform and their inception within the Irish educational milieu.

The Educational Market: A Brief Recent History in Ireland

The Mercantile Paradigm

In recent decades "global capitalism exercises increasing control over educational policy globally" (Lynch, 2012, p.88). Educational policy in Ireland has shifted to an increasingly mercantile paradigm (O'Sullivan, 2005). Mertens (2010, p.7), explains that "a *paradigm* is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action". O'Sullivan (2005), notes how Irish education, over the decades has shifted to a marketised model, shaped by what Pasi Sahlberg (2021), coins 'the Global Education Reform Movement'. GERM exemplifies market principles, based on the standards movement, advocating a rational, measurable, quantifiable, and data-driven approach to education. Mazurek et al. (2000, p.119) outline the consumerist nature of the mercantile paradigm, stating that: "the market paradigm adopts a populist approach, holding that what education is for is a matter for consumers of the system, such as pupils, parents, civic leaders, and business interests to decide".

What factors may have influenced the shift in the fundamental goals of Irish education from the 1960s? Inglis (1998, p.211), argues that over the following two decades, "the increasing influence of media, rising educational standards, travel and becoming part of Europe" contributed to significant changes in social expectations and societal norms, which may subsequently have influenced the development of more marketised forms of education. Furthermore, O' Sullivan (2005), notes that from the 1960s, the cultural construction of the aims of education shifted, moving to a more person-centred or consumer-centred approach, whereby the educational desires and needs of people living in Ireland during this time were endeavoured to be provided for. O'Sullivan (2005, p.112), argues that changing educational priorities, shaped increasingly by the mercantile paradigm, emphasised "the needs of industry, the challenges of citizenship and social personal development".

The improvement of the quality of education and the increased flexibility of education to meet the needs and desires of the consumers of the education system can be seen as a broad aim of mercantile education. Schneider (2001, p.72) observes that:

> Although school reform comes in many forms, many if not most seek to create market-like forces to which schools must respond – by becoming more flexible, more responsive to the needs of their students and parents, by improving the quality of education.

As the aims of education evolved from traditional frameworks to those determined by the needs and desires of the consumers of the system, the rationale for school choice became eminent. Olssen et al. (2004, p.202) state that:

> The fundamental rationale for choice ultimately traces its ancestry to the classical liberation conceptions of the rational autonomous individual who is presumed to be a person capable of deliberating upon alternatives and of deciding between different educational programmes according to individual needs, interests and desires.

This mercantile view of the aims of education in promoting choice for the consumers of the system, resonates with Milton Friedman's (1955) notions of 'monetarism' and 'freedom'.

These ideologies are a radical transition from traditional forms of education, which promoted limited human autonomy and freedom.

Policy Making in Ireland

In the 1950s, schools were agents of the state, whereby policy-making in 1950s Ireland was expert-based. In this era, policies were established in isolation of the general public by 'experts in education', whereby it was very difficult for parents or outside bodies to become involved in education. In contrast, the educational market sees education as advancing the personal interests of the consumers of education. Therefore, in the mercantile paradigm of education, almost every aspect of education can be quantified, regulated, and monitored by the *consumers* of education (Friedman, 1955). As the power of the neoliberal state increases, education is increasingly shaped by marketised principles. In the context of the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2021), schools are increasingly seen as service providers, arguably behaving like other commercial service providers existing in the marketplace. As previously mentioned, the 'consumers' of education increasingly have immense freedom in relation to educational choice. With the emergence of the mercantile paradigm of education, policy-making became increasingly transparent, accountable, quantifiable. Policy-making was established in an increasingly broader framework, of universal distribution with the consumers of education in mind. According to O'Sullivan (2005, p,15), in contrast to traditional notions of education, "for the mercantile paradigm, the process of decision-making must be more widely based and facilitated by public information about the system". How is the shift in education towards increased consumer ownership, within a centralised neoliberal state, conceived? According to O'Sullivan (2005, pp.113-114):

> If consumers are entitled to decide what education is for they must be facilitated in establishing schools, through individual or collective initiative, according to their philosophy of life, if the existing school system is unresponsive to their demands.

Accountability, transparency and quality of education are driving factors in the distribution of policy-making from a solely expert-based phenomenon to a more shared, universal construction of policy-making. This ideology also correlates very much with the notion of 'risk' in a 'risk society'. Increasingly, the consumers of education are stakeholders in relation to education, whose needs must be met by educational institutions. Policy documents, therefore, become increasingly significant in relation to various aspects of daily school life, in consultation with the consumers of education, in endeavour to offer a strong framework preventing possible future risks, due to an increased sense of quantifiable and transparent accountability (O'Sullivan, 2005).

In the 1950s, Ireland experienced vast emigration and a decline in economic prosperity (Lee, 1989; Lynch, 2012): "Education was held to be largely accountable as it had failed to deliver the technologically skilled workforce that was deemed essential in an industrialised era" (Lynch, 2012, p.93). Furthermore, the newly reconstituted Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which was introduced in 1961, strongly held the view that education should be regarded as a key factor in economic development (Walsh, 2009): "The OECD officials were greatly influenced by human capital theory, which held that investment in people produced a greater return of investment than investment in physical capital" (Walsh, 2009, p.64). Human capital theory immensely influenced economic thinking in the early 1960s, and consequently had implications for subsequent policy making, in the context of the marketisation of education. Hence, Ireland was moving towards an increasingly marketised 'business model' of education. Furthermore, the *Investment in Education Report* (1965) "strongly endorsed human capital theory as a guiding principle in education policy" (Lynch, 2012, p.93). Lynch (2012, p.93) echoes Clancey's (1998) observation of how discourses shifted from the 1960s onwards, placing increased "emphasis on shaping the educational system to meet the demands in the labour market". Nonetheless, how were these

changes and influences infiltrating through Irish educational policy? According to Lynch (2012, p.98):

> The move to the market has been accelerated in recent decades especially from 1997 to 2011 when Ireland was governed by a strong neo-liberal coalition government that systematically promoted marketisation and privatisation policies throughout the public sector. This trend continued with the new coalition with the gradual marketisation of even more public goods.

Lynch (2012, p.94), notes that "accountability was one of the key principles informing policy development in the *Education White Paper* in 1995". This paper placed a renewed focus on measuring educational outcomes and stipulated 'performance indicators' as a means of quantifiable measurement (Lynch, 2012). The 1990s undoubtedly cemented market reforms within education and reaffirmed the concept of persons as consumers of the educational system:

> The Department of Education and Science began to use the language of the market from that time in its key strategy documents beginning with *Implementing the Agenda for Change* in 1996. Strategy statements from the DES retained this orientation into the new millennium where the market language of 'customers and clients' replaced that of students and learners. (Lynch, 2012, p.94)

In addition to the establishment of *The Education Bill* (1997), in ensuring increased ownership and control of education by the people, the growth of non-denominational schools influenced the increasing control of consumers of education in certain contexts, reflecting a broader shift towards a mercantile educational paradigm. Furthermore, the increased privatisation of schools in Ireland, independent of the state, also demonstrates the increasing ownership and control of education by schools. This was driven by the demand from 'consumers' of the system, as the growing market for educational alternatives spurred greater diversity. The Education Bill of 1997 was undoubtedly a significant factor in dispersing the ownership/control of education to a more shared control of education by 'stakeholders' and 'consumers' of education. A number of initiatives established by the Education Bill (1997), did ensure the promotion of increased parental control in educational affairs including the establishment of Board of Managements whereby parents were to be represented in school and educational affairs. This enabled

involvement of stakeholders with vested interest in the running of the school. Patrons were positioned as representatives of parents, who availed of their educational services, ensuring the financial accountability and answerability of institutions availing of public funding (Mazurek et al., 2000). Mazurek (2000, p.127) affirms that, "the approach to legitimating parental rights is consistent with the market values of consumerism and monetarism".

It is noteworthy to draw attention to the increased marketised language, exemplified in the renaming of the Department of Education in Ireland, in 1997, to the Department of Education and *Science*, and again later in 2010 to the Department of Education and *Skills*. Lynch (2012, p.94) outlines the context in which these changed in semiotics took place:

> The EU has also helped to promote a market ideology in Education not least by the ways in which it has tied the purposes of education so closely with that of the economy in the Lisbon Agreement. The Department of Education in Ireland followed the UK direction as it mutated over 15 years from being the Department of Education, to being a Department of Education a*nd Science*, to being a Department of Education *and Skills*, with a *'Customer'* (her emphasis) Charter and a *Customer* Action Plan in 2010. It strongly emphasises skill development for employment in its strategy statements.

Since 2025, the DES has now again been renamed as the Department of Education and *Youth*. To offer transparency, (and for simplicity), throughout further discourse, I will refer to the DES as the Department of Education, while recognising the changes in its name that have taken place over the years.

While a historical context for the marketisation of education has been explored, it is noteworthy to briefly acknowledge historical developments relating to creativity within curricular reform. The introduction of the 1971 primary school curriculum "marked a significant shift, focusing on a more teacher and child-centred approach, emphasising creativity and individual learning" (O'Sullivan et al., 2023, p.139), influenced by the Plowden Report, reflecting greater emphasis on the creative arts, experiential and child-centred learning (O'Sullivan et al., 2023, p.10). Following from this, the revised 1999 primary curriculum upheld the significance of the creative arts, advocating for a child-centred and creative

approach to learning (O'Sullivan et al., 2023). Subsequently, the introduction of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020), signalled a shift towards standardised outcomes, and measurable attainment, reflecting broader marketised influences. This brief context highlights the tension between curricular advocacy for creativity and broader policy and market-driven reforms shaping education.

Policy making in Ireland has been examined historically in the context of the development of marketised education systems and the advancing grip of the Global Education Reform Movement. Next, performativity, standards-driven improvement and image management are explored, along with their impact on the education systems that neoliberal reforms are influencing.

The Educational Market: A force for Improvement or Performance?

Performativity, Standards-Driven 'Improvement' and Image-Management

A vital set of components of the educational market in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement, include incorporating new concepts of performativity, accountability, and data-driven improvement. As Ball (2013) notes, education in the context of neoliberal reforms is intrinsically linked to ensuring economic efficiency and competitiveness:

> Education is now seen as a crucial factor in ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness in the context of 'informational capitalism'. In other words, education policy is increasingly thought about and made within the context and the 'pressures and requirements of globalisation. (Ball, 2013, p.1)

Frequently, "the focus is [placed on] the product not the person, both in terms of what is attained and what is counted and countable" (Lynch, 2012, p.99). In terms of global competition and international rankings (OECD's PISA, for example), in marketised education systems, increased performativity is integral to a thriving national economy. As Robinson and Aronica (2015, p.9) note:

> A high-performing education system is critical to national economic prosperity and to staying ahead of our competitors. Standards of academic achievement must be as high as possible, and schools must give priority to subjects and methods of teaching that promote these standards. Given the growth of the knowledge economy, it's essential that as many people as possible go on to higher education.

O'Brien and Rudd (2020), reflect on how "knowledge has been gradually 'captured' by neoliberalism and education has been ever-more commodified, standardised, 'upgraded and traded'" (O'Brien and Rudd, 2020, p.155). These analyses consider how knowledge has been re-shaped, systematised and commodified for economic advances and capitalistic gains, which may, in some instances, be perceived as coming at the expense of its holistic and intrinsic value to those immersed in education. However, it is important to note that such developments may also be seen to support greater quality standards and accountability within education systems (Schneider, 2001).

Increasingly, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement, the Irish education system is constructed within the mercantile paradigm, which drives the marketisation of education which exemplifies a rational, measurable, quantifiable approach to education (O' Sullivan, 2005; Sahlberg 2021). What are the impacts of these shifts? Sahlberg (2021, p.185) outlines some of the consequences of GERM for educational change:

> GERM has had a significant consequence for teachers' work and students' learning in schools wherever it has been a dominant driver of change. The most notable impact is the standardization of educational pedagogical processes. Performance standards set by educational authorities and consultants have been brought into the lives of teachers and students without a full understanding that most of what pupils need to learn in school cannot be formulated as a clear standard.

How are the concepts of '*improvement*' and *'performance'* conceived in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement? Market forces in education seek school improvement and performance which can be seen in quantifiable measurable educational outcomes. The emphasis is on quantifiable learning targets, *measurable* improvement, and performativity, aspiring to specific *outlined* and unambiguous quantifiable learning targets and outcomes. Indeed, improvement and performance in the educational market presents itself as being more

concerned with learning *outcomes*, rather than the dynamic *process* of learning. Therefore, only what can be measured and quantified act as evaluators of improvement within educational institutions. Rudd and Goodson (2017), alert us to the likely de-professionalisation of educators as their roles are deduced to mere operatives and technicians of the curriculum, whose goal is to simply meet the demands of established benchmarks and criteria set upon them:

> As a result of these [neoliberal] consumerist values, we are also witnessing the increased 'technicist' objectification of teachers, students, curricula, and so forth. Highly qualified professional educators are increasingly being viewed as 'factors of production', resulting in de-professionalisation and less autonomy as they become cajoled into servicing and delivering learning to suit the newly imposed conditions. (Rudd and Goodson, 2017, p.3)

Further, Robinson and Aronica (2015, p.9) maintain that "governments everywhere are now yanking firmly on the reins of public education, telling schools what to teach, imposing systems of testing and holding them accountable". While these neoliberal shifts may be critiqued, they may also be seen as justified in policy terms as necessary measures for promoting performance standards and accountability within education. Emanating from neoliberal shifts in the educational market is the pressure for performativity, tied to the 'knowledge economy', resonating with Bourdieu's (2020) notion of 'cultural capital'. Furthermore, as O'Brien (2017, p.149) notes, oftentimes these 'imposing systems' are enacted through schools' and universities' practices:

> Schools and universities are increasingly situated, whilst situating themselves, in the global advance of neoliberalism… Accordingly, they 'progressively' promote knowledge as utilitarian and performative that, in turn, informs new organising principles that pervade mission statements, policy choices and inter-related cultural practices.

With this 'self-situating' that O'Brien (2017) mentions, educational institutions are oftentimes self-governing and reenacting the values of neoliberalism through direct praxis within the school, illustrating the power dynamics that are at play both upon and (re)enacted by the subjects of governance in a form of 'self-governance' (Foucault, 1980, 1991). Ultimately, these

neoliberal 'advances', conceptualised through borrowing Foucault's notion of 'reason of state', "gives way to an art of governing that assign priority to all that could strengthen that state and its power and that seeks to intervene into and manage the habits and activities of subjects to achieve that end" (Rose, 2006, p.84).

With increased emphasis placed on educational outcomes and the conception of education as product, one thus needs to question the primary *role* of education. Also, *whom* does education serve? Mazurek (2000, p.119) notes the role that interest groups have in shaping the educational market: "The market (mercantile) paradigm adopts a pluralist approach, holding that what education is for is a matter for consumers of the system, such as parents, pupils, civic leaders, and business interests to decide". The educational market drives a certain version of 'improvement' in education, exemplified in the raising of educational standards, and 'performativity'. The improvement of the 'quality' of education and the increased flexibility of education to meet the needs and desires of the consumers of the education system can be seen as a broad aim of mercantile education systems. According to Schneider (2001, p.72):

> Although school reform comes in many forms, many if not most seek to create market-like forces to which schools must respond – by becoming more flexible, more responsive to the needs of their students and parents, by improving the quality of education.

The *'quality'* of education, as outlined by Schneider (2001), in relation to the educational market, implies an outcomes-based model of education, which meets the *'needs'* of the consumers of education (i.e. students and parents). Rudd and Goodson (2017), refer to this model as a "bio-financialised 'student as consumer' model [of education]" (Rudd and Goodson, 2017, p.9). However, one may question, who the real consumers of education are? Considering the notion of parents and children as consumers of education, one may also consider the marketised rhetoric in which such discourses of education may be seen as serving capitalist and neoliberal agendas.

Ball (2013) argues that the 'terrors of performativity' accompany neoliberal educational regimes, and warns of the stark consequences of adopting a performativity culture within marketised systems of educational reform:

> Performativity is a culture or system of 'terror'. It is a regime of accountability that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as a means of control, attrition, and change. The performances of individual subjects or organisations serve as measures of productivity or output or displays of 'quality' or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. These performances stand for, encapsulate, or represent worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement. (Ball, 2013, p.57)

Performativity, regarded by Ball (2013) is almost conceived as a form of oppression or what Bourdieu (2020) would consider as 'symbolic violence'. The value of an individual or organisation here is tied to their output or *production* rather than their intrinsic value. This arguably has a de-humanising effect and a*ffect* (Ahmed, 2004) upon the subjects as their worth is linked merely to that which they can produce. Rudd and Goodson (2017) discuss the radical normalisation and 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu, 1980, 2020) of education as it is manipulated and moulded by neoliberal models which bolster performativity in the marketplace:

> The intensified financialisaton, competition and performativity is significant and is likely to result in 'misrecognition' (Bourdieu 1980, 2000), whereby social processes reflect taken for granted assumptions implied by the neoliberal model, resulting in new forms of knowledge and capital unwittingly normalised by the practice of social actors. This in turn reproduces and reinforces the particular ideological world view and ultimately provides it with legitimacy. (Rudd and Goodson, 2017, p.7)

The subjects (or social actors) of this agenda perpetuate and normalise this neoliberal paradigm (enforced on education), as they rise to meet the performance demands placed upon them, positioning themselves in roles that validate their human and social capital (Bourdieu, 2000). This power dynamic is bidirectional (top-down from the government and bottom-up from the social actors), a cyclical validation of this model of education (Foucault, 1980, 1983, 1991). Although there is a clear emphasis on knowledge production, quantifiable data-driven metrics and performativity, Rudd and Goodson (2017, p.6) argue that in fact there is little evidence to show that these 'educational standards' have resulted in improved educational outcomes:

> One of the 'elephants in the room' is that after almost three decades of educational 'crises', subsequent neoliberal reforms, a huge growth in metrics and measurements, performance tables, monitoring agencies, managerialist policies, private involvement, and so forth, there is little evidence to suggest that educational standards have actually improved, even using the limited measures imposed on the system.

O'Brien and Rudd (2020, p.158), examine the impact of increased intensification and performativity upon educators themselves and the role that this has regarding their professionalism:

> How does one cope with the increased demands ('intensification') – with the constant push and pull to persevere? How does one cope with the de-professionalizing forces ("deskilling") – with the constant push and pull to deliver? How does one cope with abstract expectations ('unreality') – with the constant push and pull to self-maximise?

O'Brien and Rudd (2020) postulate the professional identities of educators as their sense of worth becomes linked to their production, objectifying them as (re)producers of the curriculum, de-professionalising their roles as educators to those of technicians, lacking autonomy and merely focusing on delivering outcomes, based on 'abstract expectations' (O'Brien and Rudd, 2020). This sense of 'unreality' resonates with Baudrillard's (1994, 2023) 'simulacra' or simulation of reality (also referred to as 'hyper-reality'), as representations of reality or *production* become increasingly *valued over* real substance and reality *itself.*

Patrick (2013) argues that the way in which neoliberalism as a globalised ideology frames education, exemplifies the 'knowledge economy' and in particular, "the commodification of education and the commodification of the learner as potential knowledge worker" (Patrick, 2013, p.1). Further, she asserts that there is a "continuing tendency for neoliberal policy to position individuals as future workers and to assert the primacy of education as the means to this end" (Patrick, 2013, p.1).

In recent years, market-like principles have permeated the Irish education system, exemplifying an outcomes-based model of education. Typically, "the reform movement has four priorities: the three Rs [reading, writing and arithmetic], raising academic standards, STEM disciplines, and going to college" (Robinson and Aronica, 2015, p.10). With the

pressure to perform in academic disciplines such as literacy numeracy and the STEM subjects, Robinson (2011, p,63) argues that "the arts are seen as disposable extras in education; something optional to do with self-expression, relaxation and leisure". Sahlberg and Doyle (2019, p.105) note that "GERM is not just about high-stakes standardised testing; it is an intellectual and political paradigm that is an offspring of global competition that manifests itself in policies and practices in perverse ways". Educational policy is highly influenced by key stakeholders such as the World Bank (OECD), who have "developed an advisory role to policy makers at the highest level and thereby exert a widespread influence on the social and economic policies of its member states in multiple but indirect ways" (Ball, 2013, p.39). It holds a strong grip on its 30 member states, influencing educational policy "based on the collection, processing, classification, analysing, storing, supplying and marketing of policy information" (Ball, 2013, p.38).

Conway (2013, p.51), acknowledges how the "the publication of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 (Cosgrove et al., 2010; Perkins et al., 2010) reading literacy results heralded a crisis of educational standards in Ireland". With the marked decline in student results on the PISA 2009 assessments (a decline disputed, compared to the assessments of previous years), came a sharp response from the Department of Education and Skills regarding its concerns related to student achievement in 'core areas' such as literacy and numeracy. The development of the Public Service Agreement (with various versions from 2010 to present), has, in recent years, has sought to increase productivity in schools and to maximise pupils' time spent in school. The Department of Education (2011) also responded by publishing *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*, first launched in 2011 and recently updated in 2020 (DES, 2011, 2020), whereby they outline their directive for increased provision and priority of literacy and numeracy education in schools. *Literacy and*

Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 emphasises school improvement, benchmarks of attainment, standardised testing and learning outcomes. Indeed, with increased prominence being placed on accountability and learning outcomes, schools are under increased pressure to raise student achievement and to exemplify increased '*productivity'* in light of these educational reforms, which were stated to have positive gains for the economic prosperity of our nation (DES, 2020, p.9):

> Mastering the skills of literacy and numeracy brings with it many social, economic and health benefits for the individual and society as a whole. Having young people who can apply mathematical understanding in a growing range of economic, technical, scientific, social and other contexts is essential if we are to ensure employment and economic prosperity in the future.

These sentiments of productivity are echoed loudly in the Department of Education's outline of its '*national priorities*' for our education system (DES, 2020, pp.14-15):

> Improving literacy and numeracy standards is an urgent national priority for the Minister for Education and Skills and the Government. The Government will:
>
> - Set challenging targets for improvement that will require a comprehensive, national effort focussed on the progress of every child and on improving core skills of literacy and numeracy during all stages of the education system.
>
> - Clarify what we expect children to learn and develop in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings, primary schools and post-primary schools in order to prioritise the learning of literacy and numeracy.
>
> - Create a culture of continuous improvement in ECCE settings and schools in the education system by improving radically the assessment and reporting of progress at student, school, and national level and by focusing on school self-evaluation and inspection on literacy and numeracy.
>
> - Improve the professional skills of those who teach in our ECCE settings and schools in the teaching of literacy and numeracy, in planning and delivering rich learning activities, in assessing and monitoring progress, and in using assessment information to inform the next steps for learners.
>
> - Build the capacity of school leadership to lead improvement in literacy and numeracy and to support teachers in their efforts to improve standards of literacy and numeracy.

- Monitor the progress towards achieving the demanding targets that have been set and adjust our actions as necessary to ensure that literacy and numeracy targets are realised.

The *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033* (DES, 2024, p.6), "seeks to extend and build on the ambition and achievements of the previous strategy", upholding the core focus on literacy and numeracy skills, while introducing a broader emphasis on critical thinking, creativity and digital literacy as vital competencies for the future. This strategy reflects an ongoing commitment to "reducing achievement gaps [and] ensuring that all learners have opportunities to develop the skills and competences necessary in each of the strategic areas" (Minister for Education, cited in DES, 2024, p.3), echoing the emphasis on literacy and numeracy standards, educational outcomes and performance from the previous strategy (DES, 2011, 2020). However, the 2024-2033 strategy (DES, 2024) also acknowledges the significance of promoting key competencies such as the development of critical thinking, creativity and digital literacy, in response to the evolving demands of the global economy.

O'Brien and Brancaleone (2011, p.12) highlight the assumptions that "learning outcomes are not only assumed to exhibit *effectiveness* in terms of knowledge production but are presented as a key means of *improving* learning institutions". It seems apparent from examining the above sentiments of the DES (2020) regarding their *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People*, that learning outcomes are strongly assumed to act as a key means of *improving* our educational *standards* regarding literacy and numeracy in the Irish education system. Further, the DES calls on educators to improve their 'professional' *skills* and to engage in school self-evaluation to ensure the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills and attainment of pupils. On the contrary, Sahlberg (2011, 2021) argues that no high-performing education system ignores or confronts teachers in school improvement. The DES (2020, p.15) also stresses that "world-class literacy and numeracy skills will be essential for the rebuilding of our economic prosperity and ensuring

the well-being of our society". This statement emphasises the perceived benefits that *world-class* literacy and numeracy *'skills'* would have for the *'economic'* prosperity of our country, as well as ensuring the wellbeing of our society. While literacy and numeracy are undoubtedly fundamental to individual wellbeing, there is arguably a narrower interpretation reflected in the DES (2011, 2020) national strategy, which may frame learning as sets of *skills* and *targets*. Furthermore, the competitive nature of the DES (2020) seems apparent, as it states that *world-class* literacy and numeracy *skills* will be essential for future *economic* prosperity. One may question whether this emphasis reflects a broader policy focus on the 'race to the top' and 'international rankings', rather than the fundamental philosophies of wellbeing and holistic education that underpin our education system. Sahlberg and Doyle (2019) argue that standardised testing is a real threat to creativity and imagination:

> Standardised testing is a huge time-waster and energy diverter. And standardization, by definition, also works against risk-taking, creativity, imagination and innovation in schools, the very traits that education should be promoting. Standardization over emphasises direct instruction in whole-class settings rather than small-group learning and independent study. It gives priority to teaching in the same way, to all students, while crushing creativity, personal expression, diverse talents, and imagination. (Sahlberg and Doyle, 2019, p.121)

The Finnish education system is known as a *'world-class'* education system worldwide; known for its 'remarkable' high results on the PISA international tests. However, "unlike many other contemporary systems of education, the Finnish system has not been infected by market-like competition and high-stakes testing policies" (Sahlberg, 2011, p.39). Sahlberg (2011) further states that "as a nation of modest people, Finland never actually intended to be the best in the world in education" (Sahlberg, 2011, p.41). O'Brien (2013) notes how "Finland is frequently presented as the 'leader to follow' in terms of its productive 'outputs' but is hardly ever presented in terms of its qualitative 'inputs'" (O'Brien, 2013, p.13).

Although Schneider (2001) indicates that market-like forces improve the quality of education "by becoming more flexible, more responsive to the needs of their students and

parents, by improving the quality of education" (Schneider, 2001, p.72), one may contest whether this is always necessarily the case. Robinson and Aronica (2015 p.x) argue that "standards culture is harming students and schools". Further, they caution that:

> One of our deepest concerns is that while education systems around the world are being reformed, many of these reforms are being driven by political and commercial interests that misunderstand how real people learn and how great schools actually work. As a result, they are damaging the prospects of countless young people. (Robinson and Aronica, 2015, p.x)

One may question whether the integrity and intrinsic value of education are potentially being compromised by the increasing dominance of market-driven principles within education. Furthermore, one may also question whether a holistic approach to education, one that promotes individuality and creativity, can realistically be developed within an education system that is shaped by the mercantile paradigm? Marketised education systems can be seen to prioritise standardisation, consequential accountability, learning outcomes and high stakes attainment targets, often prioritised over all other curricular areas.

As mentioned, increased quantifiable accountability measures have been introduced to education in accordance with the marketisation of education (O'Sullivan, 2005). Schneider (2001) indicates that the increased accountability measures resulting from marketisation improve the 'quality' of education, which can be seen as a valid educational aspiration. However, one may also consider the inherent and intrinsic value that education holds to the *individual*, rather than the cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 2020) that it produces, which is often framed in terms of outcomes and productivity benchmarks. Although marketisation advocates improved accountability and 'quality' in education, can increased consequential accountability sometimes have some negative educational consequences?

According to Sahlberg (2007), the marketisation model of education (global education reform trends), focuses on the standardisation of education. It also places a high priority on literacy and numeracy, while significantly emphasising consequential accountability, increased

regulation, de-professionalisation of educators and intensification of educational duties, (Sahlberg, 2007). O'Brien and Rudd (2020) discuss pressures upon Irish teachers within the neoliberal governance regime, regarding teacher professionalism and intensification of their working environment:

> In a number of ways, teaching has become more professionalised – in Ireland teachers in permanent posts are relatively well-paid, they receive Masters level (university-based) Initial Teacher Education and they register with a professional standards body, for example. But in other ways, they are regulated by the latest political demands, by intense curricular and assessment reforms, by industry imperatives, by narrow measures of performativity and accountability, and other demands. The conditions within which they operate – lower levels of state resources, spiralling social inequality, complex learner needs, ever-increasing technical tasks and meaningless bureaucracy, fake media news, precarious work, and direct and indirect reception of a parallel private education system – are rarely connected to 'official' narratives of professionalisation. The professional voice too is often muted in 'partnership' talks. Indeed, teachers can (unconsciously) silence them*selves* when they self-regulate in accordance with neoliberal discourse and values. (O'Brien and Rudd, 2020, p.157)

This sense of *self*-regulation (or *self*-governing) echoes Foucault's ideology of governmentality, representing bi-directional power relations between governance by the state upon the subjects (teachers) and the self-governance by the subjects as they conform to, perpetuate and embody the demands that are placed upon them. (Foucault, 1980, 1983, 1991). In contrast, educational policies in Finland promote flexibility and loose standards, broad learning combined with creativity, and intelligent accountability with trust-based professionalism (Sahlberg, 2007): "Whereas England has moved towards externally controlled local accountability in the form of national testing, the Finnish comprehensive school system is practically free from external tests" (Berry and Sahlberg, 2006, p.22).

The study *Accountability affects the use of small group learning in school mathematics* by Berry and Sahlberg (2006) is an example of an empirical qualitative research study which explores accountability in education. It "investigates the perspective of a sample of teachers on the use of cooperative small groups in the teaching and learning of mathematics" (Berry and Sahlberg, 2006, p.3). This study is framed within the educational contexts of Finland and

England, whose educational perspectives and practices differ considerably. Although this study is independent of the Irish context, I believe that the exploration of the effects of increased accountability in the educational context of the study may resonate to some extent with the Irish educational context, although there are considerable differences between these education systems.

Findings from the study indicated that "the role of small group learning as seen by most of the (English) teachers is for doing maths, introducing social skills and discussion rather than for learning mathematics and knowledge skills" (Berry and Sahlberg, 2006, p.3). Although teachers from both England and Finland reported using collaborative group work in mathematics, it is interesting to note the difference in teachers' perceptions of barriers that may constrain them using group work, particularly in relation to restrictions arising from issues relating to accountability. A comparison of the data emerging from the Finnish and English contexts, indicated differences, particularly at primary level, whereby "the pressure of a structured instructional model of teaching and external assessment of pupils' achievement is having dramatic consequences according to some English teachers" (Berry and Salberg, p.23). Berry and Sahlberg (2006, p.23) present that argument that:

> Pupils in England are over-tested and inevitably the pressure of such external assessments and related high-stake accountability structures lead to 'teach to the test' and 'learn by heart' mentalities. (This study indicates) that too rigid and methodologically specific education policies and related national strategies, such as the NNS (National Numeracy Strategy) in England, lead to fragmented and non-innovative teaching that do not enhance risk-taking, creativity and learning of knowledge and skills that are needed in our modern knowledge world.

One English teacher and research participant, for example, explained that "having to follow the NNS, I can't see how you can do group work in maths as much as any other subjects because of the limitations" (Respondent, cited in Berry and Sahlberg, 2006, p.17). Another teacher believed that the NNS will deter a lot of teachers from engaging in group work, as they will not see how it can be congruent ins structured lessons: "we are all pressured by SATs

(Standardised Attainment Tests), who isn't? and I guess that group work does not fit into preparing the children well for the tests" (Respondent, cited in Berry and Sahlberg, 2006, p.18).

The tensions between promoting opportunities for learning through collaborative group-work and meeting the expectations of high-states standardised tests to satisfy external accountability measures seems evident in the English context from the research findings presented. It is perhaps understandable why certain teachers may feel under pressure to *perform* and teach to the test with such rigid high-stakes examinations in place as measures of assessment and accountability. However, what are the dangers of engaging in such narrow-focused teaching, lacking in flexibility, creativity and collaborative engagement and learning? Should we opt for the path of endless testing and continually aim to standardise education? *Whom* does education endeavour to *serve*?

Although the findings of this study are specific to the educational contexts in which research was undertaken and are framed within the Finnish and United Kingdom curricula, the implications of the United Kingdom's National Numeracy Strategy suggest that these findings may also resonate with the Irish educational context. The relevancy of this study to the Irish educational context, is especially pertinent as the Irish education system is shaped within an increasingly mercantile paradigm. One example of this, is the introduction of *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy* (DES, 2011, 2020), as a directive to educators, whereby increased emphasis is to be placed on the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy attainment above all other curricular areas. As mentioned, the most recent *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2023-2033* (DES, 2024) builds on previous strategies by maintaining a core focus on literacy and numeracy, while also placing greater emphasis on critical thinking, creativity and digital literacy. It continues to prioritise skills attainment and standards, focusing on reducing achievement gaps, while recognising the need for broader competencies to meet the demands of an evolving global and digital context (DES, 2024).

Neoliberal educational reforms in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement are not only are focused on performativity and accountability benchmarks but the portrayal of 'image-management' in the public forum (free market) of such 'improvements'. Lynch (2012) acknowledges that:

> There is pressure not only to produce academic results but to also profile the school in 'the market'. The task is not just to do the job well but to show that one is doing it well, to 'sell' the school or 'college' in the local, and in the case of higher education, the global market. (Lynch, 2012, p.98)

With increased emphasis placed on competition and showcasing of indicators of educational excellence, undoubtedly comes an intensification of educators' obligations alongside increased performativity measures. Ball (2000) argues that:

> There is a general tension or confusion in the education market between information-giving and impression management and promotion. This blizzard of hype, (pseudo) information and impression management also contributes to opacity rather than transparency. (Ball, 2000, p.10)

Ball (2000) outlines the deliberately constructed 'image management' of organisations and individuals as they produce representations or versions of themselves which Ball terms 'fabrications'. Ball (2000, p.8) argues that these representations or 'simulacra' (Baudrillard, 1994) are "not made in a political vacuum, [but are] informed by the priorities, constraints and climate set by the policy environment". This clearly resonates with Baudrillard's (1994) concept of 'simulacra' or 'hyper-reality', whereby an extension or representation of reality is constructed as a product, denoting a symbolic 'sign value' or perceived value in the marketplace. As aforementioned, the simulacra or '(managed) image production' is often valued more than reality itself, because of what it signifies and represents to the consumers within the system. Conversely, these fabrications of reality (hyper-reality) may also resonate with Foucault's conception of the purpose of these manipulated (un)realities:

> To paraphrase Foucault, fabrications are versions of an organisation (or person) which does not exist – they are not 'outside the truth' but neither do they render simply true or direct accounts – they are produced purposefully in order 'to be accountable'. Truthfulness is not the point – the point is their effectiveness, in the market or for the

> Inspection, as well as the 'work' they do 'on' and 'in' the organisation – the transformational impact. (Ball, 2000, p.9)

Ball (2013) further acknowledges the intensification of duties among educational providers that comes with increased performativity measures and an outcomes-based model in the context of global educational reform. These include:

> (a) increased emotional pressures and stress related to work;
> (b) the increased pace and intensification of work;
> (c) changed social relationships. There is evidence of increased, sometimes intentional, competition between teachers and departments;
> (d) an increase in paperwork, systems maintenance and report production and the use of these to generate performative and comparative systems;
> (e) increased surveillance of teachers' work and outputs;
> (f) a developing gap, in values, purpose and perspective, between senior staff, with a primary concern with balancing the budget, recruitment, public relations and impression management, and teaching staff, with a primary concern with curriculum coverage, classroom control, students' needs and record keeping. (Ball, 2013, p.60)

Ball (2013) additionally acknowledges the intrinsic link between educational accountability, performativity and 'image management' as education is commodified in the marketplace to meet the interests of the consumers of the system:

> Apart from their 'official' functions, as response to accountability, both main aspects of educational performativity – comparison and commodification – are linked to the provision of 'information' for consumers within the education market reform. And they are thus also different ways of making schools and universities more responsive or appear as more responsive to their consumers… Within all this (some) educational institutions will become whatever it seems necessary to become in order to flourish in the market. (Ball, 2000, p.10)

Ball's (2000) sentiments, echo O'Brien's and Rudd's (2020, p.158), observation of the increased demands ('intensification') placed on educators, coupled with abstract expectations ('unreality'), and the constant push and pull to self-maximise.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored a brief history of the educational market, in the context of The Global Education Reform Movement or GERM (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021), and the rise of neoliberalism. These reforms were examined both on a global stage (macro-level) and within the Irish context (meso-level). Rooted in marketised reforms, lie the capitalistic and free-enterprise pursuits of 'freedom' and 'improvement' within education (Friedman, 1955). Sahlberg (2021, pp.179-181) identifies key principles of educational marketisation in the context of the GERM:

- Increasing '*competition'* among schools.
- *'Standardisation*' in education with emphasis on an outcomes-based model of educational reform.
- *'Focus on core subjects'* in the curriculum, such as literacy and numeracy.
- *'Test-based accountability*', emphasis on students' achievement and performativity.
- *'School choice'* whereby parents are consumers within the educational marketplace.

Educational policy in marketised systems, is highly influenced by key stakeholders such as the World Bank (OECD), who have "developed an advisory role to policy makers at the highest level and thereby exert a widespread influence on the social and economic policies of its member states" (Ball, 2013, p.39). Global competition and international rankings are bolstered by the introduction and continuation of PISA by the OECD, for example, further intensifying international competitiveness and an outcomes-driven model of education.

A key tenet of marketised education systems is the notion of parents becoming critical 'consumers' of education, whereby schools are driven to manage and 'market' themselves, as a means of elevating their image and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2000, 2020). Tied to these notions of 'image management', and 'competitiveness' in the marketplace, emanate a culture of 'performativity'. Prioritisation of attainment in 'core' subjects such as literacy and numeracy were heralded with the introduction of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* (DES,

2011, 2020) in Irish schools. Despite the arrival of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES, 2023) and the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* (DES, 2023), which reinforce more holistic notions of education: "valuing the process as well as the product of learning" (DES, *Primary Mathematics Curriculum*, 2023, p.30), this negates the ongoing emphasis being placed on 'core' competencies and benchmarks of attainment. This focus, outlined by the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020), signals a potential sidelining of the creative arts and a perceived lowering of their '(sign) value' (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011) within education.

Neoliberal shifts in education and marketised productions of education have placed an undeniable prominence and value on an outcomes-based model, perhaps at the expense of embodying the process and intrinsic value of learning, despite 'official' narratives to the contrary (DES, 2023), although these developments are often framed in terms of improving standards, accountability and the quality of education. Ravitch argues that marketised education systems founded on an outcomes-based model "stifle the very creativity and ingenuity that our society needs most" (Ravitch, 2013, p.241). By continuing to prioritise attainment models relating to 'core areas' (DES, 2011, 2020), such value systems undermine the emphasis placed on creative processes, including within arts education. However, Ravitch (2013, p.241) asserts that "creativity and ingenuity stubbornly resist standardisation". Perhaps then, it may be worth further examining the impacts of the educational market on creativity within the arts, and exploring avenues of resistance to these constraining influences.

Chapter 3

The Creative Arts in a Marketised Education System

Implications of GERM on the Creative Arts

Marketised shifts influenced by neoliberalism, exemplify education as product, with a particular value being placed on certain educational ideals over others (Rose, 1989; Olssen and Peters, 2005). Lynch (2012, p.96) recognises that "the move to make education into a marketable commodity has implications for learning in terms of what is taught (and not taught), who is taught and what types of subjectivities are developed in schools". As education is progressively shaped by neoliberal agendas, and in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement, the prioritisation and amplification of standardisation, testing and data-driven accountability in relation to literacy and numeracy, is apparent (Conway, 2013; Sahlberg, 2022). According to Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.2):

> Among the many concerns of educators as far as recent attempts at reform are concerned is the narrowing of the curriculum, especially when the focus has been on literacy and numeracy, and schools have had to operate in the regime of high-stakes testing. The focus is often at the expense of the arts and pedagogies that endeavours to nurture innovation, creativity and problem-solving.

As aforementioned, the Department of Education in response to the perceived declining performance of Irish students on PISA assessments, released their directive; *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* (DES, 2011, 2020), in endeavour to increase literacy and numeracy standards in education. A key component of this directive is the 'safeguarding' of 'core' literacy and numeracy skills, over *all* other curricular areas. The Department of Education argue that "including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in the curriculum runs the risk that the time available in school for the acquisition and consolidation of critical

core skills may be eroded" (DES, 2020, p.44). Furthermore, they state that "we have to acknowledge that understanding and using literacy and numeracy are such core skills that time for their development must be safeguarded, sometimes by delaying the introduction of some curriculum areas" (DES, 2020, p.44). Although the DES state that "placing a strong focus on the development and monitoring of students' literacy and numeracy skills is not incompatible with a broad and balanced curriculum, nor should it lead to a narrowly focused curriculum" (DES, 2020, p.44), one may question whether other subject areas (such as the creative arts) may be developed in a meaningful way; and/or if time for these subject areas is consequently being eroded? Creativity surely is a vital factor to consider, regarding the fostering of a holistic education for the child.

Although marketised education systems seek to improve *standards* in education, there remains the question, *at what cost?* The conception of educational 'standards' in the context of the educational market, exemplifies quantitative, outcomes-based measures of improvement, with goal-oriented indicators of attainment of 'skills' in the *'core areas'* of literacy and numeracy. The unambiguity and narrow perspectives of 'standards' for educational 'improvement' is highly evident in the educational market in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement. Sahlberg and Boce (2010, p.33), note how "The Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) and common performance standards and frameworks have narrowed perspectives on teaching to prescribed knowledge outcomes and products". Sahlberg and Boce (2010, p.33) proceed to argue that "the ways in which international student assessment studies, such as PISA, are being received by the public and policymakers have become part of this problem". Conway (2013) concurs that the perceived drop in academic standards identified in PISA 2009 motivated a shift in Irish educational policy towards the global education reform movement seen in many other international countries, such as the United States of America and Great Britain: "GERM (Global Education Reform Movement)

is typified by an emphasis on standardisation, narrowed focus on core curricular areas, and stricter accountability" (Conway, 2013, p.52). Indeed, the shift towards a mercantile educational paradigm can increasingly be seen in the Irish education system, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement. What are the implications of the emergence of the educational market in Ireland as its education system is being drawn deeper into the web of neoliberalism? Hargreaves (2013), in reference to PISA, asks a fundamental question: "Will tests improve learning or narrow it?" (Andy Hargreaves, *Twitter*, April, 2013). Pasi Sahlberg further outlines his concerns regarding the narrow focus of international standardised tests such as PISA: "I am worried about what happens to arts, music, PE, and other subjects not included in the Global PISA. We need a Whole Child approach!" (Pasi Sahlberg, *Twitter*, April 2013). Sahlberg and Doyle (2019, p.96) further warn of the pressures of performativity and its impact on children and students who are under duress to *perform:*

> For schools and children under intense government pressure to achieve high scores on standardized tests, play – and many other absolutely critical educational foundations like the arts and physical education – is dismissed as a disposable, unnecessary luxury.

Further, Sahlberg and Doyle (2019) argue that practical subjects that were once standard in elementary schools such as "music and the arts", among others, "are being squeezed out of the curriculum in order to make room for drilling for standardized tests" (Sahlberg and Doyle, 2019, p.119). Robinson and Aronica (2015) discuss the 'hierarchy' of subjects that most national curricula demonstrate globally:

> At the top are literacy, mathematics and now the STEM disciplines. Next come the humanities, including history, geography, and social studies. Because the standards movement emphasises academic study, it places less value on practical disciplines like art, drama, dance, music, design and physical education. (Robinson and Aronica, 2015, p.12)

Considering this perceived hierarchy of subjects within educational institutions Robinson and Aronica (2015) warn how over emphasis on testing often "comes at the expense of teaching children how to employ their natural creativity" (Robinson and Aronica, 2015, p.162).

Furthermore, Robinson and Aronica (2015, p.xi) argue for a push towards the provision for creativity in education, in contrast to an overemphasis being placed on testing and performativity:

> I've been pushing for more balanced and individualised and creative approaches to education. In the last ten years especially, I hear people everywhere saying how exasperated they are by the deadening effects of testing and standardisation on them, their children, or their friends.

Conway (2013, p.52) additionally acknowledges the shift in the Irish educational context away from more holistic forms of education with the advancement of the Global Education Reform Movement:

> The move toward GERM in Irish education policy reflects a considerable redirection, from a more general focus on standards, a strong emphasis on broad holistic curriculum (particularly at primary level), and an earlier emphasis on moderate rather than stricter accountabilities in Irish education.

Indeed, with increased emphasis being placed on consequential accountability, standardisation and learning outcomes, what are the threats posed to a broad child-centred education, with emphasis on children's holistic and creative development? Sahlberg and Doyle (2019, p.122) argue that "standardized tests only partially reveal what students learn in school, they almost entirely focus on measuring only routine knowledge and memorization rather than deeper understandings".

Fiona Patrick (2013, p.1) warns that "there is a risk that neoliberal ideologies will remain entrenched while the aims of education are eroded to a set of functionalist outcomes". O'Brien and Brancaleone (2011) further caution of the dangers of an over-emphasis being placed on learning outcomes. They warn that "there is a real danger that learning outcomes (may) become elevated to the point where they serve as a fundamental criteria for determining institutional measures of effectiveness" (O'Brien and Brancaleone, 2011, p.12). Moreover, O'Brien and Brancaleone (2011, p.12), consider that there exists a very real danger that knowledge may be deduced, objectified, narrowly measured and exchanged, echoing Ball's (1998) notion of "the

commodification of education". Patrick (2013, p.5) too argues that "the economic rationalism underlying neoliberal educational policy tends to act upon individuals through use of specific discourses aimed at governing the self. In this way, learners become commodified". This concept of education as a commodifiable product may also hold resonance with what Freire (1996) termed as the 'banking concept of education', which reduced education to the passive acquisition of knowledge, devoid of any critical inquiry or creativity. This further resonates with Foucault's conception of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1991) which examines the bidirectional forces of power and governance.

Sahlberg (2011) argues that standardising teaching and learning though fixed teaching schemes and predetermined learning outcomes is the worst enemy of creativity and further claims that "a good education system and high educational performance is much more than measured academic scores" (Sahlberg, 2011, p.56). Instead, Sahlberg calls that emphasis be placed on developing broad cognitive learning, self-directed learning, collaborative processes, innovation and creativity (Sahlberg, 2009, 2010, 2011).

Ball (2003) also warns of threats to a holistic education in what he coins 'the terrors of performativity'. Ball notes how teachers may struggle as they may find their values challenged due to externally imposed measures of performance. One UK teacher in the grip of neoliberal forces asks, "what happened to my creativity? What happened to my professional integrity? What happened to the fun in teaching and learning?" (G.E. Johnson, cited in Ball, 2003, p.216). Interestingly, performativity measures can permeate throughout the curriculum, even affecting the arts. The utilisation of the arts for school promotion, and 'image management' (Ball, 2000, 2013) is often commonplace in schools, whereby the arts are deployed as a product to elevate the cultural capital of an institution (Bourdieu, 2000, 2020). Ball (2000, p.14) discusses the contradictions that may arise when the arts are used as a tool for school promotion and elevation

of the (extrinsic value) status or capital of the school versus for the intrinsic value that they hold for individual students:

> Perhaps not surprisingly drama and music productions – performances – attract much larger numbers of parents or potential parents into school than Governors' meetings for parents or Parent Teacher Association socials. The former are also much more likely to be reported in the local press. The issue here is the blurring of the distinction in relation to such productions, between educational as opposed to promotional or marketing purposes. Again, the issue is whether it is the recruitment concerns of the school that are to the fore or the educational experiences of the students.

To what extent educators give provision for creative development of course is determined by many factors. However, within the neoliberal framework that shapes education presently, there may be many specific barriers that may impede creative development. Over twenty years ago now, Eisner (2002) warned of the threat to creativity that the 'standards movement' was having on education. Eisner (2002) considers 'standards-based reform' problematic on many levels and argues that:

> Standards should be viewed as aids, as heuristics for debate and for planning. They should not be regarded as contracts or prescriptions that override local judgements. My argument is an argument not for mindlessness but for a recognition of the virtues of diversity and of the need for curriculum planners and teachers to be sensitive to local circumstances and individual efforts. (Eisner, 2002, p.173)

Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982) recognised that the fostering of creativity may not have been given priority within educators' objectives and priorities. They argue that: "it is sometimes said that the public school discourages creative thinking, but the school has many tasks, and we might be better justified in saying that creative thinking is not very high on the list of most teachers' objectives" (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982, p.80). They contend that, "we should not be troubled about motivating children for creative behaviour; what we should be aware of are the psychological and physical restrictions that the environment places on children to inhibit their own natural curiosity and exploratory behaviour" (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982, p.77). These observations highlight the restrictions that educational settings can impose on provision for creative advancement. More recently, Sahlberg and Doyle (2019) concur that "explicit

instructions limit a child's creativity' and argue that children should learn through 'observation and active engagement rather than passive memorization or direct instruction" (Sahlberg and Doyle, 2019, p.133). Considering the recent policy developments within the Irish context, particularly the introduction of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES, 2023) in succession to the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (DES, 2011, 2021), there has been a refocusing on the provision for creativity, imagination, play and the process of learning (DES, 2023). However, a dichotomy remains between this refocusing and the former directive (DES, 2011, 2020) to 'safeguard' 'core' literacy and numeracy skills, over *all* other curricular areas, including arts education.

Robinson (2011, p.15) observes that although many educators want to provide a more balanced and dynamic form of education that makes proper use of their own creative energies, "too often they feel they cannot do any of this because of political pressures of conformity and the disaffection of students who suffer under the same malaise". This is indeed a very real dilemma in many classrooms across the educational landscape within the shadows of the Global Education Reform Movement. Robinson (2015, p.15) warns that:

> All over the world, governments are pouring vast resources into education reform. In the process, policy makers typically narrow the curriculum to emphasize a small group of subjects, tie schools in in a culture of standardized testing and limit the discretion of educators to make professional judgements about how and what to teach. These reforms are typically stifling the very skills and qualities that are essential to meet the challenges we face: creativity, cultural understanding, communication, collaboration, and problem solving.

The creative *process* itself is undoubtedly integral to the fostering of creative ingenuity within individuals, whereby the educational setting is of vital importance. Robinson (2022) envisages creativity as a complex process, but argues that mainstream education systems as shaped by neoliberal agendas are stifling creative development:

> Creativity is a multi-faceted process. It involves many ordinary abilities and some specialised skills and techniques; it can be fostered by many different ways of thinking, and it draws on critical judgement as well as imagination, intuition and often gut

> feelings. The dominant forms of education actively stifle the conditions that are essential to creative development. (Robinson, 2011, p.49)

Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.11) note that "the sidelining of the arts reflects the bifurcation in the disciplines of learning that has existed since at least the nineteenth century" and further warn that:

> Nations that have placed arts education at risk, including the United Kingdon and the United States, tend to rank below those that have not followed this course, including Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Iceland, Finland, and New Zealand. (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.6)

Noteworthy, is the *ironic* emphasis often placed on international performance tables, as a means of recognising the value of the creative arts. Aside from its congruence alongside 'academic performance', the value of the arts should not be measured using *extrinsic* value systems, such as benchmarks of attainment. Instead of being subject to narrow value systems, the creative arts should be instead recognised for the inherent and *intrinsic* value that they hold for individuals. Having noted this dilemma, decreased funding provision towards the arts in favour of funding towards academic and STEM subjects may also threaten resourcing towards the creative arts. Caldwell and Vaughan (2011) contests that a "reduction in funding for the arts in schools presents a particular challenge" (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.58), and further attest that:

> Funding for music education is often reduced in order to save money. Music and arts are sometimes regarded as a luxury and as being of lesser significance for a child's education than other subjects such as mathematics or languages. We believe that such thinking is not justified because music is an important part of our culture and its exertion both involves many different skills and activates several parts of the brain. (Wetter et al., 2009, p.372, cited in Caldwell and Vaughan 2011, p.49)

Dowling Long (2015), also noted that in its initial five-year rollout, "The National Strategy to improve children and young people's literacy and numeracy has been supported by generous funding of €9 million from Budget 2014 and €13.8 [million] from Budget 2015". Subsequently, there had been a marked lack of funding and meaningful investment by the Irish Government in the creative arts, alongside advocacy bodies and initiatives such as The Arts

Council of *The Arts in Education Charter* (2013) (ibid., 2015). Dowling Long (2015. p.272) argues that:

> By comparison, the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* has received considerable financial support from the Irish Government, probably to the detriment of arts education programmes in some schools today.

The symbolic monetary and time values that are upheld in educational institutions speak volumes regarding the hierarchical worth allocated to various subject areas over others which become *less* valued. This resonates with Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic power' and hierarchies relating to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2020).

Diane Ravitch (2013), a historian of education, who was once a U.S. assistant secretary of education, during the Clinton administration, admonishes educators of the dangers of standardisation and testing (a s a result of the Global Education Reform Movement) and its threat to creative imagination:

> Anyone who truly cares about children must be repelled by the insistence on ranking them, rating them and labelling them. Whatever the tests measure is not the sum and substance of any child. The tests do not measure character, spirit, heart, soul and potential. When overused and misused, when attached to high stakes, the tests stifle the very creativity and ingenuity that our society needs most. Creativity and ingenuity stubbornly resist standardisation. (Ravitch, 2013, p.241).

Not everything of value can be measured using narrowly constructed and standardised rubrics of performativity. The desire to quantify, measure and standardise education is evident in the stronghold grip of neoliberal educational agendas. Similarly, Wegerif (2010, p.3) argues that:

> No teacher wants to teach the kind of knowledge that will only be remembered long enough to put down on an exam paper and then be forgotten. Everybody involved in education wants children and young people to learn things that will be of real value to them throughout their lives in many contexts. Teachers who feel constrained by the system that they are in to teach for tests, but really want to teach beyond the test for skills and dispositions that are of real value, often turn to the teaching thinking and creativity movement.

There are of course outliers to the threat to creativity that the Global Education Reform Movement poses. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Finnish education model has not

conformed to the ideals of the GERM nor has it been impacted by many of the limitations impacting creative development. Sahlberg (2021) remarks how the national curriculum in Finland is "built around the idea of creativity and the need to find new ways of teaching and learning" (Sahlberg, 2021, p.236). Sahlberg (2021, p.236) also notes how "where schools in many other countries are mostly dealing with compliance with external rules and expectations, Finnish schools can creatively find their own best ways to solve problems and arrange their work".

Curricular provision may be seen as a critical factor influencing the development of creativity in the visual arts in primary school. According to Hope (2010, p.39):

> Creativity is central to the arts, and thus arts education is a natural curricular place to develop creativity. However, the development of creative potential requires work over time. Creativity development *in all fields* requires serious sustained study and practice with certain goals in mind.

Hope (2010) recognises the interconnected relationship that artistic creative development has with both work and time. Conscious endeavour is obviously necessary for the manifestation of creativity, and it is natural that creative artistry indeed takes time. Can creative expression ever be developed effectively with rigid time limitations? Hope (2010) argues that for true creativity to be developed that it is of fundamental importance that a creative environment is established where time is flexible and especially plentiful. Hope's argument is presented as logical (ibid.) Creative development involves each individual engaging in higher order thinking processes, whereby they may be creating new designs, or developing their existing ideas further. Also, expressing creativity through the arts may require flexibility of time, where there are no unyielding limitations especially when children are spending time exploring with materials and developing their ideas, this undoubtedly takes time. However, in reality, it seems that time constraints are a daily force impacting on teaching and learning.

Educators are required to undertake eleven subjects on a weekly basis, at primary school level, three subjects of which are deemed as core subjects and therefore are expected to be

taught on a daily basis. With an overloaded curriculum consisting of eleven subjects to be taught weekly, excluding additional activities such as Religious education, sacramental preparations, choir practice, assembly, trips to the library or other local educational centres, and visits from external educational bodies, it seems inevitable that time constraints may be factor for consideration regarding the successful implementation of creativity within the visual arts curriculum (and indeed across the curriculum), regardless of effective planning and organisation. Considering the DES (2020) directive to increase time spent on literacy and numeracy (prioritised over all other subject areas), educators are facing growing performativity pressures. These include a stronger emphasis on standardised testing, image management and intensification of teachers' duties (Ball, 2003, 2012; O'Brien 2013, 2016). Hence, the examination of the pervasiveness of neoliberal reforms within education, and its impact on creativity within the arts, needs to be 'problematised' (Foucault, 1983, 1997).

Exploring the Conception of 'Creativity'

The possible threats to creativity impacted by the marketisation of education have been explored, but now let us examine more closely some defining characteristics of what it means to be creative. What is creativity? How can one tell when one engages in creativity? Can creativity be defined? Is every person capable of being creative? Is creativity innate? The late Ken Robinson (2022) challenges the myth that there are only some people who are creative and that therefore you are either creative, or you are not. He argues that "everyone has huge creative capacities as a natural result of being a human being. The challenge is to develop them" (Robinson, 2011, p.4). He hypotheses that "creativity, like the brain or muscle, changes with use" and that "if we neglect our creative capacities, they lie dormant [and] if we use them properly, they grow and develop" (Robinson, 2022, p.34). Therefore, if this concept was

applied to fostering creativity in educational settings, educators play an immense role in fostering children's creative capacities.

Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982, p.76) argue that "every child is born creative. The urge to explore, to investigate, to discover, is not limited to human behaviour, but it is experienced by the whole animal kingdom". Craft (2008, p.114) states that creativity "is good for individuals, who are more fulfilled when creative and who do not need to be Einstein to manifest creativity". From this statement one can clearly see Craft's (2008) belief that individuals do not need to exhibit extraordinary capabilities to exhibit creativity, but that it is innately and naturally part of the human condition: "The assumption is that the ordinary person can be creative" (Craft, 2008, p.114). Eisner (1972, p.237) too believes that creativity is inherently part of our existential reality and states that "the freedom to enquire and create should be available to all free men [sic]".

Lancaster (1990) also is of the opinion that all children have the capacity to be creative, that in effect, creativity is simply part of the human condition. Lancaster (1990, p.6) argues that:

> There is a creative urge in every human being – young and old alike – for we all have a natural desire to use our hands and materials for artistic expression. If given the right opportunities even pre-school children (some maybe only a few months old) will take delight in expressing themselves with art materials.

Although Lancaster (1990, p.7) clearly expresses the view that every human being has the urge and distinctive capacity to be creative, he too notes that opportunities must be provided in order for children to develop their inner creativity:

> Young children certainly have an inner urge which stimulates creativity, and when they enter school, teachers must encourage their 'originator instinct', as Martin Buber (1978) described it, by giving them opportunities to be young artists, crafts persons and designers.

The significant role of the teacher in developing children's natural innate ability to be creative is therefore argued by Lancaster (1990).

Wegerif (2010, p.3) argues that "excellent creative thinking is much easier to recognize when you see it than it is to define or explain". He also envisages creativity as taking the form of "lots of little sparks of insight that add up to a new view of the world or perhaps contribute to the creation of a new product. Creativity, in however small and everyday form, always seems to involve a leap from one way of seeing things to another" (Wegerif, 2010, p.54). In visualising creativity, Wegerif (2010) perhaps sees the significance of spontaneous or inspired thoughts that culminate in new ideas and viewpoints of the world, which may lead to creating various art forms. What may be interesting to note in this instance is that for creativity to exist in Wegerif's (2010) definition, creativity does lead to new views and understandings of the world but does not necessarily or always manifest itself in a new product. Creative thought therefore is believed to exist without necessarily creating a piece or outcome. This concept denotes the idea that creative thought precedes creation. Furthermore, the emphasis is on the creation or *process* of creativity rather than the product or outcome of creative endeavours.

Eisner (1972, p.89) views creativity as a characteristic that is a fundamental part of the human condition as he argues that "each child possesses a capacity for creative development. The task of the teacher is to arrange the conditions whereby these potentialities are realised". Eisner (1972, p.237) also proposes that:

> Creativity develops best when protected by the cloak of mystery. To throw a spotlight on, to illuminate each crack and cranny is to rob creativity of its power. In short, creativity is believed by some to be incapable of being understood.

Lowenfeld (1982, p.15) conceives creativity as "the ability to imagine and explore and invent in whatever medium we use". Therefore, according to Lowenfeld's (1982) understanding of creativity, the imagination or individual thought processes of the creator are significant. Emphasis is placed on exploring and inventing in various media. This implies that creativity endeavours to create something individual or new, as exploration and discovery processes involving original thought and freedom of expression are needed. The person does not merely

replicate something that already exists, but designs, invents, explores and creates something of a personal and unique nature. If creativity is individual in nature, then surely self-expression would then naturally manifest itself through arts tasks that are of a creative temperament? Self-expression has also been hypothesised by Lowenfeld (1982), as he states that self-expression is a mode of expression, whereby "the child expresses himself according to his own level of thinking, feeling and perceiving" (Lowenfeld, 1982, p.41).

Tanggaard (2011) ponders some theorists' conceptions of creativity as a theoretical framework for her research. Some theorists view creativity as an innovative action. Tanggaard, (2011, p.220), considering the perspective of Mason (2003), arguing that "to create is to act in the world, or on the world, in a new and significant way". Mason's (2003) and Tanggaard's (2011) notions of creativity view creativity as being associated with active learning. This perspective aligns strongly with Vygotsky's (1981, in Penuel and Wertsch, 1995) concept of constructivist learning. This is in powerful contrast to what Freire (1996, p,58) would term as the "banking model of education", a "dehumanising power" whereby children remain passive recipients of knowledge "[which] inhibits their creative power". One may question however Mason's (2003) notion that to be creative one needs to act in a *'significant* way'. Who is responsible for measuring significance? And how may one measure the significance of a creative action? Furthermore, surely what is significant to one individual may be of less significance to another? Thrash et al. (2010, p.470) consider Feist's (1998) notion that "a work is creative if it is both original and useful". Originality, one could argue would seem to be a natural and fundamental element of creativity, however, does a work of art need to be of use to be deemed a creative piece? Was Picasso a creative artist? Most people with any knowledge of Picasso and his works would argue, yes. Are his paintings original? Most would argue 'yes'. However, are his paintings useful? One could argue that paintings are of no practical use at all. However, another could argue that a painting could fulfil one's aesthetic desires, or

offer a source of happiness, inspiration or simply joy in the act of looking. If a painting is original and yet of no use to the majority of people is that to say that the artwork is uncreative? Surely not? Whether a work is deemed useful surely depends upon the subjectivity of the viewer.

Tanggaard (2011) outlines the importance of a collaborative paradigm and a social approach in understanding and fostering creative development in educational settings, what Tanggaard (2011) terms 'we-creativity'. Tanggaard (2011) argues for the vital role that schools play in developing creativity among pupils in school. According to Tanggaard (2011, p.220):

> We-creativity is a more fundamental social approach to creativity. We-creativity is the study of how, in this respect, schools not only condition creative processes, but also play a role in determining their nature. For example, teachers not only condition certain types of creativity through their teaching, but also through the manner in which they talk about creativity. Furthermore, how they organise everyday life at schools is vital for the actual processes of creativity that occur.

For Tanggaard (2011), it seems apparent that it is the responsibility of schools to ensure that creativity is nourished and fostered in schools. Here, the school organisation plays a fundamental role. Sahlberg (2009, p.339) reiterates this idea, stating that "all teachers can teach anything in a creative way so that students need to do things in new ways and come up with novel ideas". I believe that for creativity to be fostered, the importance of providing *meaningful* opportunities for students' creative development within education must be acknowledged and respected. Creative education undoubtedly required dedicated time, thoughtful planning, encouragement of free-thinking and effective classroom organisation. Eisner (1972) believes that every child should be able to think independently and critically and to be afforded the freedom to make decisions relating to their creative work. Rather than a community where children are regimented or restricted in their ability to think and develop creatively, Eisner (1972, p.237) instead advocates for a community of enquiry in education:

> No artistic community would permit restrictions regarding what an artist can create; such restrictions have no place in a free society. When one enters a wedge saying, *'this*

> *is what you can study and this you can't'*, where that wedge stops no one can tell. The freedom to enquire and create should be available to all free men [sic].

Eisner presents the view of freedom of enquiry and creativity as a fundamental ethical right of man [sic]. However, Tanggaard (2011) warns of the possible dangers and barriers that may threaten creative teaching and learning in schools. In relation to external measures of educational standards, a dictating curriculum and increased emphasis on performativity in relation to standardised assessments, Tanggaard (2011, p.221) proposes that "it becomes less likely that teaching will challenge pupils who are able to go beyond the framework of the test", and further argues that "in this sense, such (didactic) teaching methods become a barrier to creativity, understood as going beyond the existing paradigm or posing new questions" (Tanggaard, 2011, p.221).

In 2022 PISA began testing explicitly for creativity. However, one may perhaps consider testing for creativity in the context of standardised tests as a contradictory endeavour. Nonetheless, PISA have demonstrated their affiliation and commitment to quantifying and measuring creativity as they reconceptualise its prominence in the knowledge economy. Grey and Morris (2022, p.2) remark that:

> The inclusion of creativity in [the PISA Assessments] 2022 also demonstrates the ongoing linkage to the 'twenty-first century skills' of Critical thinking, Collaboration, Creativity and Communication, which have become prominent in global educational policy discourse since the late twentieth century.

They further acknowledge the shift in educational policy discourse that increasingly deduces creativity as a key 'twenty-first century *skill'*, often with connotations of innovation and the advancement of the 'Knowledge Economy' (Grey and Morris, 2022). The co-option of creativity within the new PISA 2022 framework, represents a shift whereby the intrinsic nature and value inherent to creativity, is deduced to that of a measurable and outcome-driven skill. One may wonder what the wider implications of this reframing of creativity are for the creative arts and whether it signals a loss of artistic and creative integrity among these practices.

Alongside the establishment of the testing of creativity on standardised PISA assessments in 2022, the OECD has conceived their own definition of creativity:

> Creative thinking is the way of thinking that leads to the generation of valuable and original ideas. All people are capable of engaging in creative thinking and practicing 'everyday' creativity (addressing everyday activities in a non-conventional way). Creative thinking can be applied not only to contexts related to the expression of imagination, such as creative writing or the arts, but also to other areas where the generation of ideas is functional to the investigation of issues, problems or society-wide concerns. (OECD, 2023)

Grey and Morris (2022, p.2) contend that the OECD's measure of creativity relies on a "narrow definition of creativity based on easily measured cognitive skills associated with enhancing innovation and economic productivity, while ignoring the more subtle nuanced conceptualisations which defy standardised measurement". They further challenge the increasingly narrow conception of creativity by the OECD, that reframes it as a form of human capital, deducing it to a measurable and quantifiable product of the 'knowledge economy':

> Th concept of creativity until now has been characterised by 'messiness', complexity and the lack of an agreed definition: has been tolerated and understood by the various stakeholders in education. That tolerance of ambiguity is appropriate given the essentially unpredictable and divergent nature of the concept but is clearly problematic for the OECD… The OECD has exploited the space allowed by this malleability to reconstruct it for its own purposes. Many teachers do not share the OECD's conception of creativity. However, by reframing creativity as a form of human capital, amenable to measurement and ranking in league tables, the OECD may resolve its own challenges. (Grey and Morris, 2022, p.11)

One may argue that the very nature of creativity is its limitless bounds, and freedom from restriction of being neatly packaged into categories that are constraining its very essence to remain unconstrained and immeasurable. This recontextualising of creativity as a form of human capital (Becker, 1993) and productivity focuses on the outputs and products of creativity, arguably at the expense of the creative *process* itself. Grey and Morris (2022) further contend that:

> While a precise definition of creativity has defied scholars for centuries, the indications are that the OECD's metric will focus on a narrow, convergent and easily measured conceptions associated with cognitive competencies and linked to enhancing human capital. In this way, the 'messiness' around the polysemic concept will be

> simultaneously both exploited and threatened, as new, measurable versions displace alternatives. (Grey and Morris, 2022, p.1)

Arguably, the OECD have subjugated and reappropriated 'creativity' for their own neoliberal agendas linked to the 'knowledge economy' (Patrick, 2013) and human capital (Becker, 1994) investment to bolster future economic prosperity, international competitiveness.

Recent Policy Developments in Ireland

New Primary School Curricula and Frameworks

In most recent years there has been a shift in primary educational policy towards provision of creativity, aligned with emphasis placed on it by the OECD and PISA 2022 assessments, which include testing for creativity. This is not a coincidence given the pervasive influence that the OECD has on global educational policy (Ball, 2003, 2012). The new *Primary Curriculum Framework For Primary and Special Schools*, which was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was launched in March 2023. The aim was to redevelop the 1999 primary curriculum to address the changes in society and in classrooms since then (DES, 2023). According to Norma Foley, Minister for Education (2023):

> The curriculum places children at the heart of their learning and provides for a holistic approach to children's education. Each child's learning journey is different, and so the curriculum provides flexibility and choice to teachers and school leaders as they support children in their holistic development. (Norma Foley, cited in DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework* 2023, p.2)

Key competences of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* include communication and literacy development, numeracy skills, as well as digital learning, wellbeing, citizenship, active learning, and creativity (DES, 2023). Further, the curriculum is divided into five general areas and subjects: 1) language, 2) Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Education, 3) Wellbeing, 4) Arts Education and 5) Social and Environmental Education (SESE). The DES (2023) place a renewed emphasis on the development of creativity through the arts, including the development of imagination, innovation and using creative processes:

> A broad experience in the arts is integral throughout a child's experience in primary school. The arts give expression to and extend children's understanding, imagination, and creativity through a broad range of experiences. Such experiences have the capacity to engage, inspire, and enrich all children, exciting the imagination and encouraging them to reach their creative and expressive potential. (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.12)

The DES (2023, p.9) also argue of the central value of creativity in primary education, arguing that:

> Through creative activity, children can produce works that are original and of value across the curriculum. As children develop this competency, they come to understand that creative activity involves enjoyment, effort, risk-taking, critical thinking, and reflection. Unlocking and promoting children's creative potential impacts positively on their motivation, self-esteem, and overall development.

Whilst the creative process and intrinsic value of the creative arts is exemplified by the DES in the *Primary Curriculum Framework*, they also note the value of the *'transferable skills'* of such: "while Art, Drama, and Music have a common creative process and share *transferable skills* (author's emphasis) each has its own knowledge, concepts, skills, and intrinsic value" (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.12).

A key finding emanating from the NCCA's *Child's Voice: Consulting with children as part of the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum* (2024), was children's desire to engage in meaningful opportunities for creativity: "Children want more opportunities to play and learn through play, and they want more Arts and creativity" (NCCA, 2024, p.27). Regarding engagement with the arts, the NCCA's findings included children's desires to engage in more divergent forms of learning with further avenues for self-expression, freedom, creativity and autonomy, in contrast to more rigid forms of instruction:

> The areas of Arts Education that children enjoy less reflect their views on other subject areas and pedagogical approaches; they don't like the repetitiveness of Irish dancing, the difficult vocabulary of Irish songs and the limited opportunities for exploration and creativity facilitated through the use of templates in visual arts ('colouring in') or only learning one instrument. Words that came up across all areas of Arts Education across both the junior and the senior class were expression, creativity, choice, freedom and exploration, suggesting that Arts Education is where children are most likely to identify feelings of being agentic in their learning. (NCCA, 2024, p.67)

This consultation with children is very welcome and is illustrative of the innate desire that children have to express themselves in an individual and creative way, without the restrictions that may inhibit this development.

The launch of the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* by the DES (2023), also places a renewed emphasis on play and exploratory learning. The *Primary Curriculum Framework* focuses on developing confidence in numeracy skills that can be applied to "all aspects of life" (DES, 2023, p.10). According to the DES (*Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.8) "being mathematical involves children drawing on a range of knowledge, skills, concepts, attitudes, values, and dispositions as they recognise, interpret, and apply real-world information presented mathematically". The DES (Primary Mathematics Curriculum, 2023, p.29) state that "mathematics, as in all other areas of learning, is characterised by play and playfulness". They further attest that "throughout childhood, play is of value in and of itself and children have both a right and a desire to play. Play is seen as an intrinsic aspect of childhood learning experiences" (DES, 2023, p.29). It is argued that "mathematical learning can be greatly enhanced in a play environment that is interactive, engaging, inclusive and supportive; and that provides opportunities for exploration, investigation, challenge, creativity, choice and independence" (ibid.) The DES (2023) also encourage educators to place a renewed emphasis on "valuing the process as well as the product of learning" (DES, *Primary Mathematics Curriculum*, 2023, p.30), noting that "'how' children learn is as important as 'what' children learn" (ibid., p.31). They further reiterate that:

> Playful learning is appropriate for all children across all stages of primary and special education. Children's learning experience in Mathematics, as in all other areas of learning, is characterised by play and playfulness. Throughout childhood, play is of value in and of itself and children have both a right and a desire to play. (DES, Primary Mathematics Curriculum, 2023, p.31)

The fundamental role that educators have in facilitating the process of learning is also to the forefront in the mathematics curriculum, as the DES (2023, p.31) attest that "teachers can help

encourage playfulness with Mathematics by…allowing a safe space for spontaneity, creativity, and imaginative play with Mathematics". Sahlberg and Doyle (2019, p.149) in their book *Let the Children Play* observe that:

> Many experts on creativity agree that we cannot teach creativity per se, but we can instead create conditions for children to develop their habits of minds and skills that are necessary in creative thinking and action. Play is a natural and effective way to do just that.

Also noteworthy, is the DES' reference to the significance of mathematical attainment in relation to the development of STEM subject areas:

> Mathematics provides the foundation for science, technology, and engineering and is the study of the relationships, connections, and patterns that surround us. Science, technology, and engineering are intrinsically linked and enable children to benefit from learning about and working with traditional, contemporary, and emerging technologies. (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.12)

As discussed previously, the OECD places increased emphasis on the development of creativity and STEM subject areas, whereby the clear links with future economic advancement are evident. The DES' (2023) outline of the significance of communication and language development appears to focus on a broader and more holistic conception of literacy, considering diverse forms of communication and communication in the digital age:

> Being a communicator and using language means being able to understand, interpret, and use different forms of communication, including gesture, expression, language (which can include English, Irish, Irish Sign Language, and other languages), printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. It also involves children engaging purposefully in the creation and exploration of different text types. (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.8)

An emphasis on digital learning and technological innovation is also an intrinsic component of the new primary curriculum framework. According to the DES developing digital learning "increases their confidence in using a range of digital technology to harness their imagination and expand their creative thinking and creative expression" (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.8). The DES (2023, p.8) seeks to promote "content creation, problem-solving, and creativity using digital technology" as among some of their key competences of

its digital learning aims. The renewed emphasis that the DES (2023) has placed on 'creativity' across the curricula is perhaps no coincidence as Ball (2013, pp.38-39) notes the undeniable influence that the OECD has in shaping educational policy to meet the future demands of the economy:

> The OECD has developed an advisory role to policy makers at the highest level and thereby exerts a widespread influence on the social and economic policies of its member states in multiple but indirect ways. Policy instruments such as evaluation studies and 'quality monitoring' have sometimes had considerable influence on national education policy. It is a 'globalising agency', an instrument of, forum for and actor in policy, with a central role in the flow of international education ideas.

The OECD acknowledge that "organisations and societies around the world increasingly depend on innovation and knowledge creation to address emerging challenges, giving urgency to innovation and creative thinking as collective enterprises" (OECD, 2023, p.140).

The intrinsic links between wellbeing, attainment and knowledge production have also been acknowledged by the DES (2023) in their *Primary Curriculum Framework:*

> Wellbeing supports children's social, emotional, and physical development now and into the future. It enables children to develop self-awareness and knowledge, build life skills, and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school, their community, and wider society. (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.12)

Additionally, in 2018 the DES first released their *'Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework'*, placing a renewed emphasis on wellbeing, which was revised in 2019. The DES (2018) advocate wellbeing as being vital to their mission for students:

> The promotion of wellbeing is central to the Department's mission to enable children and young people to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development. (DES, *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework*, 2018, p.3)

The explicit emphasis linking students' wellbeing to their potential to contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development, has obvious links to neoliberal agendas and capitalism. The DES (2018, p.3) state that "there is overwhelming evidence that children and young people learn more effectively if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves, and feel supported". Wellbeing is clearly linked to learning efficacy, the production of 'knowledge'

and academic attainment, with a focus not only on its intrinsic value to the individual but its potential to contribute to productivity and performance *by* the individual.

Arguments for Creativity Through Provision of The Arts

The Role of Arts Education in Building Creative Minds

Reflecting on the role of creativity within education, one may ask, why should we promote creativity and why is it so important to stimulate creativity within individuals? Robinson (2022, p.46) postulates that:

> As challenges facing young people proliferate, it is essential to help them develop their unique creative capacities. Like imagination, creativity is not a single power located in one part of our brains but an overall power that arises from the complex functions of our minds as a whole. Creativity is possible in all areas of human life. It can be cultivated and refined, which involves an increasing mastery of skills, knowledge, and ideas.

Eliot Eisner (1972, p.8) argues that "the development of creative thinking ought to be a primary goal of any good educational program". Further, according to Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982, p.74):

> The development of creative thinking has tremendous importance for us, both as individuals and as a society. It offers a change from what is and has been to what might be or what is yet to be discovered.

Howard Gardner is well known in the educational field for his theory of 'multiple intelligences' and in his book *Five Minds for the Future* (Gardner, 2006) advocated for the inclusion of arts in education. He contended that "it is essential for individuals in the future to be able to think in ways that characterise the major disciplines; [stating that] at the pre-college level, my own shortlist includes, science, mathematics, history and at least one art form" (Gardner, 2006, p.31). Johnson (2006, p.3) argues that "creativity is inherent in us all… the only problem is how to bring it out".

Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.9), remind us that "UNESCO considers education in the arts to be a universal human right, implying that its absence or sidelining is a breach of the Convention of the Rights of the Child". UNESCO (2006, p.3) argue that "culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual. Therefore, Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners".

Wegerif (2010, p.37), over a decade ago, foresaw the imminent marketisation of creativity, which would inevitably be linked to a business model, lucrative innovation, and economic gain:

> When governments say that they want to promote creativity, what they probably mean is that they want to promote applied creativity leading to successful innovations that make lots of money and preferably also start new industries that employ lots of people. There is often a tension in our use of the term creativity between, on the one hand, a view of creativity as a kind of freedom to play around and, on the other, a focus on ideas that are not only original but also of value and influential.

Damerow (2023, p.97) draws on the work of Catarina S. Martins, a Portuguese Arts professor, who examines the influences of the labour market on the "creativity" and "critical thinking" skills in the last number of years. She notes how they illustrate "not only the semantics but also the dedication of these very skills that are being transformed from free and personality developing abilities to a utilizable part of the labour market" (Damerow, 2023, p.97). Florida, (2005, p.29, cited in Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.5), acknowledges the significance of the promotion of creativity for economic advancement and the 'knowledge-based' economy:

> The importance of the 'creative class' in successful economies has been well documented by Richard Florida who reported that there is a 'broad agreement among economies and business forecasters that the growth of the overall economy will come in the creativity or knowledge-based occupations and in the service sector'.

The push towards the promotion of creativity in education has been to the forefront, over the last decade especially. Florida argued that "at its core, education reform must make schools into places where human creativity is cultivated and can flourish" (Florida, 2005, p.254, cited in Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.6). He acknowledged that "talent is a driver of economic

growth in today's creative economy" (Florida et al., 2015, p.14). The Global Creativity Index (GGI) measures creativity in the context of economic growth and potential:

> The Global Creativity Index, or GCI provides a broad-based measure for advanced economic growth and sustainable prosperity based on the three Ts of economic development – talent, technology, and tolerance. It rates and ranks 139 nations worldwide on each of these dimensions and on our overall measure of creativity and prosperity. (Florida et al., 2015, p.6)

The Global Creativity Index measures talent in two ways, "by the share of the workforce in the creative class and the share of adults with higher education" (Florida et al., 2015, p.14).

The United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's UNESCO's (2010) *Seoul Agenda* advocates for the inclusion of "arts education to promote creative and innovative practices in favour of the holistic, social, cultural and economic development of societies" (UNESCO, 2010, p.8). Furthermore, the *Seoul Agenda* promotes the development of creativity and critical thinking skills as necessary for "emerging innovations in communication technology" (UNESCO, 2010, p.8). Damerow (2023, p.99) notes that UNESCO "must have had the labour market in mind when implementing creativity and critical thinking". Damerow (2023, p.100) further questions the legitimatisation of these creative skill sets and goals in terms of whose interests they are *really* serving:

> The future worker and their capability of implementation into the labour market and the resulting education are being measured, and before that defined to be measured. In the economic view of this topic, there is a benefit to changing the curriculum towards the mentioned skill goals. The question that comes up is what benefits are being erased by this skill strategy and whose interests are being represented through measurements.

Creativity and critical thinking 'skills' are increasingly being seen as fundamental skills to develop in response to a drive towards technological and innovative advancement that will provide economic gains for the future (UNESCO, OECD). The repositioning of creativity as a deductive skill that can be used for capitalistic gains and the advancing of human/ social capital (Bourdieu, 2020) agendas, seems to undermine the intrinsic value that creativity holds for the *individual,* as opposed to its extrinsic and economic 'sign value' (Baudrillard, 1981;

Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011). The tension between intrinsic and innovation-driven conceptions of arts education is also explored in the OECD report *Art for Art's Sake? The Impact of Arts Education* (Winner et al., 2013). Synthesising a large body of empirical research, the report examines claims regarding the impact of arts education on various outcomes related to 'skills for innovation'. While it identifies evidence suggesting that arts education may be associated with the development of creative thinking, motivation and social competencies, it also indicates that evidence for transfer to academic achievement in non-arts subjects is mixed and is often methodologically limited. These findings support a more nuanced understanding of arts education, with the authors cautioning against overstating instrumental outcomes. Although Winner et al., (2013, p.23) note that "education in the arts is more important than ever, [and that] in the global economy, creativity is essential" they also emphasise the intrinsic value of arts education, arguing that:

> Ultimately, the impact of arts education on other non-arts skills and on innovation in the labour market should not be the primary justification for arts education in today's curricula… The arts are important in their own rights for education. (Winner et al., 2013, p.20)

Considering primary school contexts, these findings reinforce that, although the creative arts may show some limited transfer benefits in academic areas, "the primary justification of arts education should remain the intrinsic value of the arts and the related skills and important habits of mind that they develop" (Winner et al., 2013, p.20).

Damerow (2023, p.100) affirms that "creativity is an autonomous and experimental development of one's personality and abilities separated from duties and requirements of any usable outcome of creativity". She also acknowledges the reality of our European context in terms of recent educational changes that have reconceptualised creativity and critical thinking, deducing them to a skillset and commodity to be bolstered by the labour market (Damerow, 2023), further warning that:

> If we discuss the connection between creativity and critical thinking as labour market skills and the involvement of the OECD, its ratings and changes in European curriculums, we must practise criticism towards this orientation of education, in general and in the arts. For example, Foucault states the view on 'Third World Economies' as a failure of investment into human capital… If arts education creates an ideal student with useful skills, its success can be measured. The question now is whether the outcome of education of the arts, the discourse over aesthetics and potential growing understanding and passion for the arts *should* be measured. (Damerow, 2023, p.100)

This notion of the utilisation of creativity in the arts to reproduce certain skill sets deemed to be of noteworthy value in relation to their transferability to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) reflects a broader instrumentalist framing of the creative arts. Damerow (2023, p.98) notes how "these STEM fields are clearly subjects of economic value". She further argues that:

> The shifting of the semantics changes critical thinking and creativity towards problem solving, the choice out of limited options, positive risk-taking and the possession of abilities needed to fulfil given tasks or requirements of the labour market. The subject produced by its neoliberal self-governance is chameleonic, ready to change its colours to fit into the self-directed enrichment of the quality for its own human capital. (Damerow, 2023, p.97)

Muench et al. (2022, p.1) also note that "creativity is the driving force of technological innovation and sustainable economic growth in the knowledge society". Martins and Popkewitz (2015, p.8) consider the Portuguese context (where increased emphasis has been placed on the development of innovation and creativity within the arts): They examine what they term the "eventualizing" of arts education, and thus "ask about it as an effect to historical practices and power relations – what Foucault spoke about as knowledge/ power relations". Martins and Popkewitz (2015, p.12) postulate the neoliberal educational reforms that "travel across continents to talk about how nations can become 'knowledge societies' through making children become more inventive and innovative". They attest that the arts and creativity are being (mis)appropriated for capitalistic and entrepreneurial gains and as an impetus to amplify attainment in literacy and STEM fields:

> Justified to achieve better results in mathematics, reading or science, the arts are used as disciplinary instruments that will make the child more attentive, motivated, and even better in performing in tests. Arts education is not about artistic competences but about the making of a certain kind of person and about achieving a desired future. This rhetoric is not only present in school but also within the so-called knowledge economy. The latter is framed in the rhetoric of entrepreneurship that is inseparable from creativity and innovativeness. Art becomes one of the most variable techniques of governing one's own conduct. The creative child is the future creative citizen and worker who will believe that his/her interiority and autonomy are the expression of his/her independence, his/her success or failure. (Martins and Popkewitz, 2015, p.10)

Martins (2014, p.122) argues that conceptions of creativity are being utilised for advancements in innovation, in a way that "melts into a technology that governs ways of being a person and defines particular models for acting and thinking in schooling". Martins draws on Foucault's (1991) concept of 'governmentality' to theorise how these neoliberal practices aim to shape or manipulate individuals for an alternative gain:

> To be inscribed within certain discourses of creativity, creative potential, creative learning, or creative teaching is to become an active subject of a particular sort, one for whom the conduction of conduct through the technology of creativity becomes an expression of self-government. (Martins, 2014, p.129)

Michael Foucault's inception of the term 'governmentality' originated in the 1970s as he investigated political power relations. He understood 'government', as an "activity that undertakes to conduct individuals throughout their lives by placing them under the authority of a guide responsible for what they do and for what happens to them" (Foucault, 1997, p.68, cited in Rose, 2006, p.83). Governmentality was "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciousness, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself" (Foucault, 1997, p.82, cited in Rose, 2006, p..84). Foucault, in his chapter entitled *Governmentality* (Foucault, 1991), speaks of the links between government and the power relations existing between the state and society:

> The art of government, as becomes apparent, is essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce the economy – that is to say, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family, and of making family fortunes prosper – how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his

> family into the management of the state. This I believe is the essential issue in the establishment of the art of government: introduction of economy into political practice. (Foucault, 1991, p.92)

Foucault here notes the dynamic of power relations between the 'top down' authority of governance, but also the 'bottom up' (re)representation or *(re)enactment* of governance as society enacts the ideologies accrued upon them, through "government of the self" (Rose, 2006, p.92). Martin's (2014) further reiterates Foucault's notion of power and governing, observing that:

> The exercise of power as Foucault said, "consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (Foucault, 1983, pp.220-1). Creativity could only be read as a way of governing if we consider that this governing pre-supposes and requires the imagination of a free and active subject. (Foucault, 1983a, cited in Martins, 2014, p.123)

Damerow (2023, p.99) argues of the ethical dilemma in governing the creativity the arts, as he warns that "arts education then becomes part of a technique of governing children's and students' thoughts, if we consider the worst outcome for arts education". He also warns of expropriating creativity under the influence of neoliberal interests, at the expense of meaningful creativity and critical thinking:

> Creativity and critical thinking should be prevented from transformation through neoliberal interests. Students should not be taught how to be flexible subjects inside skill-based labour markets. To achieve this, our teaching in arts education should be changed to participate in critique of curriculum changes, educational monitoring and measurability of abilities all that to make these transforming processes a substantial part of arts education, which can be exposed to real thinking and creativity. (Damerow, 2023, p.103).

The provision for and measurement of creativity on the 2022 PISA assessments was a noteworthy addition by the OECD. What were the motivations behind this inclusion? Why is creativity *now* being recognised and valued?

> Creative thinking can have a positive influence on students' academic interest and achievement, identity and socio-emotional development by supporting the interpretation of experiences, actions and events in novel and personally meaningful ways. Beyond the classroom, creative thinking can help students adapt to a constantly and rapidly changing world. Supporting students' creative thinking can help them to contribute to the development of the society they live in, today and as *future workers*

> [my emphasis]: organisations and societies around the world increasingly depend on innovation and knowledge creation to address emerging and complex challenges, giving urgency to innovation and creative thinking as collective enterprises. (OECD, 2023)

The OECD's reappropriation of creativity as a valuable tool to boost enterprise, productivity and a 'knowledge economy' is explicitly presented in their above statement. Creativity here, is conceived as a commodity for innovation and economic advancement; arguably diluting the essence of creativity and the intrinsic value that creativity holds, regardless of its outputs. Although Robinson (2011) was a huge advocate for the provision of creativity in education, he was also aware of the value that creativity held in relation to its potential utilisation in the marketplace, regarding innovation, economic development and changing markets:

> Given the speed of change, governments and businesses throughout the world recognise that education and training are the keys to the future, and they emphasise the vital need to develop the powers of creativity and innovation. First, it is essential to generate ideas for new products and services and to maintain a competitive edge. Second, it is essential that education and training enable people to be flexible and adaptable, so that businesses can respond to changing markets. (Robinson, 2011, p.6).

While the Arts Council England (2014, p.4) places utmost value on the intrinsic value that the arts have on individuals in a holistic sense, it too acknowledges the impact of the arts regarding their economy and 'national status':

> When we talk about the value of arts and culture, we should always start with the intrinsic – how arts and culture illuminate our inner lives and enrich our emotional world. This is what we cherish. But while we do not cherish arts and culture because of the impact on our social wellbeing and cohesion, our physical and mental health, our education system, our national status and our economy, they do confer these benefits, and we need to show how important that is.

The Arts Council in Ireland is a nationally developed Government agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland. While *The Arts Council Strategy 2016-2025* acknowledges the value of the arts as being "central to civic live, as a hallmark of local and national identity, and as a sign and signature of our creativity as a people" (The Arts Council, 2016, p.12). The Strategy also illustrates its strong placement of the arts as tied to marketised ideologies:

> The Arts Council will be more visibly active in promoting the arts and in advocating their social value and economic benefit [as well as] develop a strategy to address our statutory function to promote the arts and to demonstrate their distinctive value across a range of measures: cultural, social and economic. (The Arts Council, 2016, pp.39-40)

The acknowledgement of the 'sign value' (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020), of the wider benefits of the arts, perhaps deduces them to products of extrinsic benefit, over the intrinsic value that they hold.

The wide-ranging benefits of creativity and the arts are evident, ranging from their intrinsic value at an individual level, to their extrinsic value, globally. However, the value that creativity holds for the individual is arguably the most fundamental benefit of providing opportunities for creative expression. Ravitch (2010, p.235) argues for the provision of creative development through the arts with emphasis on the sheer *joy* that creativity brings:

> In the arts, we should agree that all children deserve the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument, to sing, to engage in dramatic events, dance, paint, sculpt, and study the great works of artistic endeavour from other times and places. Through the arts, children learn discipline, focus, passion, and the sheer *joy* of creativity. We should make sure that these opportunities and the resources to support them are available to every student in every school.

Noddings (2003) also challenges the 'standards movement' typified by neoliberal education reform and calls for a more holistic education, whereby emphasis is placed on happiness and the joy of learning. She urges us to "challenge the existing rules by which a society has organized itself" (Noddings, 2003, p.85), shifting from the narrow fixation with "keeping the US strong economically" and providing "every child opportunity to do well financially" (Noddings, 2003, p.84). Hall and Thomson (2017) present the individual and cultural merits of the inclusion of creativity through the arts, offering a more holistic concept of creativity:

> The creative arts position young people as producers of cultures. They offer children and young people – and the adults who work with them – the chance to dream, to experiment, to explore and to experience learning and life though all if their senses, through bodies and mind together, through the cultural media and genres that we have developed and are still developing. The creative arts express and build identities and communities. They incite action and reaction. In capturing ideas and captivating audiences, the creative arts are a source of hope and inspiration. They animate,

> invigorate, and quicken our social life. If the creative arts can awaken our sense of possibilities and rally our energies, they can surely bring this distinctive spark to the process of school change. (Hall and Thomson, 2017, p.183)

Although the promotion of creativity in education may have many benefits for society, culture, innovation, academic attainment *and* the economy, one may argue that the innate values that creativity holds, for the *individual* should be and *must be* to the forefront. This position argues that the inherent creativity that an individual possess, must not be exploited, commodified or misappropriated as a tool for production within marketised agendas.

Research-Informed Insights: How Arts Education Fuels Creativity

As discussed, the Global Education Reform Movement has been characterised over the years by a narrowing of the curriculum, with a heightened emphasis placed on literacy, numeracy and STEM subjects, with a sidelining of creativity and arts education. Caldwell and Vaughan (2011) challenge this actualisation, as they examine empirical research findings illustrative of the clear benefits that creativity through arts education has across the curriculum. This includes (but is not limited to) academic attainment in 'core' subject areas such as literacy and numeracy. Sefton-Green (2011, p.11) attests that "the Arts [are] usually taken as the pragmatic site for creation". To illustrate the benefits that creative arts have in the wider educational context, some of the research findings regarding such, will be examined:

> For many centuries the arts have been at the centre of education and society in a holistic view of human development. In more recent times there has been a bifurcation of endeavour that has led to the arts being sidelined when the curriculum has narrowed or there has been a need to cut public expenditure. This is despite evidence of the contribution the arts make to national creativity and to the wellbeing of the individual citizen. The social and economic costs will be high in nations that have succumbed under these circumstances. (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.17)

A landmark transformative study was undertaken in Western Sydney in New South Wales, in disadvantaged state schools, which did not offer programs in the arts. TSR [The Song Room,

an Australian non-profit organisation, advocating for the creative arts], provided programs in visuals arts, drama, music for children in socially disadvantaged settings:

> An intervention by the national non-profit organisation The Song Room (TSR), with the support of a high-profile foundation (Macquarie Group Foundation) to provide such programs in primary schools has led to gains on almost every measure of student achievement and wellbeing. (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p,3)

The TSR Program, which involved a visual arts intervention within schools, undertaken by artists for a duration of six to eighteen months, illustrated positive impacts on students' wellbeing, outlook, creativity and self-efficacy:

> The primary finding is that participation in a sustained program of high-quality visual arts instruction associated significantly with growth in our indicators of general self-efficacy. The mechanism seems to involve feelings of accomplishment in visual art and diverse positive interactions with peers and expert instructors surrounding the work… Self-efficacious children believe they can be agents in creating their own futures and are more optimistic about what the world has in store for them. The second finding is that the program had effects not only on self-efficacy beliefs, but also on children's originality. (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.51)

To contextualise this study, at the time of research, educational changes in Australia in alignment with the Global Education Reform Movement triggered increased emphasis on an outcomes-based model of education. These shifts resulted in an amplification of testing, and subsequent marginalisation of the creative arts. According to Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.11) this shift was often met with apprehension as:

> Many of the fears in Australia about the dysfunctional effects of national testing, an excessive focus on and unrealistic expectations for standards, the narrowing of the curriculum, and high levels of stress for students and teachers have been borne out in experience in England.

Richard Gill, in response to Australia's preoccupation with testing of literacy and numeracy, argues that:

> Evidence is now available that schools all over the country are cutting back on arts education to devote more time to subjects that make children literate. It can demonstrably be proven that activities used in testing for the national tests destroy individuality, stifle creativity, stultify thought and make all children respond in the same way – a sort of educational circus in which the children are trained animals and the teachers the poorly paid ringmasters. (Gill, 2011, p.15)

Contrary to practices of limiting arts education to boost academic performance, in the context of neoliberal educational reform, Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.1) argue that "the curtailment of arts education not only robs students of the *intrinsic* [my emphasis] benefit of an artistic experience but further reduces the performance of students in literacy and numeracy". Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.59) further attest that:

> Engagement in the arts is associated with increased academic achievement, literacy, IQ, mathematics, and attendance. Moreover, students tend to show improvements on psychological and behavioural indicators such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation and empathy.

Illustrative findings arising from the Australian study, whereby TSR provided programs in visuals arts, drama, music for children in socially disadvantaged settings, are supportive of these sentiments:

- Attendance was significantly higher for the longer-term arts program and initial arts program cohorts in comparison to the students who had not participate in the arts.
- Literacy results were significantly higher for the longer-term arts program cohort in comparison to students who did not participate in arts program.
- Students' grades in science and technology were significantly higher for students who had participated in an arts program compared to those who had not participated in such a program.
- The confidence of students was reported to increase through participation in classes and the performance aspects of the arts program.
- The behaviour of students showed improvement through their participation in the arts program.
- The confidence gained from arts programs was described as 'spilling over' to other areas such as academic studies.
- The arts program had a positive influence on student attendance in all schools in the case studies.
- The program was found to increase the confidence of teachers to teach music. (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, pp.15-16)

Engagement with the creative arts has been shown by a wide body of research evidence to elevate performance on a range of indictors of student achievement and wellbeing (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.17). Caldwell and Vaughan (2011) draw on some of this research:

> Music and arts initiatives have been shown to increase academic outcomes (Bamford 2006; Catterall et al., 1999), increase (IQ) (Schellenberg 2006), improve literacy (Bamford 2006; Hunter 2005; Spillane 2009) and numeracy (Catterall et al., 1999; Hunter 2006; Spillane 2009; Upitis and Smithrim 2003). Participation in the arts has

> been shown to encourage changes within the cognitive functions of the brain (Koelsch et al., 2005; Levitin and Tirovolas 2009; Parsons 2001; Sacks 2007; Schlaug et al., 1995a; Schlaug et al., 1995b; Schlaug et al,. 2005; Sluming et al., 2007; Wetter et al., 2009). (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.47)

Further, there is evidence accumulated through scientific research such as imaging technology for neurobiology, to illustrate how music can directly influence our brains (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011). Wetter (2009, p.372) noted how music can "induce structural and functional variations of central regions of the brain resulting in manifold implications". Drawing on the research of Levitin and Tirovolas (2009) and Parsons (2001), Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.50) observe that "the neural systems underlying music were found to be distributed throughout the left and right hemispheres of the brain". Caldwell and Vaughan (2011, p.50) also consider research undertaken by Sluming et al. (2007) to "support the suggestion that the development and maintenance of musical performance abilities confers benefit on non-musical cognitive domains".

Winner et al. (2013, p.185) ask "why should arts education engender creativity?" They reflect on the work of Hetland, Winner, Veenema and Sheridan's (2013) analysis of visual arts teaching, who hypothesised that "that visual arts teachers continually asked students to take risks, experiment, try new things, and thus to extend themselves beyond what they had done before" (ibid.) They consider that if this discourse is common within arts classes that it may influence children to express their creativity and self-expression (Winner et al., 2013). Winner et al. also draw on an experimental study by Warger and Kleman (1986), who explored the effects of theatre on the creativity outcomes of children aged 6-10 years old, creating two subgroups of children who engaged in creative drama and those who did not. Findings indicated that the subgroups of children engaging in creative approaches "outscored the control group on Torrance's tests of fluidity, originality, and imagination" (Winner et al., 2013, p.194). A second experimental study examined by Winner et al. (2013) considers research by Hui (2006), involving one-hundred and twenty-six 1st and 4th grade children, some of whom were

randomly selected to undertake drama and the control group selected to partake in sports. The study "reported that drama training improved creativity, expressive communication, and creative drawing" and further that children engaging in drama "generated more creative responses, tended to provide more creative drawings, were more expressive" (Winner et al., 2013, p.194). Creating an environment whereby children can think critically, explore and experiment with innovative ways of doing things, is a significant argument for the value of creativity in primary education.

Catterall et al. (1992) examine some key findings from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey data (NELS: 88) which included data obtained from 25,000 students from the United States and examined the profound impact of the arts on individuals. Some of the key findings are outlined below:

- Involvement in the arts and academic success: Positive academic developments for children engaged in the arts are seen at each step in the research – between 8th and 10th grade as well as between 10th and 12th grade.
- Music and mathematics achievement: Students who report consistent high levels of involvement in instrumental music over the middle and high school years show significantly higher levels of mathematics proficiency by grade 12.
- Theatre arts and human development: Sustained student involvement in theatre arts (acting in plays and musicals, participating in drama clubs, and taking acting lessons) associates with a variety of developments for youth: gains in reading proficiency, gains in self-concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others.
  (Catterall et al., 1999, p.2, cited in Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.49)

Creativity and the arts undoubtedly hold intrinsic value, regardless of their impact on academic attainment in other subject areas. However, the wide-ranging benefits of fostering creativity through the creative expression of the arts cannot be ignored. Caldwell and Vaughan (2011) consider a broad body of research that indicates the benefits of the creative arts to overall wellbeing:

> Participation in arts programmes was seen to increase various psychological indicators such as resilience (Oreck et al., 1999), self-regulation (Hunter 2005; Orek et al., 1999), self-esteem (Brice Heath and Roach 1999 ; Hunter 2005; Upitis and Smithrim 2003), identity (Orek et al., 1999), self-concept (Catterall et al., 1999), self-efficacy and motivation (Bamford 2006; Catterall et al., 1999; Hunter 2005). Students who actively

> participate in various arts programs showed improvements in the behavioural indicators of empathy (Catterall et al,. 1999; Hunter 2005), tolerance (Catterall et al., 1999), cooperation (Hunter, 2005), skills of collaboration (Hunter 2005), and communication skills (Hunter, 2005). (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011, p.50).

The benefits that the creative arts have on students' wellbeing and holistic development is a significant consideration regarding the inclusion of the creative arts in schools. Research undertaken regarding the Creative Partnership (CP) programme in England and Wales, examines the impact of the programme, a creative arts initiative, on students' wellbeing (McLellan et al., 2012):

> In the primary schools committed to the CP programme, McLellan et al. found higher levels of student engagement and enjoyment, more opportunities for students to make decisions, more informal relationships in the classroom, more opportunities for genuine student voice in the school, and more flexible approach to the curriculum. In the secondary schools, the researchers found a stronger articulation of the connection between wellbeing and creativity in the CP schools and the championing of student voice. (McLellan et al., 2012, cited in Hall and Thomson 2017, p.72)

Dowling Long (2015), draws attention to the *Arts in Education Charter,* a 'landmark document' launched by the Irish government in collaboration with the DES (2013). This initiative's aim was to embed the creative arts within education, in partnership with education agencies and arts organisations, while recognising the value of arts education in fostering creativity. Further, the launch of *The Creative Arts Programme* (2017), launched by the Irish Government in 2017, illustrates a commitment to the vision that all individuals in Ireland "should have the opportunity to realise their full creative potential" (*The Creative Arts Programme* website, 2025). Alongside this programme, *The Creative Schools Initiative* (2018) was introduced, with the aim of primary and post-primary schools engaging in creative art partnerships, to embed creativity within educational practice. Although the signalling of these creative initiatives and partnerships is welcome, there may be a need for greater financial commitment from the Government of Ireland, Department of Education and external bodies. This investment is crucial to meaningfully embed creative practices, thus fostering a cultural shift away from outcomes-based models influenced by the marketisation of education.

The *Arts Alive: A Literature review to support curriculum specification development for the area of arts education* (NCCA, 2023), further highlights the role of arts education in supporting creativity, wellbeing and holistic development of children in Irish primary schools. Commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023), this report extensively reviews and synthesises literature in arts education, examining relevant thinking and practice. This review reinforces the value of sustained engagement with the arts within primary education:

> Evidence abounds for the importance of the arts in the Primary School Curriculum. The arts curriculum occupies a pivotal space in the context of primary schooling. While supporting and promoting artistic and creative development, participation in the arts facilitates the exploration of feelings and emotions, promoting empathy and wellbeing. A progressive primary arts programme enables children to be creative, to express themselves and to occupy the perspectives and worldview of the other. As they progress through school an arts education helps children to develop skills specific to the individual art form and an appreciation of aesthetic and cultural value (O'Sullivan et al., 2023, p.3)

O'Sullivan et al. (2023) maintain that a broad experience in the creative arts is integral to a child's experience in primary school. Developing creativity among students has the capacity to fuel children's imagination, as well as inspire and enrich their learning. This reinforces the central argument that arts education is fundamental in developing children's creativity, artistic development, freedom of expression, as well as fostering their sense of wellbeing and holistic development in primary education.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored perceptions and definitions of creativity and the potential benefits of fostering creativity within the arts, situated in a broader curriculum. It further investigates how the creative arts are shaped and framed within marketised education systems, providing a conceptual framework for this study, which explores how the educational market impacts creative teaching and learning, within one Irish urban primary school. The impact of the Global

Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021) on creativity within the arts is multifaceted and complex. Key influences of GERM upon education include standardisation, a narrowing of the curriculum (with 'core' emphasis being placed on literacy, numeracy and STEM), an outcomes-driven model, competition, choice and the dominance of performativity culture. The publication of *The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020), as a consequence of a perceived decline in PISA international student assessments (Conway, 2013), heralded a strong message to prioritise literacy and numeracy 'standards', and the 'safeguarding' of 'core' literacy and numeracy skills, over *all* other curricular areas. The DES (2020, p.44) contend that "including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in the curriculum runs the risk that the time available in school for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills may be eroded". Moreover, they assert that "literacy and numeracy are such core skills that time for their development must be safeguarded, sometimes by delaying the introduction of some curriculum areas" (DES, 2020, p.44). These sentiments undoubtedly send a very clear message of the hierarchy of 'core' subjects above other curricular areas, including the creative arts. Thus, signalling the potential sidelining of the creative arts, illustrative of their diminished '(sign) value' (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011) within the educational market. Dowling Long (2015, p.275) considering the impacts of these shifts, cautions that:

> There is a danger that teachers would take time away from the teaching and learning of compulsory core areas, such as music, the visual arts and drama, to focus solely on the task of children's attainment of literacy and numeracy skills.

The subsequent arrival of the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES, 2023) and the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* (DES, 2023), emphasise more creative notions of education: "valuing the process as well as the product of learning". Further, they "recognise children's innate creativity, [and note that], children have creative energy and require lots of opportunities for creative behaviour" (DES, 2023, p.9). However, there is a clear dichotomy between the

ongoing emphasis placed on 'core' competencies, 'standards' and benchmarks of attainment which form the pillars of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020), and the perceived revaluing of creativity with an emphasis on the process of learning, signalled by recent frameworks (DES, 2023).

The recent testing of creativity by the OECD on the PISA 2022 international standardised assessments, signals a reappraisal of creativity as a core competency for the 'knowledge economy', dependent on: "innovation and knowledge creation to address emerging challenges, giving urgency to innovation and creative thinking as collective enterprises" (OECD, 2023, p.140). Perhaps then, the recent refocusing on creativity within the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES, 2023), was not created in "a political vacuum, [but] informed by the priorities, constraints and climate set by the policy environment" Ball (2000, p.8).

However, one may caution against the reframing of "creativity, as a form of human capital, amenable to measurement and ranking in league tables" (Grey and Morris, 2022, p.11), deduced to that of a measurable and outcome-driven skill. Eisner (1972, p.237) cautions that:

> Creativity develops best when protected by the cloak of mystery. To throw a spotlight on, to illuminate each crack and cranny is to rob creativity of its power. In short, creativity is believed by some to be incapable of being understood.

UNESCO (2006, p.3) argues that "Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners". A significant body of research has also been explored, outlining the potential benefits of engaging in the creative arts and their impact, not only for individual development, but also for enhancing learning across the curriculum. Findings include: the potential benefits that the creative arts have on students' wellbeing and efficacy, attainment in literacy and numeracy (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011), cognitive functions (Wetter, 2009), as well as academic success across educational disciplines (Catterall et al., 1999).

Aside from the extrinsic value that the inclusion of the creative arts may hold, we *must* above all else, consider the inherent *intrinsic* value that the fostering of creativity within the

arts holds for individuals. Ravitch (2010, p.235) argues "[within] the arts, children learn discipline, focus, passion, and the sheer *joy* of creativity, [and maintains that], we should make sure that these opportunities and the resources to support them are available to every student in every school".

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

Introduction

From the literature review presented, it seems evident that increased market forces are prevailing, whereby increased pressure regarding accountability and productivity is being placed on teachers regarding meeting measurable educational targets and skills attainment in relation to education; particularly in the 'core' areas of literacy and numeracy. According to the DES (2011, 2020) publication; *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People*, increased emphasis needs to be placed on the development of literacy and numeracy. The strong message appears to be that literacy and numeracy must take priority over the development of other curricular areas, including arts education. The most recent *Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033* (DES, 2024), while placing greater emphasis on digital competencies, creativity and imagination, still prioritises literacy and numeracy standards, stating that "we will have a renewed focus on reducing achievement gaps, ensuring that all our learners have opportunities to develop the skills and competences necessary in each of the strategic areas" (Minister for Education, cited in DES, 2024, p.3). Over a decade since the first publication of this document, I remain concerned that the increased accountability measures that the DES has introduced, with primary focus being placed on skills development and attainment, is resulting in teachers feeling under increased pressure to deprioritise other areas of the curriculum, including creative arts education. I am interested in exploring educators' perceptions of change within this increasingly marketised educational climate, and the

perceived impacts that the educational market is particularly having on the fostering of creativity in the primary classroom.

The title of this thesis is: '*The (Educational) Market: A Longitudinal Ethnography. Exploring its Impact on Creative Teaching and Learning Within the Arts, in One Irish Urban Primary School'.* A key focal point of this research is to examine education as product, then, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement, or GERM (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021; Conway, 2013). Research undertaken critically explores the impact of the educational market (concerning both its *affects* and *effects)* on creative teaching and learning through a longitudinal ethnographic study undertaken in one urban primary school. Especially pertinent to this doctoral area of research is the dilemma outlined by Tanggaard (2011) regarding the meeting of external demands for what Hargreaves and Braun (2013) term *'data-driven improvement and accountability'* and being able to provide *meaningful* opportunities for creativity:

> A dilemma is pinpointed between the demand that teachers conform to centrally defined test systems, and the challenges facing our societies in relation to bringing up pupils and students who dare to take risks, challenge the existing order and create something new. (Tanggaard, 2011, p.219)

Regarding the Irish education system, within the context of the global education reform movement, increased emphasis is continually being placed on learning outcomes and the standardisation of the curriculum. One need only examine the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (DES, 2011, 2021), in contrast to more holistic conceptions of education as promoted through the 1999 curriculum (DES, 1999) and the new *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES, 2023). According to Conway (2013):

> The move toward GERM in Irish education policy reflects a considerable redirection, from a more general focus on standards, a strong emphasis on broad holistic curriculum (particularly at primary level), and an earlier emphasis on moderate rather than stricter accountabilities in Irish education. (Conway, 2013, p.52)

Indeed, with increased emphasis being placed on 'consequential accountability' (ibid.), standardisation and learning outcomes, this study asks: what threats are posed to creativity within education, with emphasis on children's holistic and creative development?

Further, here are some other guiding research questions which frame the research study:

- What are educators' perceptions and experiences of change within an education system that is being increasingly shaped by market forces?
- How do children perceive and explore creativity within their learning experiences?
- What are the key effects, and key 'affects' (which concern the emotive domain), on creative teaching and learning, in one Irish urban primary school?
- How does the increased emphasis on learning outcomes and performativity (exemplified by literacy and numeracy attainment) impact creative teaching and learning?
- What barriers are there for creative teaching and learning in the case study research context?
- What opportunities remain for creative teaching and learning in the case study research context?

Of course, it is imperative that the research design fits such guiding research questions, in order to adequately address these enquiries and reflect key relevant literature in the field. Furthermore, the theoretical framework employed critically guides the research enquiry. This is now examined in detail.

Theoretical Framework and Research Approach

Constructivist Paradigm

A fundamental aspect to consider regarding the undertaking of empirical research is the research paradigm which frames and guides the study. What is meant when we refer to a methodological approach as being rooted in a guiding research paradigm?

> The term 'paradigm' was popularised by Thomas Kuhn (1970). Roughly, a paradigm is an approach to the study of some range of phenomena that involve not only substantive commitments as to the nature of the phenomena of interest but also commitments as to how the phenomena are to be thought about… Kuhn [further] suggests that paradigms may be incommensurable. People with different paradigms see the world differently. (Kuhn, 1970, cited in Green et al., 2009, p.61)

Traditionally, in the 1960s and 1970s, when Kuhn was developing and putting forth his ideas regarding research paradigms, "the dominant view of educational research in countries like the UK and USA was essentially a scientific perspective, with most research adopting statistical, experimental and hypothesis-testing approaches" (Nesbet, 2005, cited in Coe et al., 2021, p.7). However, today "educational research aims to add to existing knowledge in some way, be it through a new discovery, confirmation of previous findings, new theory or enhanced understandings" (Coe et al., 2021, p.11). There has been a paradigm shift regarding the principal methodology of social and educational research, which is now often predominantly *qualitative* in nature and situated within the constructivist paradigm. The guiding paradigm is integral to the research undertaken, as its characteristics and principles underpin and shape the study and the process of systematic inquiry as it evolves (Mertens, 2010). Neale (2021) envisions research paradigms as a cohort of theoretical ideas that guide the methodological approach to research:

> Paradigms are integrated sets of conceptual ideas that achieve a dominant position in social research and provide a methodological blueprint for researchers to follow. As conceptual tools that offer alternative ways to know and understand the social world, paradigms are overreaching, abstract concepts that feed into different research methodologies and practices. (Neale, 2021, p.37)

The theoretical framework that I as researcher have used in the undertaking of this research is grounded in the *constructivist* paradigm. A paradigm of research offers a fundamental explanatory framework, that is guided by epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions that guide the researcher's methodologies of inquiry: "A *paradigm* is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action" (Mertens, 2010, p.7). Further, according to Pollard (2002, p.37):

> A research paradigm is a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions.

The constructivist paradigm holds the epistemological assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and that it is interpretative in nature, as opposed to static and positivist (Schwandt, 2000, cited in Mertens, 2010, p.16):

> The basic assumptions guiding the constructivist paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed by people in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it.

This concept of *attempting* to understand the lived experience of research participants, constructing knowledge based on the individual understanding of the researcher, is in direct contrast to the positivist paradigm of research which supposes that "the world and phenomena are real and independent of perception [and that] there is truth and objective knowledge about the world" (Coe et al., 2021, p.6). Further, "the constructivist paradigm emphasises that research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them" (Mertens, 2010, p.16). The emphasis of the constructivist paradigm is on the analysis and individual understanding of gathered data, whereby findings are constructed by the human mind and influenced by interpretative principles. Knowledge is seen as subjective, based on individuals' own perceptions, and socially constructed:

> Social phenomena are always perceived in a particular way, they have no 'reality' independent of perception. All knowledge is subjective and socially constructed.

> Individual social contexts are unique; generalisation is neither desirable nor possible. (Coe et al., 2021, p.6)

Many of us live in what Schutz (1972, p.74) would refer to as a "taken for granted" reality, in which our culture often conforms to socially agreed norms that ensure social harmony (Berger and Luckmann,1967; Thomas, 1993). However, researchers, using the constructivist paradigm, reject the notion of there being a definitive objective reality, independent of individual understanding and interpretation and call for a deeper analysis and (re)construction of 'reality'. A fundamental guiding principle that defines the constructivist paradigm is its complexity and its qualitative nature. As Coe et al. (2021, p.6) note:

> The complexity, level of interactivity, situational specificity and contextual dependence of social phenomena prevent the traditional concept of causation from being useful or appropriate. Many constructs cannot usefully be quantified; only rich qualitative description can capture their essence. Representations of phenomena must be authentic, based on studying things in their natural setting.

Capturing the essence of the research through rich qualitative descriptions grounded in the natural setting is central to qualitative inquiry. According to Neale (2021, p.39), "interpretative thinking underpins all forms of qualitative enquiry, including qualitative research. These ideas emerged as a foil to the dominance of positivism in social enquiry". Further, Neale (2021, p.37) affirms that:

> The logic of qualitative enquiry, and its engagement with temporal processes, encompass a range of intellectual positions and strands of scholarship that have developed over many decades, stretching back to the 19th century. Ideas about the nature of the social world (its ontology) and the best means to know and understand this world (its epistemology), are enduring themes that are refuted, re-enforced and refined by successive generations of social theorists and philosophers.

A core principle of the constructivist paradigm is that reality is shaped through social interactions, influenced by 'interpretative thinking' (Neale, 2021). Mertens (2010, p.16) notes that "the constructivist label was chosen for this paradigm because it reflects one of the basic tenets of this paradigm, that is, reality is socially constructed". In social research, individuals are seen as active participants who engage with and shape their environment, constructing their

own interpretations of the world. While interpretivism focuses on understanding individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations of reality, the constructivist paradigm of research explores how these understandings are socially constructed within social contexts. As Coe et al. (2021, p.6) note:

> Human beings are active participants in the researched world, interacting with rather than reacting to their environment, constructing situations by bringing their own meanings and acting freely. Social phenomena are more than the sum of their parts and can be understood only holistically.

The critical perspective of the researcher is of key importance too in the constructivist paradigm, whereby analysis of research undertaken is subjective and revelatory, not 'definitive' as in the positivist paradigm. Hermeneutics is a key aspect of the implementation of the constructivist paradigm of research, in that the research generated is constructed using meaning-making through the critical lens and analysis of the researcher (Mertens, 2010). Hermeneutics within ethnography plays a vital role in the field of qualitative research by focusing on the *interpretation* of cultural meanings, aiming to capture the 'lived experience' and construct an understanding of the research:

> Ethnographic *hermeneutics*, the science of understanding – or more accurately, of preventing misunderstanding – involves reducing the re-fraction of images distorted by conventional science's interpretative prism as we translate what we see from one set of cultural symbols (those of our research subjects) to another (those of our audience). (Thomas, 1993, p.5)

Hermeneutics, which originally placed emphasis on the systematic and textual interpretation of religious texts, was developed by the German theologian and philanthropist Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) (Green et al., 2009). The neo-Kantian philosopher of history, William Dilthey (1833-1911), extended the notion of applying this method to history and the human sciences and suggested that hermeneutics provided a methodological foundation to the cultural sciences distinct from natural sciences (Dilthey, 1989). Green et al. (2009) draw on the work of Dilthey (1989), considering the use of hermeneutics in interpreting texts, in endeavouring to understand their meanings by considering their context, as patterns of

interpretation emerge from a sort of back-and-forth analysis. The aim is "not just to sample those that conform to an initial interpretation. One should develop an account of a pattern in the carpet as a whole, and not merely in a narrow part of it" (Green et al., 2009, p.15). Thus, so far, we can see the immiscible lineage between hermeneutics (a method or theory of interpretation), the concept of interpretivism and its connection to the constructivist paradigm of research, as Neale (2021, p.38) reiterates:

> Interpretivists hold that the social fabric of the world is constructed through individuals and groups and their interpersonal and collective beliefs, experiences, events, actions and interactions. It was in classical hermeneutics (Dilthey, 2002 [1910]) that an interpretative approach first found its value, and the idea of lived experience was developed.

Indeed, the complexity of capturing the *lived experience* and conceptualising our social world is personally individualistic, interpretative and socially constructed by its very nature and illustrates the necessity for social researchers to utilise an interpretative framework to explore our complex social worlds. However, to distinguish, interpretivism tends to focus on how individuals understand their subjective experiences, whereas constructivism emphasises how these understandings and experiences are socially constructed and co-created within social contexts. Neale (2021, p.41), considers Bergson's (1910 [1889]) thought process, regarding capturing the 'lived experience', by his imagining of time as being fluid and evolving regarding the social world, rather than static or fixed:

> In *Time and Free Will* (1910 [1889]), Bergson held that the social world exists in a perpetual state of *becoming* rather than *being.* He distinguished between quantitative time *(temps)*, the mechanistic nature of time *(durée)*, the enduring dimensions of time that are lived and experienced.

Research framed by an interpretative lens does not offer absolute or definitive findings; instead, findings are constructed through the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the data, shaped by their understanding of the literature within the research field. The constructivist research paradigm greatly contrasts with the positivist research paradigm, as the constructivist researcher cannot accept the notion that there is a given reality irrespective of people, instead

believing that reality is socially constructed and interpreted. They recognise themselves as potential variables in their own research (Pollard, 2002). To the interpretative and constructivist researcher, reality is a construct of the human mind, where reality can be perceived differently depending on the various viewpoints of individual people (Pollard, 2002, p.38):

> The interpretative researcher sees language as a more-or-less agreed symbolic system, in which different people may have some differences in their meanings. Because of differences in perception, in interpretation and in language, it is not surprising that people have different views on what is real.

Constructivist researchers use data which can be interpretive, usually verbal, based on, for example, interviews, conversations, or fieldwork notes: "Sometimes this can be analysed numerically but more usually it is not open to the quantitative statistical analysis used by positivists. Hence it is described as qualitative" (Pollard, 2002, p.38). The emphasis of the constructivist paradigm is on analysis and individual understanding of data gathered, whereby, as highlighted, findings are constructed by the human mind through interpretative research. Kvale (2009, p.54) examines the qualitative research interview, for example, and supposes *'knowledge as produced*' or 'constructed' within the interview process itself:

> The research interview is a production site of knowledge. Interview knowledge is socially constructed in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. The knowledge is not merely found, minded, or given, but is actively created through questions and answers, and the product is co-authored by interviewer and interviewee. The production process continues through the transcription, analysis, and reporting of the original interviews, with the reported knowledge tinged by the procedures and techniques applied on the way.

Kvale (2009) perceives the constructivist paradigm as being embodied in the actual research process, an integral component within the captured *lived experience* as knowledge is co-constructed and evolves within the research timeline in its entirety, including post-analysis. It is worth reiterating that research undertaken within the constructivist paradigm does not offer absolute or definitive findings; rather, the findings are presented as interpretations constructed

by the researcher's understanding of data gathered in the context of the research field and literature reviewed. Pollard (2002) states that:

> The interpretative researcher cannot accept the idea of there being a reality out there which exists irrespective of people, for reality is a construct of the human mind. People perceive and so construe the world in ways which are often similar but not necessarily the same. So there can be different interpretations of what is real. (Pollard, 2002, p.37)

I chose the constructivist paradigm as the framework for this research because the data, consisting of observations, educators' responses, feelings, and opinions, is inherently interpretative and socially constructed, aligning with the essence of social research. The focus lies on interpreting the data that has been gathered and co-constructing knowledge and developing interpretation, in order to synthesise meaning and understanding in relation to the research focus. Mertens (2010, p.18) reiterates that constructivist researchers reject "the notion that there is an objective reality that can be known and taking the stance that the researcher's goal is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge". Coe et al. (2021, p.6) note how "[the process of] research is inductive, following an unending dialectical cycle of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Hypotheses and theories emerge in the course of researching; they are critically tested and refined against data and theory". The generation of hypothesis and theory as well as the analysis and subsequent construction of understanding is intertwined as part of the research *process*, which evolves over the course of the study.

Critical Ethnography

My research is informed by constructivist paradigm and is guided specifically by critical ethnography, that is distinct from, yet comparable to, traditional forms of ethnography. Ethnography is a form of naturalistic inquiry concerned with social research. Ethnographic research methods offer a unique lens for exploring the complexities of human experience beyond what traditional quantitative methods can capture. Furthermore, critical ethnography has the potential to challenge and transform our understanding of cultural norms and

perceptions and through its critical lens, challenging 'taken for granted' realities. According to Thomas (1993, p.5), "ethnographic emancipation, the act of cultural liberation, loosens the unrecognised symbolic constraints that restrict our perception, interpretation, discourse, and action. It alerts us that things are not always as they seem".

The term *ethnography* refers to a description of people or cultures (Denscombe, 2007). Ethnography as a research approach originates from the works of social anthropologists "whose aim was to provide a detailed and permanent account of the cultures and lives of small, isolated tribes" (Denscombe, 2007, p.62). Anderson-Levitte (2009) puts forward that "ethnography is a real philosophy of research rather than a specific method; it depends primarily on the two broad methods of participant observation and open-ended interviewing" (cited in Green et al., 2007, p.279). Trondman et al. (2018, p.31), conclude that:

> Essentially, ethnography is a methodology which entails 'being there' as an ethnographer 'in the field' among 'the people' under the study with the ambition of understanding and theorizing the meaning of lived experience. This is done for the sake of bringing illuminating and surprising answers to puzzling research questions which, in turn, prepare the ground for social criticism.

Ethnography as a research approach aims to capture the lived experience of social groups and cultures, therefore "it requires the researcher to spend considerable *time in the field* among the people whose lives and culture are being studied" (Denscombe, 2007, p.62). Denscombe notes that ethnography is an approach whereby the researcher needs to immerse oneself deep into the field of the researched, whereby "the ethnographer needs to share in the lives [of the research participants] rather than observe from a position of detachment" (Denscombe, 2007, p.62). This observation is particularly pertinent in relation to this research undertaken, especially because as a permanent member of staff in the study school, I am intertwined and immersed within the culture that is the centre of enquiry. Trondman et al. (2018, p.36) view ethnographic research with a focus on four "*interdependent elementary forms":*

- *Lived experience* as 'data' or 'evidence' concerning the people under study in the actual phenomenon of interest.

- *Cultural understanding* as showing the cultural resources and materials that provide meaning in those lived experiences of schooling, in both present and past forms.
- *Theorization* as imaginatively and analytically worked out abstractions and synthesized interpretations by the ethnographer, which seek explanations of actual lived experiences and meanings in a partly different but not completely alien way compared with the people under study.
- *Social Criticism* as the prospect or even anticipation of focused critique of what is and the exploration of alternatives. [offering a] critique of 'what actually is' toward perhaps an explicitly argued 'what ought to be' (Trondman, 2015).
(Trondman et al., 2018, p.36)

The rationale of the use of critical ethnography as a research approach is that it allows an intense analysis of participants in their naturalistic educational context (Mertens, 2010; Green et al., 2009). The complex and multilayered nature of ethnography as a research approach must also be recognised:

> The social and educational world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions. It is multilayered, and not easily susceptible to the atomization process inherent in much numerical research. It has to be studied in total rather than in fragments if a true understanding is to be reached. (Cohen et al., 2007, p.167)

Arguably, the notion of capturing a 'true understanding' has positivist connotations, rather, in the constructivist paradigm (especially relating to social research), meanings, are viewed as being multifaceted, complex, as well as being co-constructed by the researcher. Being a member of the educational community where the research was undertaken, allowed me valuable and in-depth, access to the research field. Fostering a sense of trust and openness with research participants is of key significance in undertaking ethnographic research. As Charmaz (2012, p.21) observes, "research participants allow ethnographers to see their worlds and their actions within them. The goal of much ethnography is to gain an insider's depiction of the studied world". A sense of naturalistic inquiry is key to ethnographic work, whereby the research endeavours to capture the 'lived experience' within the field: "social research should be conducted in natural, uncontrived, real-world settings with as little intrusiveness as possible by the researcher" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.168). Furthermore, Denscombe observes that:

> In order to produce a pure and detailed description, ethnographers will wish to avoid disrupting the situation by their very presence as observers in the field. The ethnographer's concern with naturalism derives from the wish to study things in their natural state – undisturbed by the intrusion of research tools or the disruption of experimental designs. (Denscombe, 2007, p.70)

As an ethnographer whose goal it is to capture the naturalistic setting as unobtrusively as possible, this may still be challenging. As a participant of the school culture which I am researching, it is inevitable that I may influence school life (the research field) through various initiatives or activities that I may initiate or promote. As an ethnographic researcher immersed in this culture, it is crucial to recognise that I am not 'detached' from the context that I am studying.

Advantages of ethnography as a research approach include the researcher's ability to engage in direct observation, gather detailed data, ensure ecological validity and especially allow the researcher the ability to compare and contrast between other data obtained (Denscombe, 2007). Spindler and Spindler (1992), emphasise the significance of prolonged observation in the field regarding ethnographic research, in order to amplify validity. They argue that researchers must remain in the field long enough to witness reoccurring events, allowing them to assimilate the data, recognise patterns and construct deeper understandings:

> Spindler and Spindler (1992) suggest that ethnographic validity is attained by having the researcher *in situ* long enough to see things happening repeatedly rather than just once, that is to say, observing regularities. (Spindler and Spindler, 1992, p.65, cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p.181)

By adopting an ethnographic approach to this research, I sought to capture, as far as possible, and as accurately as possible, the 'lived experience' of daily school life within this study. While this approach offers valuable insights, it also presents inherent challenges. Although I aimed to stay as unobtrusive as possible within the field, my role as a researcher is inherently subjective and interpretative, as is typical in social research. Additionally, my dual role as researcher and member of the school community inevitably influences my perspective as my

daily participation in that culture shapes my observation and understanding of these 'lived experiences'.

While the ethnographer aims to capture the 'lived experiences' within the research context that he/she is engaging in, it is important to reiterate that the ethnographer is present too in the *construction* and analysis of data gathered from the field. Denscombe (2007, p.62), notes that:

> There is some acknowledgment that an ethnographer's final account of the culture or group being studied is more than just a description – it is a construction. It is not a direct 'reproduction', a literal photography of the situation. It is rather, a crafted construction which employs particular writing skills (rhetoric) and which inevitably owes something to the ethnographer's own experiences.

Considering this viewpoint, ethnography is therefore an approach that resonates comfortably with the constructivist paradigm, which emphasises knowledge as co-constructed and re-constructed by the researcher alongside the participants through interactive analysis, placing meaning-making to the forefront.

Ethnographic observation and analysis of the research field, through keeping a detailed ethnographic journal for example, enabled me, as the researcher, to gather data from informal discussions with teachers, as well as observe and analyse daily practices within the field. In addition to observing elements of school life as seen in the 'typical' school days, I also aimed to capture elements of practice inside teachers' and students' classrooms. I observed teachers' lessons centred on creativity, specifically relating to the arts, including music, drama and the visual arts. This enabled me to view elements of creative practice within the classrooms. Ethnography is significant as a research approach as it allows me to not only capture teachers' and students' opinions, ideas and feelings, but also allows for analysis of elements of actual practice, as mentioned. This approach enabled me to examine both educational pedagogical assumptions and practices. Social research, however, is not straightforward by nature. Cohen et al. (2007, p.167), note the complexities of social and educational research, and thus argue for a complete study, not simply singular elements, in order to gain a fuller understanding:

> The social and educational world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions. It is multi-layered and not easily susceptible to the atomisation process inherent in much numerical research. It has to be studied in total rather than in fragments if a true understanding is to be reached.

Malinowski (1922) notably emphasise the comprehensive perspective that ethnography offers as a research approach:

> One of the first conditions of acceptable ethnographic work certainly is that it should deal with the totality of all social, cultural and psychological aspects of the community for they are so interwoven that not one can be understood without taking into consideration all the others. (Malinowski, 1922, xvi, cited in Denscombe, 2007, p.62)

The totality of ethnographic research, as outlined by Malinowski, is a key stance upon undertaking an ethnographic research approach. Furthermore, the significance of trying to understand the point of view of the participants involved in the study is paramount. According to Denscombe (2007, p.63):

> Ethnography tends to emphasise the importance of *understanding things from the point of view of those involved.* Rather than explaining things from the outsider's point of view, there is a concern to see things as those involved see things – 'to grasp the native's point of view'.

The constructivist research paradigm, as outlined at the start of this chapter, frames my ethnographic approach. I accept my subjectivity in the analysis and interpretation of observations. This study places strong emphasis on the ongoing construction of meaning and the complex and nuanced process of interpretation. The depth of *critical* ethnography, which moves beyond traditional notions of ethnography, views the multifaceted nature of writing, both within the field and about the field, as valuable in the co-construction of meaning and interpretation:

> The world of ethnography has expanded in ways that were unimaginable a decade ago… Qualitative researchers in a variety of disciplines – medicine, law, education, the social sciences, and the humanities – have since found *writing as a method of inquiry* to be a valuable way in which to learn about themselves and the research topic. (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p.959)

Critical ethnography delves deeper into the research field, examining political influences and questioning existing paradigms and assumptions:

> Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge, and action. It expands our horizons for choice and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas. Critical ethnographers describe, analyse, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centres, and assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain. Critical scholarship requires that commonsense assumptions be questioned. (Thomas, 1993, pp.2-3)

Further, expanding on the distinctions between conventional ethnography and critical ethnography, Thomas and O' Maolchatha (1987) observe that:

> At its most general, *conventional ethnography* refers to the tradition of cultural description and analysis that displays meanings by interpreting meanings. *Critical ethnography* refers to the reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgements of meaning and method to challenge research, policy, and other forms of human activity. (Thomas and O' Maolchatha, 1989, p.147, cited in Thomas, 1993, p.4)

In essence, "conventional ethnography describes what is; critical ethnography asks what could be. Conventional ethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it; critical ethnographers do so to change it" (Thomas, 1993, p.4). Further, "critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose" (Thomas, 1993, p.4). Thomas (1993) further elaborates on the distinction between conventional ethnography and critical ethnography:

> Conventional ethnographers generally speak *for* their subjects, usually to an audience of other researchers. Critical ethnographers, by contrast, accept an added research task of raising their voice to speak *to* an audience *on behalf* of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to the subjects' voice. As a consequence, critical ethnography proceeds from an explicit framework that, by modifying consciousness or invoking a call to action, attempts to use knowledge for social change. (Thomas, 1993, p.4)

Thomas' (1993) description of critical ethnography also resonates with the transformative research paradigm, as well as my guiding framework, the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2010). There is also a strong sense of social justice related to some notions of critical

ethnography. Thomas (1993) observes how some critical ethnographers strive to promote social justice and challenge oppression:

> Critical ethnographers use their work to aid emancipatory goals, or to negate the repressive influencers that lead to unnecessary social domination of all groups. *Emancipation* refers to the process of separation from constraining models of thinking or acting that limit the perception of and action toward realizing alternative possibilities. (Thomas, 1993, p.4)

Occasionally a 'problematisation' of issues raised through the research may be a form of action in itself (Foucault, 1991). Although my guiding research paradigm is predominantly constructivist, my study does resonate with the tenants of the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010), as it offers a sort of problematisation of critical discourses influenced by wider political and cultural influences within the field (Foucault, 1991). Critical ethnography recognises the complex nature of research and acknowledges biases, political influences and calls for increased awareness and consciousness of the issues under investigation. Thomas (1993, p.8) argues that "we live in a reasonably literate information society, but we lack full awareness of the symbolic sources and processes that shape our daily lives". He further states that:

> Conventional ethnographers recognise the impossibility, even undesirability, of research free of normative and other biases, but believe that these biases are to be repressed. Critical ethnographers instead celebrate their normative and political position as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change. (Thomas, 1993, p.4)

While ethnography aims to capture the 'lived experiences' of the participants of the study, it also encompasses the depth of emotion and imagination related to these experiences. As Pink (2021, p.118) notes, "ethnographic approaches get under the surface, to investigate experience, emotion, memory, imagination and more that is simply not visible through surveys and statistics, observational or interview methods". A noteworthy element of critical ethnography is the use of, what Willis (2007) terms, the 'ethnographic imagination'. According to Willis (2007, p.17) the ethnographic imagination "challenges all forms of humanism by

demonstrating how meaning can be seen as externally constructed. It certainly provides a stern warning against essentialism" (Willis, 2007, p.17). Language is a social construct, and it is important to consider how language influences 'meaning making' and our understandings:

> The ethnographic imagination must take note of 'language paradigm' approaches, appreciating how language and wider signification processes might work and taking seriously the challenges they pose to other, often simply assumed humanist positions on the generation of meaning. Just *how* are the latter supposed to operate? But taken too literally and projected, as they are being, into a science of the cultural, language paradigm approaches can be very damaging. They do not help but hamper our understanding of the ethnographically imagined sensuous creativity of cultural practices. (Willis, 2007, p.18)

According to Willis (2007), then, an ethnographic imagination should focus on the process of creative meaning-making within research practices that are rich and deeply immersive, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the field that extends beyond surface-level observations. By embracing this approach, ethnography can uncover the deeper layers of communities of practice in the context of the research. It is through the lens of the 'ethnographic imagination' that the researcher can engage in creative interpretation and construct meaningful insights from the data.

Considering the strong emphasis on creativity and the arts throughout this thesis, the use of visual ethnography was also explored. In visual ethnography, the emphasis is placed on fostering a deeply engaged and creative approach to analysis by using visual discourses. This method supports the constructivist paradigm in which meanings are created in the context of both the production of digital and physical research materials, including photographs, the symbolic and physical environment, and samples of work. Visual ethnography values not only the systematic analysis of visual research materials to uncover patterns in everyday life but also provides intuitive insights regarding the 'lived experiences' of participants. As Pink (2021, p.152) notes:

> The priority in visual ethnography is to develop an engaged and reflexive attention to analysis. The approach recognises the constructedness of social science categories, the contexts and relationships through which digital and physical visual research

> materials are produced and the contingencies and relationalities through which academic meanings are made. It attends equally to the hunches through which insights grow and stories are told through our fieldwork experiences and materials as it does to systematically viewing and comparing sets of materials that enable us to understand patterns and contingencies of life as lived across groups and communities of people.

Pink (2021, p.154) also acknowledges that "in visual ethnography analysis is not a stage in research, but it is a practice that is engaged throughout the research process". The researcher's open-mindedness and intuition are important in constructing understandings arising from the use of visual ethnography. It is important that the researcher is open to many ways of 'seeing', to go beyond what is obvious at surface-level insights. As Pink (2021, p.155) notes:

> The quality of visual ethnography analysis lies not in regulating the process by which it is undertaken, but in the interpretive and intuitive sensibility and skills of the ethnographer. This requires an openness to the unexpected, the ability to look beyond the obvious, to have an eye for those insights that enable us to get to the core of what we need to know, and which will enable us to see things differently, and to follow them through the fieldwork and materials.

Visual ethnography can deepen understanding and contribute to the construction of meaning by allowing the researcher to connect it with other data sources and methods used in the study. By synthesising various data sources and analytical approaches, more meaningful connections are made which enhances the overall understanding of the research:

> Analysis in visual ethnography entails making links between different research experiences and materials such as photography, video, field diaries, ethnographic writing, participant produced or other relevant written or visual texts and objects. These different media and materials represent different types of knowledge and ways of knowing that may be understood in relation to one another, and which it is the ethnographer's responsibility to bring together to create meaningful narratives and connections. (Pink, 2021, p.155)

Pink (2021) thus draws our attention to the benefits of using visual ethnography to create a multifaceted and in-depth approach to research, adding a richness to narratives explored and depth of understanding in interpreting the data.

Research Design

Rationale and Context of the Research

The research undertaken consists of a longitudinal ethnographic study in the educational context in which I, as researcher, have been based for over sixteen years. It is an Irish urban designated disadvantaged national school. The use of critical ethnography as an approach was particularly relevant to this study, enabling me to capture the 'lived experiences' within the educational context and generate theories and understandings in relation to the research focus (Mertens, 2010). The primary data was collected between 2013 and 2016. Qualitative pilot interviews and focus groups were undertaken in 2013, followed by additional interviews and focus groups from 2014 to 2016, along with critical ethnographic classroom observations. Critical ethnography was adopted as an ongoing approach, which spanned over the longitudinal timeframe, up until 2025, exploring school culture within the field, with visual ethnography (Pink, 2021) enriching and adding further depth to data collection and analysis. While this study highlights key ethnographic observations to illustrate changes over time, I as researcher remained continuously engaged within the field, enabling longitudinal insights into developments in the school culture. The initial findings capture the 'lived experiences' and perspectives of participants during the earlier period, while the more recent ethnographic observations reflect evolving insights across the extended timeframe, up to submission in 2025. Care has been taken to analyse and interpret these findings in relation to the timeframe of data collection, while also engaging with literature published across this period. As with all ethnographic research, the findings represent a '*snapshot'* of the participants' viewpoints and experiences within specific settings and may not encompass all perspectives or changes across the entire time span. Nevertheless, the longitudinal ethnographic nature of this study does offer valuable insight into how changes in educational policy and marketised shifts can impact school culture over time.

Furthermore, access was a very practical issue for me to consider. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p.109), "access is a key issue and is an early factor that must be decided in research. Researchers will need to ensure that access is not only permitted but also, in fact, practicable". Since I work full-time in the educational context where my research is based, my access to the research field was extensive, making the data collection and analysis process both enriching and fruitful. Undoubtedly with 'back yard research' (Malone, 2003) too comes ethical considerations, some of which will be explored later.

A key goal of research was to explore teachers' conceptions, perspectives, and opinions concerning the evolving role of education as it increasingly aligns with market-driven principles, and how these impacts creativity within arts education. Specifically, I wished to ascertain educators' perceptions of change within an increasingly marketised education system and to gather their perspectives on how these changes impact opportunities for creativity in arts education. I was also interested in eliciting educators' responses to the DES directive on literacy and numeracy as outlined in *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* (DES, 2011, 2020), and to explore the implications of this directive in relation to the fostering of a creative and holistic education for the child. In addition to eliciting educators' opinions and beliefs in relation to this study, I also sought to critically examine elements of practice within the chosen research field through the lens of critical ethnography. This enabled me to examine both pedagogy and practice within the research field. Although I inevitably, as researcher, possess personal opinions and biases regarding the research topic, I endeavoured to minimise interview bias (while acknowledging that my position is inevitably subjective) by asking open-ended questions and without (I hoped) leading the participants. However, it was inevitable that my personal opinions might shape my analysis, for example, through the use of critical discourse analysis during interviews or while analysing and the general interpretation of data.

Ethical considerations were of course taken into account, for example, receiving ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee at UCC and receiving written permission from the school and participants prior to the undertaking of research (see appendices 12).

In the realm of educational research, framed by the constructivist paradigm, adopting a critical approach is integral, as Coe et al. (2021, p.10) observe:

> Educational research is critical in the sense that it actively seeks to question its own claims, assumptions and methods, and those of others. Where explanations are offered, the research process seeks to verify them, generating and testing alternatives. Obvious and popular perceptions or explanations are treated with caution and subjected to scrutiny.

I elicited participants' ideas and responses through adopting a degree of flexibility in the interviews as they evolved. However, I refrained from expressing any personal opinions during interviews lest I unduly lead or influence the participants' perspectives. Naturally, while analysing and interpreting data, I used a constructivist framework, interpreting the findings through my dialectic engagement with participants' perspectives in relation to the research focus. However, every effort was made to interpret data as authentically and representatively as possible to ensure that the research findings were evidenced by the ideas and practices of the participants.

This critical ethnographic study, involved close observation within the educational context; gathering data from informal discussions with teachers and keeping a detailed ethnographic journal (field notes). These approaches certainly offered strong insights into the research questions, while increasing validity of the research during the data analysis process. As well as undertaking interviews and focus group interviews with participants, I observed day-to-day practices influenced by school policies, interactions among students, teachers and management staff, as well as undertaking four classroom observations of lessons focusing on creativity in the Arts (visual arts, music and drama). Observing practice (as well as eliciting participants'

thoughts and responses in interviews) was of key importance in constructing an understanding of the research field and in interpreting the data gathered. As Walford (2018, p.18) notes:

> Observation of naturally occurring events, in classrooms for example, can form a written account in field notes and provide an alternative account of participants' perspectives and understandings. What people do is sometimes very different from what they say they do, and it is part of ethnography that these disjunctures are noted.

In undertaking research, it was of immense importance that numerous research methods were used. The guiding research approach for this study is ethnography, using interviews with research participants in addition to focus groups as methods to offer deep insight into the research questions, as well as capturing rich accounts of the 'lived experience'. While the interview is an interactive process relying on the co-construction of data, it is important to note the limitations of interviews in terms of validity within the research process, in so far as perception is subjective and also participants may only be willing to share select information. As Walford (2018, p.24) notes:

> We know that interviewers and interviewees co-construct the interview and that the replies to questions are produced for that particular occasion and circumstance. Interviewees will select their words with care (as in other formal occasions) and will moderate what they have to say to the particular circumstances. If we put to one side the epistemological question of whether or not there is any ultimate 'reality' to be communicated, the interviewee may have incomplete knowledge or faulty memory. They will always have subjective perception which will only give what they are prepared to reveal about their subjective perceptions of events and opinions. These may be at some considerable distance from any 'reality' as others might see it.

Therefore, fostering a good rapport between the researcher and participants is important, as well as utilising observations within the field to co-construct a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences.

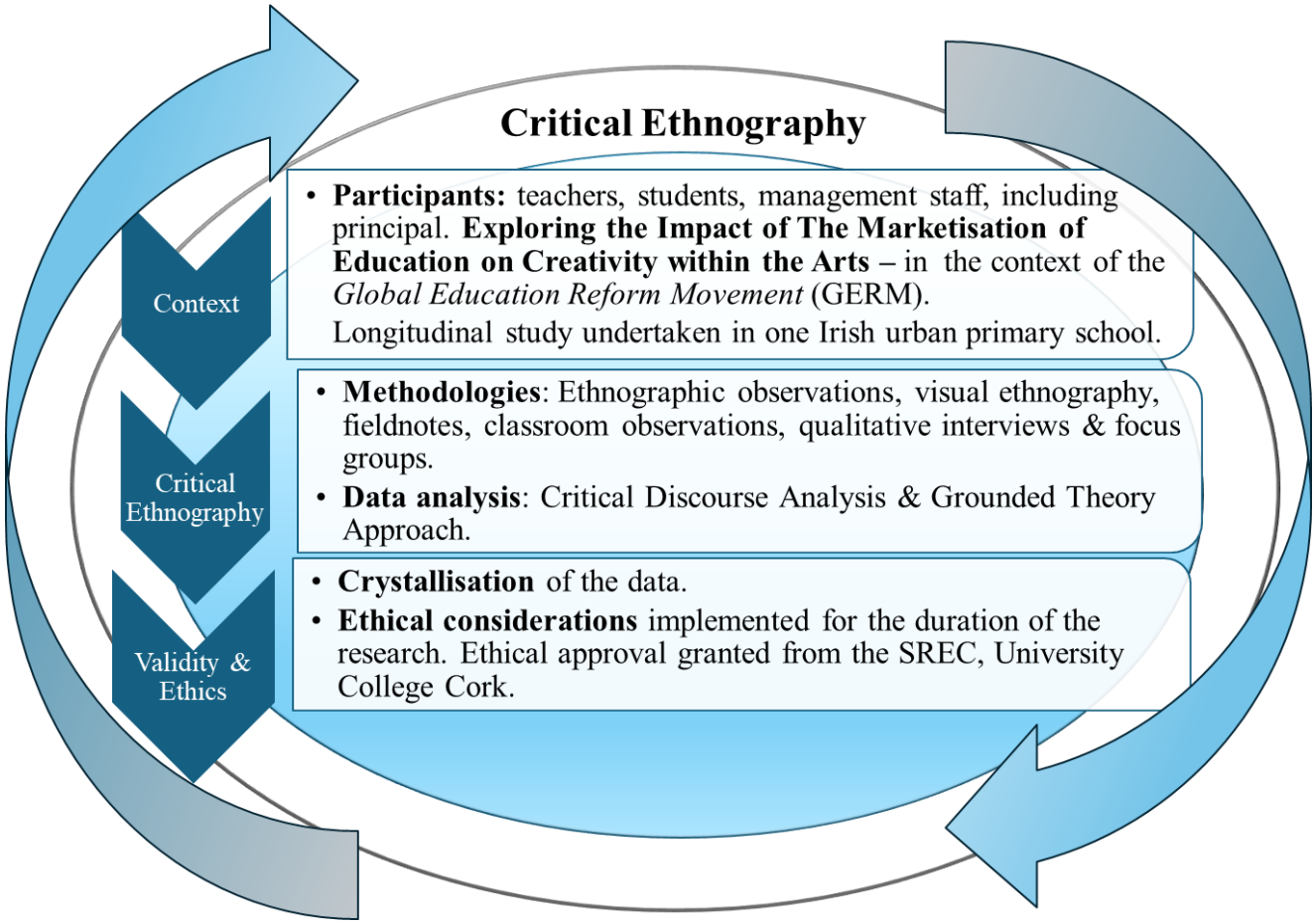


Figure 2: Methodological overview of the study

Sample

This critical ethnographic study was undertaken in the primary school in which I teach, a senior designated disadvantaged national school, in an urban setting. Convenience sampling or opportunistic sampling (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, cited in Cohen et al., 2007) was used in this study. There are undoubtedly ethical considerations associated with conducting 'backyard research' (Malone, 2003) such as power relations, confidentiality and anonymity issues as well as the consideration of researcher subjectivity. However, my experience as an educator in this research context over for sixteen years, provided significant advantages, such as extensive access, daily immersion in the field and comprehensive observation of and engagement in cultural practices.

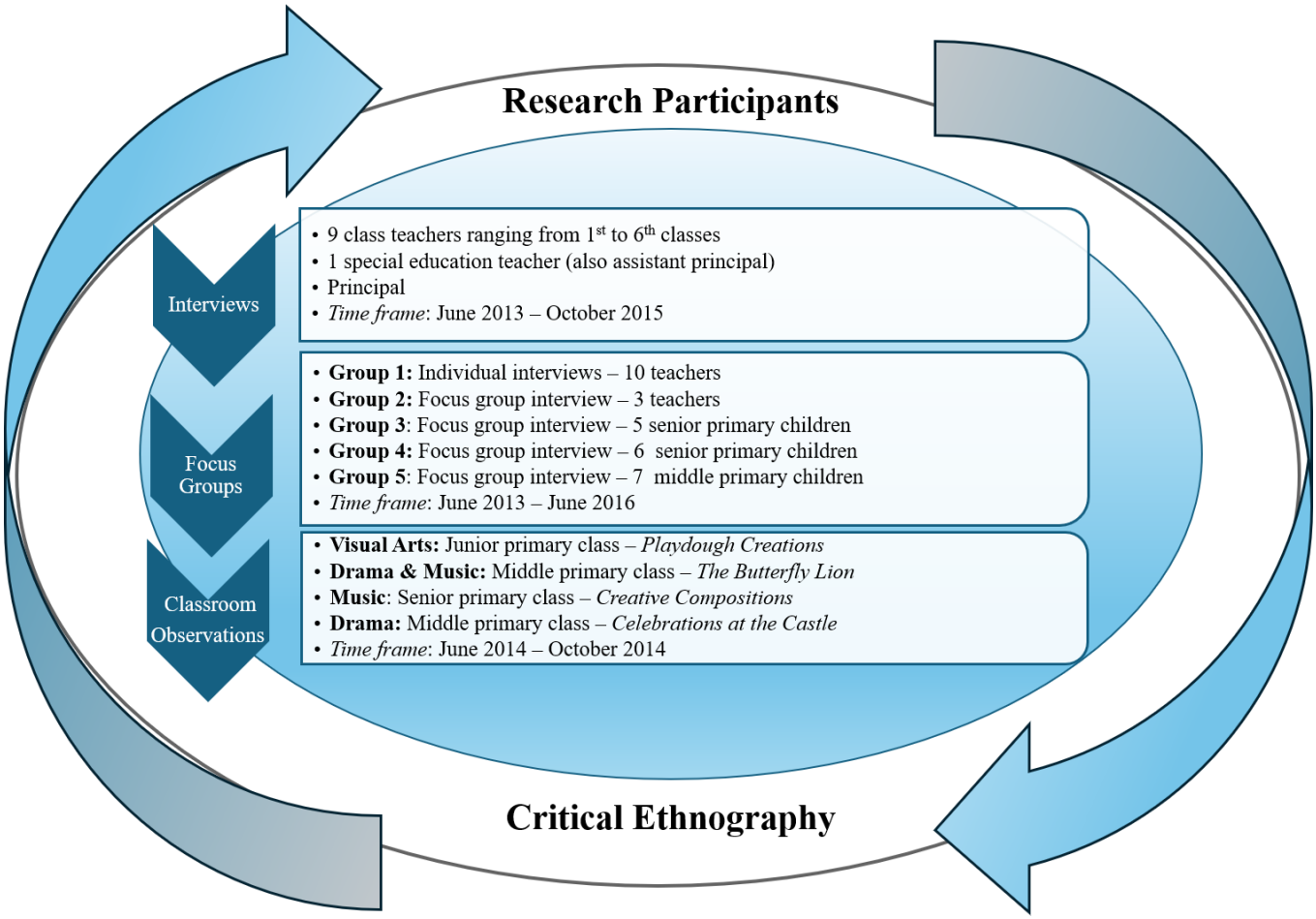


Figure 1: Participant details and demographics

The study sample consists of various educators within the school, including mainstream teachers, learning support teachers, management staff such as the assistant principal and principal, as well as the students attending the school. The staff participants varied in their levels of experience, with some being novice teachers, others having several years of experience, and some approaching retirement after decades in the profession. Notably, a significant proportion of participants had worked at the school for over ten, twenty, and even thirty years. I undertook semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups with nine mainstream *teachers* and one special education teacher (who also held the role of the assistant principal), eighteen *students* and the *principal*. The research consisted of ten individual interviews with teachers and four focus groups, one with teachers and three with students from

middle and senior primary years. Further, ethnographic observations were undertaken within four classrooms, from lower, middle and senior primary, to ensure a diverse and representative sample. Critical ethnographic observations explored creative teaching and learning within the arts, focusing on visual arts, drama and music. As previously noted, lower primary refers to 1st and 2nd classes, middle primary to 3rd and 4th classes and upper primary to 5th and 6th classes. To protect participant anonymity, exact class groupings were not specified, and all participants were assigned pseudonyms.

As the school is a senior primary school the classes range from first to sixth classes. The diversity and variety of participants enabled a comprehensive and wide-ranging investigation pertaining to the research. Ethical considerations were central to ensuring participants' voluntary involvement in this study, and these will be further discussed in a later section.

Pilot Testing

Before conducting research in the field, it was crucial for me to undertake a pilot study to test the data collection methods, ensure the research design was effective in gathering the necessary data, and identify any potential issues with the methodology. This also allowed me to evaluate any improvements needed before proceeding with the main study, thus increasing the quality of the research methods used in gathering data. According to Mertens (2010), researchers can gather insights by conducting pilot interviews and focus groups, noting participants' engagement with the formatting of questions. Based on the findings from the pilot study, the researcher may choose to refine, revise, or clarify certain interview and focus group questions, adjusting their scope or adding detail for greater clarity. It was crucial to provide participants with letters pertaining to informed consent and assent, regarding the research. These letters outlined a detailed description of the study's objectives, as well as an overview of the potential benefits and risks that the research might pose to participants (see appendices 1-6). Coe et al.

(2021 p.39) state that "once you are happy with your selection of methods of data collection and analysis, a pilot study can help you refine the techniques and tools you plan to use". This for me, was a significant benefit of undertaking the pilot study. Coe et al. (2021, p.39) make some valuable observations regarding the practicalities of undertaking pilot studies, as well as the benefits of this valuable learning process:

> You should plan to conduct your pilot study in a situation as close as possible to that of the actual research and preferably where participants are willing to play and active role in suggesting improvements to research instruments. This process will take you away from the 'drawing board' and bring you closer to the research context, enabling you to fine-tune your research plans to the realities of the research situation. You may also decide to pilot your intended data analysis methods by conducting analysis on a section of the data collected during the pilot study.

As well as piloting the interviews and focus groups, I also piloted the data analysis methods and approaches used, which I found to be highly beneficial for several reasons. It allowed me to identify areas that needed refinement, gain deeper clarity on my research focus, and make informed adjustments to the overall research design. By analysing the initial emerging data, I was also able to see emergent themes and patterns arising from the data, which helped me to gain insights and clarity in relation to the research focus, thus allowing me to explore the impacts of the educational market on creativity in the arts. Additionally, the pilot study was hugely rewarding in that it allowed me to see the research 'come to life' and provided an opportunity to envision and refine the direction of the study going forward.

Research Methods and Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative Semi-structured Interviews and Focus Group Interviews

Due to the qualitative and interpretative nature of the research study, I felt that the use of qualitative interviews and focus groups with a sample of mainstream teachers and students from the study school, offered in-depth insights into participants' personal opinions, views,

reactions and responses in relation to the research question. According to Denscombe, (2007, p.174-175):

> When the researcher needs to gain insight into things like people's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences, then interviews will almost certainly provide a more suitable method [of research] – a method that is attuned to the intricacy of the subject matter. Interviews lend themselves to the collection of data based on opinions, feelings, emotions, experiences, sensitive issues and/or privileged information.

In-depth interviewing of research participants is fundamentally driven by the belief that every individual's story holds value and significance. As Seidman (2019, p.9) states: "at the heart of in-depth interviewing is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (Seidman 2019, p.9, cited in Coe et al., 2021, p.233). Furthermore, "through interviewing, it is possible to learn the experiences of others and to understand better the meaning those experiences hold" (Coe et al., 2021, p.233). There are many advantages to undertaking semi-structured interviews, as they can allow for freedom of expression and spontaneity of the interviewees whereby individual expression can also be taken into consideration. According to Denscombe (2007), semi-structured interviews offer many advantages to the researcher, including increased flexibility, whereby the development of ideas and increased freedom of speech may be endorsed. Furthermore, "allowing interviewees to speak their minds is a better way of discovering things about complex issues" (ibid., p.176).

Cohen et al. (2007) consider the interview to be a flexible tool for data collection, allowing a variety of communication methods to be used; verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. Although the order of the interview may be preconceived, spontaneity may still occur, and the interviewer can press not merely for full answers but also for reactions regarding complex and multifaceted themes. Echoing the sentiments of Kvale (1996), Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.349), conceive that, "the use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as granted between humans, often through conversation".

Individual interviews offer a unique and in-depth interaction among individual participants and the researcher, gaining a comprehensive understanding of an individual's impressions or experiences, as they provide extensive and detailed information. However, Mertens (2010) also notes that while interviews offer greater flexibility, they can be time-consuming both in conducting and transcribing. Traditionally, academic interviews typically focus on one-to-one interviews; however, focus group interviews have become increasingly used as a valuable research tool, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.150) note:

> While academic interviews have generally been one-to one interviews, there is today an increasing use of focus group interviews. Social researchers employed group interviews in the 1920s, but widespread use of group interviewing first took place after the 1950s, when market researchers developed what they termed "focus group interviews" to navigate consumer motives and product preferences.

Cohen et al. (2007) note that focus groups are a type of group interview, but not in the typical back-and-forth exchange between the interviewer and participants. Instead, the emphasis is on group interaction as members discuss a topic provided by the researcher, resulting in a shared perspective rather than individual opinions.

> Hence the participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge – the participants' rather than the researcher's agenda can predominate. It is from the *interaction* of the group that the data emerge. (Cohen et al., 2007, p.376)

The use of focus groups in addition to individual interviews may offer increased insight and depth into participants' opinions and beliefs regarding the research topic, while giving participants an opportunity to interact and communicate in a group, often encouraging a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, adding a further richness to the research data collected. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.150):

> [Focus group interviews are] characterised by a non-directive style of interviewing, where the prime concern is to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic in focus for the group. The group moderator introduces the topics for discussion and facilitates the interchange. The moderator's task is to create a permissive atmosphere for the expression of personal and conflicting viewpoints on the topics in focus.

Gibbs (2021, p.241) argues that benefits of focus group interviews include "discovering the collective perspective, the synthesis and validation of ideas and concepts, the involvement of diverse groups of people and potentially a large number of participants". Mertens (2010) also points out that the "reliance on interaction between participants is designed to elicit more of the participants' points of views than would be evidenced in more researcher-dominated interviewing" (Mertens, 2010, p.240). Focus groups indeed may be advantageous to the researcher in quickly and reliably gathering participants' perspectives, efficiently obtaining a broad and detailed range of information in a short period, and effectively communicating essential insights about topics. This is a very attractive benefit of using focus groups in addition to individual interviews. Furthermore, the group interaction allowed for in focus group interviews may further stimulate the participants' thoughts, opinions and ideas in relation to the topic of discussion. Therefore, this collective exchange may offer more fruitful insights, and thus more data for analysis. If participants demonstrate contrasting views, this can create valuable opportunities for deeper discussion, as participants may feel compelled to elaborate on their opinions and beliefs when engaging with different perspectives. As Gibbs (2021, p.241), also observes:

> The benefits to focus group participants themselves should not be underestimated. People may feel strongly about a topic and may enjoy discussing it with others who share some of their concerns, they may also enjoy group debate on a topic in such a way that they feel empowered by the group dynamic. Participants in focus groups may feel able to talk about sensitive topics in a way in which they would not do in an individual interview, and they may gain strength from the energy of a group setting.

However, Mertens (2010) also points out challenges, including the increased complexity of analysing numerous participant responses, the necessity of a skilled facilitator to maintain safety and guide the discussion, and the increased scheduling complexity compared to individual interviews (due to scheduling multiple participants). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.150) also observe that:

> The aim of the focus group is not to reach consensus about, or solutions to, the issues discussed, but to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue. Focus group interviews are well suited for exploratory studies in a new domain, since the lively collective interaction may bring forth more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive, interviews.

Ultimately, one of the greatest strengths of focus groups is their interactive nature, whereby collective collaboration and opinion holds as much significance as individual viewpoints:

> The distinguisher of focus groups is that they are *interactive*, the group opinion is at least as important as the individual opinion, and the group itself may take on a life of its own not anticipated or initiated by the researcher. (Gibbs 2021, p.240)

Although focus group interviews may be somewhat contrived in their nature, Cohen et al. (2007, p.376) argue that this is both their strength as well as their weakness:

> Focus groups can be contrived settings, bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particular given theme or topic, where the interaction with the group leads to data and outcomes. Their contrived nature is both their strength and their weakness: they are unnatural settings yet they are very focused on a particular issue and, therefore, will yield insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward interview, they are economical on time, producing a large amount of data in a short period of time, but they tend to produce less data than interviews with the same number of individuals on a one-to-one basis.

Another noteworthy benefit of focus groups is their ability to facilitate change, either during the discussions or afterward. Gibbs (2021) notes how focus group research can lead to shifts in educational policy, practice, or theory, as new ideas often emerge through participant dialogue, and these participants may be capable of driving change themselves. Through the problematisation (Foucault, 1991) of pertinent issues in the field, participants may initiate future action, impacting change within the educational context. This further resonates with the concept of educational 'refraction' (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, 2016), conceptualised as a form of mediation in relation to existing dominant cultural practices. It is through sharing of discourses, narratives and deliberation of ideas that the seeds of future thought and action as sown.

Focus group interviews may also offer a valuable insight into children's beliefs and opinions, (which were a valuable part of my research), as well as providing a more comfortable space for children to share discuss their ideas:

> Group interviews of children might be less intimidating for them rather than individual interviews. Eder and Fingerson (2003) suggest that a power and status dynamic is heavily implicated in interviewing children; they have little in comparison to the adult. (Eder and Fingerson 2003, p.34, cited in Cohen et al., 2007, p.374)

The richness of data that may emerge from focus group interviews is hugely significant as well as providing children an opportunity to engage on a meaningful level with their peers, using language that is relevant and appropriate to them:

> Group interviews with children enables them to challenge each other and participate in a way that may not happen in a one-to-one, adult interview and using language that the children themselves use. (Cohen et al., 2007, p.375)

It was very interesting to witness children's ideas emerge through the interaction that the focus group interviews afforded them. Focus groups may offer a safe and supportive space for children to engage in discussion and express their student voice.

Researchers have an important responsibility to ensure, as far as possible, that participants are comfortable and are not under any undue pressure during the interview process. Fostering a trusting and respectful relationship among the researcher and interview participants is of vital importance. As Walford (2018, p.23) notes:

> Most ethnographers will make efforts to reduce the pressure that the interviewees may feel. They will try to explain the nature of the interview and, hopefully the interview is only conducted once some previous relationship has been established. An unthreatening location will be chosen, and the interviewer will be prepared to respond to some of the questions that the interviewee wants to ask.

Interviews and focus groups provided a valuable opportunity for direct engagement with participants, allowing them to express and share their ideas and 'lived experiences' freely in a safe and trusted space. These opportunities significantly enhanced the richness of the data gathered and deepened my understanding of their viewpoints, which significantly contributed to the depth and quality of the research.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a technique shaped by the work of French structuralists, including Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Lacan, and Roland Barthes, along with critical poststructuralists such as Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, and Michel Foucault, (Coe et al., 2021). The focus of discourse analysis is on the construction of meaning from discourses obtained from literature or research (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Cohen et al. "discourse researchers explore the organisation of ordinary talk and everyday explanations, and the social actions performed in them" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.389). Discourse analysis is not seen as merely a method but rather a more comprehensive approach to undertaking research:

> Discourse analysis is not a single method, but instead a series of complementary techniques focusing on the interpretative 'reading' of a sample of media texts in order to expose the dominant *episteme* (knowledge), assumptions, ideologies or values underwriting them. (Coe et al., 2021, p.330)

I used critical discourse analysis as an analytical approach throughout my research to assist me in conceptualising the data, for example. What distinguishes critical discourse analysis from conventional discourse analysis is its focus on examining how power dynamics and political influences shape social practices in complex ways:

> Critical approaches [to discourse analysis] go further and treat social practices, not just in terms of social relationships, but also in terms of their implications for things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power… In fact, critical discourse analysis argues that language-in-use is always part and parcel of, and partially constitutive of, specific social practices and that social practices always have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power. (Gee, 2011, p.68)

Language is a powerful and complex force that shapes society. It is more than merely a tool for communication and is shaped by power dynamics that constructs one's subjectivity. As Richardson and Pierre (2005, p.961) note:

> Language is how social organisation and power are defined and contested and the place where one's sense of self – one's subjectivity – is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses – competing ways of giving meaning and of organising the world – makes language a site of exploration and struggle. Language is not the result of one's individuality; rather language constructs one's subjectivity in ways that are

> historically and locally specific. What something means to individuals is dependent on discourses available to them.

Critical discourse analysis, then, is a particular approach to discourse analysis which moves beyond mere descriptive discourse analysis (Gee, 2011). The goal of critical discourse analysis is not to merely describe how language works or to offer deeper explanations. Researchers who use critical discourse analysis also "want to speak to and, perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world. They want to apply their work to the world in some fashion" (Gee, 2011, p.9). The subject of my thesis is imbedded in political and social issues; therefore, the use of critical discourse analysis is pertinent. There is therefore a dichotomy at play between descriptive discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. According to Gee (2011, p.9):

> People who take a descriptive approach to discourse analysis often think that a critical approach is 'unscientific' because the critical discourse analysis is swayed by his or her interest or passion for intervening in some problem in the world. People who take a critical approach often think that a purely descriptive approach is an evasion of social and political responsibility.

The significance of the context of the research and spoken or written word cannot be underestimated: "Discourse analysts arrest that no media text is ever 'neutral' or outside the trappings of language or ideology" (Coe et al., 2021, p.330). Cohen et al. (2007, p.389) echoing Habermas (2002), argue that words and sentences are never "disembodied from context, but rather, their meaning derives from the intersubjective contexts in which they are set". The use of critical forms of discourse analysis, examine the semiotics of language through social interactions as well as policy documents and written texts. The complexities of these 'understandings' are core to the process of critical discourse analysis:

> Language both reveals and conceals; and even the most benign cultural symbols may possess potential threats. We create meanings and choose courses of action within the confines of generally accepted existing choices, but these choices often reflect hidden meanings and unrecognised consequences. (Thomas 1993, p.3)

The use of critical discourse analysis, alongside grounded theory, was the principal approach to data analysis used to critically interpret findings from the research that I undertook, ranging from analysis of DES and school policy documents, literature, interview and focus group transcripts and dialogues obtained from field notes.

Further, it is important to note that critical discourse analysis is an essential approach to use throughout the entire research process (including the live data phase), not just during the post-data collection phase. Discourse analysis was valuable tool to use in the undertaking of qualitative research as I, as researcher, endeavoured to synthesise meanings and decipher findings from the data gathered, during and after the data collection process. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.129) also acknowledge the significance of the context regarding interpreting meaning in interviews. They state that "the live interview situation, with the interviewee's voice and facial and bodily expressions accompanying statements, provides a richer access to the subjects' meanings than the transcribed texts will do later on" (ibid., p.129). Therefore, in engaging in critical discourse analysis, it is also important to take more than the 'transcribed' words into consideration. The context of the interview, the body language and subtle messages that the interviewees communicate explicitly or implicitly is of key importance in deducing meaning. Furthermore, the critical stance of the researcher is integral in discourse analysis, whereby the construction of meaning and interpretation of discourses by the researcher is of a subjective nature, in the context of the constructivist paradigm.

Critical discourse analysis was used as an analysis approach to examine how language and discourse within qualitative research reveal underlying patterns, power relations and meanings relevant to research questions. Rather than seeking to merely confirm a hypothesis, it is important as a researcher to remain reflexive, looking for assimilation and convergence of the data gathered from various sources to strengthen validity of research findings. Gee (2011, p.124) notes that:

> A discourse analysis argues that certain data supports a given theme or point (hypothesis). In many cases, for the individual piece of work, convergence and linguistic details are the most immediately important aspect of validity – that is, showing that answers to a number of questions and linguistic details converge to support analysis.

Conversely, as a researcher it is significant too to examine any analysis of data that has contra-indications to previous trends in research findings. Gee states that: "It is important, too, that the researcher openly acknowledges if any answers to these questions or any linguistic details support opposing conclusions" (Gee, 2011, p.124). Convergence is a key aspect regarding validity outcomes from use of critical discourse analysis, whilst simultaneously acknowledging any discourses that are in conflict to the research hypothesis.

Critical discourse analysis, therefore, is an excellent approach to use in the analysis of qualitative research. However, the researcher needs to be mindful to use critical discourse analysis ethically in interpreting and constructing meanings and/or findings of the research undertaken (and taking in to account possible contra-indications of research findings). Regarding use of critical discourse analysis in social research, it is important to note that the context of the research undertaken is also of paramount importance. Gee (2011) refers to discourses as having *situated meanings* in relation to what the researcher already knows about the overall context in which the data occurred. Therefore, analysis of data and semiotics (the study of signs), and deductions made from analysis need to be contextualised in the field in which the research was undertaken. Data is never separate from its context and thus the context of the data being analysed must be to the forefront when analysing data and interpreting findings and conclusions.

Ethnographic Analysis using Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has become a popular choice of methodology for researchers engaging in social and qualitative research. According to Denscombe (2007, p.88), "the approach originated with the work of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and, in particular, their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, which was published in 1967". According to Thomas and James (2006, p.25), "the original impetus for the formulaic guidance of grounded theory came from the desire to gain the respect and trust of 'scientific' social scientists in the 1960s – to be able to talk about procedures, reliability, validity and so on". What exactly *is* grounded theory approach?

> It's an approach dedicated to generating theories. In this sense it contrasts with approaches concerned with testing theories and is different from research whose main purpose is to provide descriptive accounts of the subject matter. It is an approach that emphasises the importance of empirical fieldwork and the need to link any explanations very closely to what happens in practical situations in the 'real world'. (Denscombe, 2007, p.89)

As described by Strauss and Corbin (1994), grounded theory is seen as "a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed" (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p.273, cited in Mertens, 2010, p.236). Also, "there can be little doubt that it has been a major – perhaps *the* major – contributor to the acceptance and legitimacy of qualitative methods in applied social research" (Thomas and James, 2006, p.2). Grounded Theory has many benefits in ethnographic research including a shift towards more open-ended and constructive data collection and analysis, whilst too enhancing the rigour and depth of the research process. As Charmaz (2012, p.33) notes:

> Grounded theory methods move ethnographic research toward theoretical development by raising description to abstract categories and theoretical interpretation. In the past, ethnography suffered from a rigid and artificial separation of data collection and analysis. Grounded theory methods preserve an open-ended approach to studying the empirical world yet add rigid rigor to ethnographic research by building systematic checks into both data collection and analysis. The logic of grounded theory entails going back to data and forward into analysis. Subsequently you return to the field to gather further data and to refine the emerging theoretical framework.

As stated previously, empirical research (especially regarding the use of fieldwork) is a fundamental aspect of the grounded theory approach (Denscombe, 2007). The central role that fieldwork plays in grounded theory resonates strongly with that of an ethnographic approach whereby it serves as an essential approach for qualitative data collection in 'real' social contexts. For this reason, I wondered whether the use of grounded theory would complement the ethnographic approach which guides my research. A central belief framing grounded theory is the notion that theories should be 'grounded' in empirical research (Denscombe, 2007). According to Glaser (1999, p.840):

> Grounded theory tells us what is going on, tells us how to account for the participants' main concerns, and reveals access variables that allow for incremental change. Grounded theory is *what is*, not what should, could or ought to be.

Although grounded theory is associated with qualitative research and aims to capture *"what is"* (Glasser, 1999, p.840), as a qualitative researcher engaging in research framed by the constructivist paradigm, surely capturing 'what is' may be problematic due to the constructivist nature of qualitative analysis? We can endeavour to capture what appears to be, however there is, as previously mentioned, no absolutism in the constructivist paradigm of research. Thomas and James (2006) also express issues with the perceived positivist epistemological connotations associated with the notion of 'discovery' of reality in grounded theory approach. This will be elaborated on further. In the grounded theory approach "the emergent theory is grounded in the current data collection and analysis efforts" (Mertens, 2010, p.236). As Mertens (2010, p.236) further notes:

> Because the initial or emerging theory is always tested against data that are systematically collected, this approach to research has been called the *constant comparative method*. It was developed specifically for the purpose of developing theory based on empirical data.

The use of grounded theory in ethnography offers complexity and a lens through to construct understandings and examine the process within the field:

> Grounded theory ethnography gives priority to the studied *phenomenon or process* – rather than to a description of a setting. Thus, from the beginnings of their fieldwork, grounded theory ethnographers study what is happening in the setting and make a *conceptual* rendering of these actions. A grounded theory ethnographer likely moves across settings to gain more knowledge of the studied process. (Charmaz, 2012, p.22).

Building on Charmaz's perspective, the use of grounded theory as an analysis approach in this ethnographic study has allowed me to focus on the underlying processes within the educational context, exploring patterns and themes emerging from the data to gain a deeper conceptual understanding of the impacts of the marketisation of education on creative teaching and learning within the arts. Framed by the use of critical ethnography, I systematically analysed patterns in the data, through the use of open coding and the constant comparative method, within a grounded theory approach (Mertens, 2010). By utilising a constant back-and-forth analysis (repeatedly revisiting the data and generating insights from emerging themes), I was able to identify key themes that were directly grounded in the data. For example, I engaged in in-depth readings of ethnographic field notes and participant responses from interview transcripts, to reveal patterns related to their shared 'lived experiences' regarding the influence that the marketisation of education had on their cultural identities, experiences and practices, including its impact on creativity in arts education. This process was informed by my reflexivity and awareness of my role as a researcher, recognising that my longstanding position as a teacher within the field and my interest in the research area, informed both the identification and interpretation of patterns. Throughout this process I remained attentive as to how my own positionality, assumptions and perspectives may have influenced data interpretation and analysis, ensuring that insights were grounded in the data. This process enabled me to generate theoretically informed insights that were contextually grounded, whilst also acknowledging the nuanced and multi-faceted nature of the research.

Divergences within Grounded Theory Approach

Since the concept of Grounded Theory was first introduced, the original founders evolved their ideas in somewhat different directions. This difference highlights two possible perspectives that exist within the Grounded Theory approach:

> On one hand there is Glaser's version (Glaser, 1978, 1995, 1999), which rests on the belief that: (a) the researcher should maintain a distance and independence from the data; and (b) the meaning of the data will emerge inductively from the data if studied using a suitably neutral methodology. This is really quite positivistic in outlook. Contrasting with this, there is Strauss's version (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998), which is more in line with interpretivism, in that the role of the researcher is to go looking for the meaning that the data hold, possibly probing beyond their superficial meaning. Things like 'coding paradigms' provide a fairly extensive and detailed framework that is intended to help the researcher *make* sense of the data; that is, to interpret the data in a systematic way. (Denscombe, 2007, p.102)

As a researcher, when considering using grounded theory as an approach to research, it was of paramount importance that the varying understandings and uses of grounded theory approaches were considered, so that the approach used fit with the intended research paradigm framing the study. As previously mentioned, the research which I undertook is qualitative in nature and is framed within the constructivist paradigm of research (Mertens, 2010). Thus, I resonate with Strauss's version (Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998) of grounded theory approach, which emphasises the interpretation of data by the researcher, whereby coding merely acts of a means of assisting that interpretation, not offering absolute findings. Mertens, (2010, p.237) considers Charmaz' (2006) constructivist view of grounded theory approach for use in qualitative research:

> Charmaz (2006) recommends adopting more of a constructivist approach to grounded theory that recognises that the categories and concepts are not inherent in the data, awaiting the researcher's discovery. Rather, the researcher creates the categories and concepts as the result of interaction with the field and the questions that are asked.

However, Thomas and James (2006), criticise the notion that grounded theory can be constructivist in nature, due to the highly prescribed methods of coding and analysis that it uses, and also due to the epistemological associations with 'theory', 'ground' and 'discovery'.

Although Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.202) challenge this perspective, offering a constructive description of what grounded theory entails, as follows:

> The purpose of grounded theory is not to test existing theory, but to develop theory inductively… The goal is the development of categories that capture the fullness of the experiences and actions studied. Data instances are constantly compared for similarities and differences, which lead to sampling of new data and writing of theoretical memoranda. (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.202)

Grounded Theory Through a Constructivist Lens

Glaser and Strauss's original formulations of Grounded Theory approach were crucial in helping qualitative researchers legitimise their methods of inquiry by offering clear, structured strategies through a systematic coded research process (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). One may wonder whether this approach may be incompatible with a constructivist approach to research. However, in contrast to forms of analysis such as content analysis, "the codes in grounded theory approach do not need to be quantified but enter a qualitative analysis of the relations to other codes and to context and action consequences" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.202). This offers an analysis process that is constructive, more open-ended and allows for greater interpretation of the data. This interpretative perspective of grounded theory, alongside my use of critical discourse analysis of the data, enabled me as a researcher to approach the data through a constructivist lens and construct understandings that embraced the nuances and complexities of the research context.

Charmaz (2000, 2006) has developed a modified interpretative version of grounded theory which she coins as constructivist in nature, which "takes a middle ground between postmodernism and positivism" (Charmaz, 2000, p.510, cited in Thomas and James, 2006, p.5). However, Thomas and James (2006) argue that "the problems with grounded theory preclude any possibility of modification or retrenchment" (Thomas and James, 2006, p.5). They argue that "'ground' with its intimations of solidity and fixity, simply does not mix with

'construction', with its contrasting intimations of the tenuous, the mutable, the interpreted" (Thomas and James, 2006, p.5). Grounded theory exemplifies the generation of theory from the 'ground' or field of research, therefore, has its foundations in generating theory directly from the research data (Denscombe, 2007, Mertens, 2010). According to Strauss and Corbin, (1998, p.34, cited in Thomas and James, 2006, p.18):

> One must remember that because *emergence* is the foundation of our approach to theory building, a researcher cannot enter an investigation with a list of preconceived concepts, a guiding theoretical framework, or a well thought out design. Concepts and design must be allowed to emerge from the data.

Thomas and James (2006) ask "how are grounded theorists to quarantine themselves, as social selves, from the data they are analysing and re-analysing to enable 'theory' to emerge? And how can they transcend this and move outside it to stand on neutral 'ground'?" (Thomas and James, 2006, p.18). In social qualitative research, I wonder how it would ever be possible for a researcher to enter an investigation *without* "a list of preconceived concepts, a guiding theoretical framework or a well thought out design" (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.34, cited in Thomas and James, 2006, p.18). Undoubtedly, the data obtained from qualitative inquiry is crucial in generating understandings through analysis of the data. However, within the context of qualitative research framed by the constructivist paradigm, it is both inevitable and essential for the researcher to embrace their subjectivity and draw upon their own *interpretation* of the data in constructing meaning. This is especially relevant to ethnographic approaches as the researcher is participating in the 'lived experience' among the participants of the study. Although Bourdieu (1988) cautions that researchers still need to maintain some objectivity regarding their subjective positioning in relation to the research. Constructivist research is interpretative in nature and therefore reverberates the epistemological assumption that knowledge and meaning are co-constructed (Mertens, 2010). However, the epistemological notions of grounded theory seem to be at odds with this as it views knowledge as something to be "discovered" (Thomas and James, 2006).

It is my view that the interpreter and interpretation are indissoluble, as a researcher's interpretation still emerges from their engagement with, and construction of meaning, from key data sources. However, I feel that this somewhat contrasts with the notion of truth being grounded in the data, 'waiting' to be discovered. Thomas and James (2006) argue that 'discovery' involves revealing phenomena that already exist but are not easily observable; it deals with uncovering things that are present, though hard to find: "Discovery implies a clean lineage from thing to thought and an uncomplicated correspondence between the two" (Thomas and James, 2006, p.23).

Furthermore, the actual coding procedures of grounded theory are argued by Thomas and James (2006) to be very damaging to the complex nature of social research. Thomas and James (2006, p.25), argue that "if one is freed from methodological constraint, one is in turn freed to depend more on one's experience, more on Dilthey's *geistige Welt* – on all the things of the mind in the world". Charmaz (2000), in contrast, argues that her version of grounded theory encourages researchers to continually re-engage with the data, allowing fresh perspectives and insights to be constructed over time. Charmaz (2000, 2006) focuses then on the constant re-construction of meaning obtained from the data. However, as Thomas and James (2006) question, why does Charmaz (2000) feel the need to label this form of constructivist research as grounded theory?

The threat that the grounded theory approach poses to a researcher's judgement and subjectivity within social research is also presented by Thomas and James (2006), as they ponder Eisner's sentiments:

> As Eisner reminds us, there is in much scientific and social scientific endeavour the highly problematic assumption that procedural objectivity (that is, the attempt to eliminate the scope for judgement) will lead us to ontological objectivity (that is, seeing things the way they *really* are). As he puts it, 'consensus achieved through procedural objectivity provides no purchase on reality. It merely demonstrates that people can agree' (Eisner, 1993, p.53). In grounded theory, a set of 'neutral analytical procedures replace the 'neutral' controls and treatments of the experimental situation

> in the hope that they will provide the same guaranteed route to an uncontaminated correspondence. (Eisner, 1993, p.53, cited in Thomas and James, 2006, p.15)

As I reflected upon these perspectives, I found myself questioning whether the procedures of grounded theory would constrain or inhibit my judgement as a researcher, rather than offer a helpful structure to facilitate a deeper understanding. One may also consider that some structure or procedures are surely needed to offer a framework for the complex task that is data analysis. However, I do believe that Thomas and James (2006) and Eisner (1993) do offer some very thought-provoking considerations regarding the epistemological and ontological nature of such methods, advocated by grounded theory. These considerations have important implications for the freedom of interpretation afforded to the researcher, whose research is framed by the constructivist paradigm. Ultimately, I felt confident in using grounded theory informed methods, alongside critical discourse analysis throughout my research. Together these approaches can offer deep and rich insights into the data, supporting the generation of theory and conceptual understanding emerging directly from the data, framed through the lens of critical ethnography.

Ethical Considerations

Upon undertaking research, it was imperative that key ethical issues were taken into consideration. Cohen et al. (2007, p.69) note that "researchers have a duty of trust placed in them by the participants to use privileged data appropriately, not least for the improvement of the condition of the participants". As a researcher, it was of paramount importance that I recognised the immense responsibility that I had to ensure that all research undertaken by me met the highest ethical standards in accordance with University College Cork's *'Code of Research Conduct'* (2010, 2021). Oney key consideration for example, is that the "intrusion into the privacy of participants must be kept to the minimum necessary to fulfil the purposes of the research" (UCC, 2021, p.14).

Upon examining potential ethical issues relating to my research, it was of vital importance to consult the aforementioned *Code of Research Conduct* (2010, 2021) and *The Social Research Committee* (2012) guidelines, in addition to other scholarly articles, which enabled me to critically reflect on these issues. These will be briefly explored and include the following:

- Obtaining informed consent.
- Privacy and confidentiality/anonymity issues.
- Respect for the rights and dignity of research participants.
- The avoidance of harm.

In today's global research landscape, research integrity has been brought to the forefront, particularly with the publication of the revised *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (2017), which highlights its importance:

> Research Integrity (RI) is at the centre of attention on the international research landscape. Following publication of the revised European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2017) and the revised National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland (2019), the UCC Code of Research Conduct has been updated to ensure alignment with both the national and European policy. A responsibility of the research community is to formulate the principles of research, to define the criteria for best practice to maximise quality and rigour and to respond appropriately to threats to, or violations of, research integrity (EU Code, 2017, cited in UCC, 2021, p.2).

University College Cork (2021) outlines the fundamental principles that form the foundation of the EU Code (2017), which are essential for all researchers to follow upon undertaking research:

> The EU Code specifies four basic principles that underpin all research integrity and good practice in carrying out research, which we endorse here. These are principles that all scientific and scholarly researchers and practitioners must observe directly in performing their own individual research, and in dealings with research partners and the audience that receives their research reports. These principles are:
>
> - Reliability in ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources.
> - Honesty in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full and unbiased way.
> - Respect for colleagues, research participants, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment.

- Accountability for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision and mentoring and for its wider impacts. (UCC, 2021, p.5)

According to Denscombe (2007, p.147), "the importance attached to research ethics is evident in the fact that most researchers will need to get prior approval for their investigation from a committee". Prior to undertaking this research, I sought ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee at The School of Education, University College Cork (see appendix 12). The Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC), at University College Cork, "has responsibility for ethical oversight of non-clinical research involving human participants" (UCC, 2012, p.5). Research overseen by the Social Research Ethics Committee might include "direct or indirect interaction with human participants for the purpose of data collection using research methods such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, and focus groups" (UCC, 2012, p.5).

I outlined a comprehensive overview of my study for consideration by the *Social Research Ethics Committee* at University College Cork and was granted ethical approval on the 10th of June 2013 (see appendix 12).

The Research Process and Informed Consent

Having been granted ethical approval from the *Social Ethics Research Committee* at UCC, and prior to undergoing research, I wrote to the principal and Board of Management of the school in which I based this research, seeking permission for the research to be undertaken (June 2013 and June 2014, see appendices 1 and 3). It was imperative that the principal and chairperson of the Board of management gave written permission to allow research to be undertaken. Power relations are often very significant in relation to social research. Malone (2003) speaks of 'gate-keepers' of the research; in other words, individuals who hold the initial power to grant or deny permission for a study to proceed. In the context of my research, the principal and the

Board of Management acted as 'gate-keepers', exercising their authority in deciding whether or not the study could be conducted. Ensuring that the principal and Board of Management had adequate information and detail regarding the research was of key significance regarding this process (appendices 1 and 3) and permissions were granted in June 2013 and June 2014.

It was also vital that written permission was sought from participants regarding semi-structured interviews, focus groups and classroom observations prior to their undertaking and that informed consent and assent were given. Neale (2021) emphasises the importance of informed consent in qualitative research as "an ongoing process rather than a once-off event [that should be revisited throughout the study] with participants at key intervals" (Neale, 2021, p.144). I discussed key areas pertaining to the study with participants prior to and during the informed consent process and revisited these discussions at appropriate points in relation to interviews, focus groups and classroom observations. I also informed participants that they were welcome to ask questions at any stage and that I was available to provide clarification or address any concerns that they may have had. Furthermore, issues of confidentiality, as well as participants' dignity and autonomy, need to be respected throughout:

> While the local and national ethical protocols will vary in detail, the cardinal principles of research ethics are designed to ensure that participants are fully and transparently informed and participate freely in the study, that their confidentiality is protected, and that their dignity, autonomy and privacy are respected at all times. (Neale, 2021, p.131)

Providing research participants with a balance of adequate information regarding the research study is vital in undertaking research, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.71) acknowledge:

> Informed consent also involves the question of *how much information should be given and when.* Full information about design and purpose counteracts deception of the participants. Providing information about a study involves a careful balance between giving too much detailed information and leaving out aspects of the design that may be significant to the participants.

Furthermore, interviews take the participant time to complete. There may be some discomfort regarding certain questions, whereby there may be a perceived intrusion of privacy. Participants therefore were invited to undertake interviews, with no obligation to complete or

answer all of the questions or respond to any comments or probes. Individuals were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. University College Cork outlines the importance of obtaining informed consent in their *Code of Research Conduct* guidelines:

> Researchers must obtain prior consent from participants, except where the absence of consent is permitted by law or governmental/institutional regulation, or is explicitly approved by the appropriate ethics committee. The form of consent may vary according to the circumstances. However, for it to be valid, the researcher must ensure that participants:
>
> - have the capacity to consent;
> - are provided with all information regarding the research that may affect their willingness to participate, in language that they can understand;
> - have been given sufficient time and opportunity to discuss and comprehend the risks and benefits of their participation;
> - are aware that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time;
> - have been assured that not participating or withdrawing will have no effect on their subsequent treatment;
> - are not under inappropriate pressure to participate;
> - understand that they may ask questions and will be given answers regarding their participation;
> - are advised on what form their data will be stored in and for how long;
> - have an opportunity to withdraw data relating to themselves;
> - understand that the intention is to publish the outcomes of the research;
> - understand that in some cases research might be in collaboration with a commercial partner. (UCC, 2021, p.16)

Of course, I do realise the challenges of inviting work colleagues (based in the school in which I teach) to become active willing participants in the research. As many of my work colleagues know me quite well in relation to our professional working context, certain colleagues may have felt (unintentionally) pressured into agreeing to partake in the research. Some colleagues may have felt that declining to participate in this study could negatively affect our professional relationship. However, participation was entirely voluntary, and I made it clear that all individuals had the right to decline or withdraw from the study without consequence. I was mindful of the potential pressure that colleagues might feel and was took care to avoid any sense of coercion in inviting them to participate. Denscombe (2007) cautions

that participants should never be pressured or coerced into partaking in the research. Their participation should be always voluntary, whereby they are sufficiently informed regarding the nature of the research, thereby giving 'informed consent'. Cohen et al. (2007, p.52) note that the "principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom", whereby they have complete autonomy regarding their engagement with the study.

As stated previously, written permission was sought from the principal and Board of Management, teachers, and parents of child participants who agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and classroom observations. Teachers provided written consent for me to observe their creative-focused lessons. Since the observations focused on teaching and learning as a whole, rather than on specific students, individual assent from each child was not required. Instead, parents were informed in writing regarding classroom observations and given the option to withdraw their child if they so wished. As noted earlier, written parental consent and child assent were obtained for participation in the focus group interviews. These participants were also asked to confirm their permission in writing for their responses to be used in research (see appendices 1-6). Denscombe (2007, p.145) reiterates the importance of receiving written permission of participants to engage in research:

> There is need to get consent in writing. When the consent is in writing it acts as a way of formally recording the agreement to participate and confirms that the participant has been informed about the nature of the research.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.71), in relation to informed consent, state that:

> Through briefing and debriefing, the participants should be informed about the purpose of and the procedures of the research project. This should include information about confidentiality and who will have access to the interview or other material, the researcher's right to publish the whole interview or parts of it, and the participants' possible access to the transcription and the analysis of the qualitative data.

In accordance with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) advice and following Malone's (2003) practice of ensuring participants were satisfied with their interview responses, I offered

participants in my study the opportunity to review their transcripts to confirm that they were happy with what they had expressed, if they wished to do so.

Furthermore, Eisner (1991) acknowledges the inherent challenges and complexities involved in adequately informing participants of the full implications of the study in which they are invited to partake. He states that "the notion of informed consent implies that researchers are able to anticipate the events that will emerge in the field about which those to be observed are to be informed" (Eisner, 1991, p.215). Malone (2003, p.800) adds that "the inductive, emergent nature of qualitative design precludes researchers being able to predict where the study will take them". As Eisner (1991) and Malone (2003) both note then, informed consent may never be entirely informed, regarding qualitative social research, due to the limitations presented. These indeed are the realities of social research, which offer many complex issues which researchers need to be aware of.

Privacy and Confidentiality/Anonymity

Of course, a fundamental principle of social research is that researchers must not disclose any personal identifiable information pertaining to the participants of the study. According to Cohen et al. (2007, p.64), "the essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity". Neale (2021) notes that in the UK and Europe, the principle of confidentiality is exemplified in the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018:

> The commitment to confidentiality is usually built into the process of securing informed consent, thereby setting the standard for how a project will unfold. Reassurances of confidentiality at this stage can perform a vital function in enabling participants to speak freely, without fear that their 'warts and all' accounts, views and experiences will be divulged to others outside the research domain (Neale, 2021, pp.145-146).

Privacy and confidentially/anonymity issues are an imperative concern when undertaking research with people. According to the *Code of Research Conduct* (UCC, 2021, p.14):

> Confidentiality and anonymity are important principles in dealing with data from participants. The term 'confidential' usually refers inter alia, to the identity of participants, which should normally be kept private. It is inappropriate to use this term to refer to information which will be published: the appropriate term in this case is 'anonymous'.

There is, however, an important distinction between confidentiality and anonymity. As Mertens (2010) outlines, confidentiality refers to the privacy of individuals being protected and assumes that the data that is provided by participants will be handled and reported in a manner that will not be personally associated with individuals. Anonymity on the other hand stipulates that "no uniquely identifying information is attached to the data, and thus no one, not even the researcher, can trace data back to the individual providing them" (Mertens, 2010, p.342). Ensuring anonymity is a crucial aspect of protecting participants' privacy in research. As Cohen et al. (2007, p.64) explain:

> A participant subject therefore is considered anonymous when the researcher or another person cannot identify the participant or subject from the information provided. Where this situation holds, a participant's privacy is guaranteed, no matter how personal or sensitive the information is.

It is essential that participants should be informed regarding confidentiality issues and who will have access to the data that they have provided and the researcher's right to publish the whole interview or parts of it (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.71). Ensuring the security and integrity of research data is essential for maintaining ethical standards and accountability in social research practices. As highlighted by University College Cork, it is vital that data and records such as field notes and transcripts generated during research are securely and confidentially stored:

> Data and records generated in the course of research must be kept securely in paper or electronic form, as appropriate, and back-up must always be kept for data and records stored on a computer. Data and records must be stored in such a way that permits a complete retrospective audit, if necessary. (UCC, 2021, p.17)

Although the anonymity and confidentiality of participants may be theoretically ensured, in written or published research; indeed, complete anonymity and confidentiality may not always

be guaranteed in practice. This is often beyond the control of the most diligent of researchers. Ensuring (theoretical) confidentiality is a crucial aspect of educational research, however it must be balanced with other factors such as fostering trust between researcher and participants, as well as promoting authenticity, openness and willingness in interactions. As Neale (2021, p.130) notes:

> Balance is needed between the drive to establish rapport with participants, and the need to respect their privacy; and between reciprocity, the need to 'give something back' to participants, and the need to keep within the bounds of a professional research relationship. Finally, a balance is needed between confidentiality and the equally compelling drive towards authenticity, empowerment, and shared authority with participants.

Malone (2003) outlines some challenging issues that emanated from her research, in relation to ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants in her study. Because Malone's research (2003) was undertaken in the educational context in which she was working and circulating among colleagues in her field, it may have been extremely difficult (and arguably impossible) for her to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of her research participants. Coe et al. (2021, p.60) note that:

> Researchers have more control, in principle at least, over what data or information is presented in research reports and made public in that way. One of the ethical problems involved here is that it may be possible for readers to identify the people, organisations or places studied, and this could breach privacy as well as perhaps carry a risk for harm.

This was a particularly pertinent issue in relation to the undertaking of research in my educational context. It is important to note however, the limitations of providing anonymity to research participants in research studies, as Coe et al. (2021, p.60) point out:

> We should perhaps note that attempts to keep research participants anonymous do not always succeed: they may be identified despite researchers' best efforts. This has occasionally happened in case study and ethnographic research.

While academics or educators familiar with the research focus may recognise certain aspects of my thesis, I do not currently anticipate it being widely disseminated, thus minimising any potential risk to participant anonymity.

Respect for the Rights and Dignity of Research Participants

Respecting the rights and dignity of research participants is crucial in all stages and aspects of any research process. As University College Cork (2021, p.14) note, "researchers who work with human participants must have appropriate regard for the participants' moral and cultural values and avoid or refuse to participate in research which is disrespectful of participants' legal, civil or moral rights". Researchers possess a responsibility towards the research community and must try to ensure a safeguarding of the community's ethical norms and practices:

> Members of the research communities have responsibilities to and for the research community that include adhering to and taking collective responsibility for the maintenance of the community's ethical norms and for ensuring that the institutions and practices that shape the community's activities conform to them. (Strike, 2009, p.57).

This principle must remain fundamental to every part of the research process. If a participant felt uncomfortable with any aspect of the research, they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and without consequence. I also feel that it is important to acknowledge that although the research may benefit participants by giving them an opportunity to reflect on issues within education and consider how these may influence their practice, participation may also present certain burdens, such as time constraints or a perceived intrusion by the researcher. As a researcher, it is vital that I respect the research participants and acknowledge the time and effort that they dedicate to this study. In undertaking longitudinal ethnographic research, it was also imperative that a positive and trusting ethical working relationship was fostered and maintained over time by the researcher and the research participants:

> QL [Qualitative Longitudinal] researchers are not simply required to maintain samples, but to 'walk alongside' participants and to sustain relationships with them over substantial periods of time. This creates a distinctive form of longitudinal ethics. (Neale, 2021, p.129)

An important aspect of ethical research, particularly in long-term or longitudinal studies, is the ability to navigate complex ethical considerations that single-visit studies often overlook:

> Sustaining long-term relationships with participants makes us sensitive to ethical issues in ways that are impossible to grasp in single-visit studies. Researchers need to work both proactively, establishing broad ethical protocols to guide a study, and reactively, dealing with unanticipated dilemmas as they arise. (Neale, 2021, p.130)

As mentioned, in undertaking this research, I engaged in discussion with children through focus group interviews. When conducting research with children, it is essential to address specific ethical concerns, particularly those relating to consent and participation. Mertens (2010, p.341) considers Vargas and Montoya's (2009) perspectives regarding ethical considerations:

> Vargas and Montoya (2009) address ethical concerns of doing research with children. Parents are usually the people who have legal authority to give permission for research participation for their children under the age of 18. However, ethical practice calls for getting 'assent' from the child by explaining the study to the young person with language that is understandable to them and getting their agreement to participate.

I spoke with children, informing them of the key focus of the study, ensuring language was accessible to them at their own level of understanding, before receiving their verbal consent to partake in the study. Informed assent letters were given to parents of child participants, prior to undertaking research with the children. Also, regarding ethnographic classroom observations, teachers were given informed consent letters prior to the research. Parents of the children involved in the classroom observations, also received informed assent letters, allowing them to withdraw their children from the study, if they so wished (see appendices 5 and 6).

Avoidance of Harm

Building on the assumption that all research participants should be treated with dignity and respect, it follows that any potential harm to participants in the research should be avoided as much as possible. University College Cork stipulates that "studies should be designed to minimise potential risks and maximise potential benefits to research participants, and to ensure that benefits to participants and society outweigh the risks" (UCC 2010, p.9). According to Coe et al. (2021, p.59) research involving educational qualitative investigations still poses the possibility of causing harm:

> Questions asked in interviews or on questionnaires may be distressing, observation in classrooms can be intrusive in the sense of causing problems for teachers or students, and reporting findings may have harmful consequences.

Of course, it is impossible as a researcher to offer absolute guarantees that harm will not emanate from certain aspects of the research undertaken. For example, when undertaking qualitative interviews with participants, it may not always be easy to predict whether or not a participant may experience sensitivity to a topic of conversation. Similarly, due to the emotive nature of some possible qualitative interview questions, some respondents may experience discomfort or emotional unease when their thinking may be provoked by certain questions or topics of conversation. While efforts can be made to avoid harm through careful planning of interview questions, thoughtful use of language, and careful observation of social cues during interviews, there can never be an absolute guarantee that harm will be entirely eliminated in any form of social research.

In conclusion, it is vital to carefully consider ethical issues when undertaking research with human participants. Although the importance of creating safeguards is necessary to prevent as many unethical situations as possible from arising during the undertaking of research, it seems fair to recognise that whenever research is undertaken involving human subjects, there can never be an absolute guarantee that unprecedented ethical dilemmas will not arise as the study develops and progresses. As Malone (2003, p.814) so aptly notes:

> We are bound to continue to encounter unanticipated ethical dilemmas, no matter how long a checklist we devise to monitor ourselves, but we can at least expand the list of those we *can* anticipate by learning from each other and asking each other the questions we discover along our way.

Researchers undertaking qualitative research, especially with human participants, will inevitably meet unprecedented ethical predicaments. This is the reality of social research. The key point to remember is that it is important that a researcher deals with ethical issues that may arise to the best of his/her ability, taking into consideration professional research practices and

ethical considerations indicated in scholarly readings and, also in my case, the imperative *Code of Research Conduct* (2010, 2021) outlined by University College Cork.

Validity of the Study

Crystallisation

When conducting research, it is important that several research methods are used not only to ensure increased validity of the research but, more importantly, to offer a deeper understanding of the data emerging from the study, supporting meaning-making and the generation of theory. Research methods that I used in the undertaking of research included individual and focus group interviews, analysis of artefacts such as samples of work and policy documents, informal day-to-day ethnographic observations through use of written fieldnotes and diary entries, as well as direct classroom observations of curricular work, teaching and learning, to offer congruity, assimilation and crystallisation of the research. Traditionally the use of triangulation as a means of increasing the validity and accuracy of research was commonplace in academic research. Denscombe (2007, p.138) argues that:

> The rationale for using triangulation in social research is that by viewing something from more than one viewpoint the researcher can get a better knowledge of it. This better knowledge can take two forms; improved accuracy as a means of validation and a fuller picture may be created as a source of complementary data.

Increasingly there is a shift away from the concept of 'triangulation' which has positivist implications and connotations, towards a more constructivist notion of 'crystallisation' of research findings. In the context of the social research undertaken, I do not seek to offer positivist certainties regarding the validity of research findings, but rather aim to 'crystallise' the research findings, offering multi-faceted and nuanced insights into the research questions. This may increase validity (in the context of the constructivist paradigm) by offering broader, explorative insights into the research questions from a variety of perspectives, through use of

varying data collection tools. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) theorise the shift away from the notion of 'triangulation' towards increasingly creative and analytical processes (CAP) such as 'crystallisation':

> In traditionally staged research we valorise 'triangulation'. In triangulation, a researcher deploys different methods – interviews, census data, documents, and the like – to 'validate' findings. These methods, however, carry the same domain assumptions, including the assumption that there is a "fixed point" or an "object" that can be triangulated. Both in CAP (creative analytical processes) ethnographies, researchers draw from literary, artistic, and scientific genres as well. In what I think of as a postmodernist deconstruction of triangulation CAP text recognises that there are far more than "three sides" by which to approach the world. We do not triangulate; we crystallize. (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p.963)

Ellis and Bochner (1996) argue that CAP (creative analytical processes) ethnographies herald a paradigmatic shift. Richardson and Pierre (2005) argue that the practices that produce creative analytical processes (CAP) ethnography are both creative and analytical, despite any notions that these modes may be in contradiction to one another. They also argue that when engaging in creative analytical practices, "ethnographers learn about the topics and about themselves that which was unknowable and unimaginable using conventional analytical procedures, metaphors and writing formats" (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p.963). The concept of 'crystallisation' challenges conventional notions of validity by embracing complexity and multiple perspectives, offering a more nuanced and layered understanding of a subject. As Richardson and St. Pierre (2005, p.963) explain:

> Crystallisation, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of 'validity'; we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves. Crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, and thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

In postmodernist research, the idea of validity shifts away from traditional, fixed frameworks, like the triangle, towards a more fluid and multidimensional metaphor. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) propose the crystal as a more fitting representation, as it embodies both structure and flexibility, offering countless angles, shapes, and transformations. Unlike a rigid form, a

crystal reflects and refracts its surroundings, revealing different patterns and perspectives based on one's viewpoint. This concept, known as crystallisation, emphasises that what we observe is shaped by our position, allowing for multiple truths rather than a single, fixed reality:

> I propose that the central imaginary for 'validity' for postmodernist texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combined symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallisation. (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p.963)

Creative analytical processes (CAP) along with the introduction of the concept of crystallisation, challenges traditional views of validity by embracing multiple perspectives and multifaceted complexities. The crystal metaphor illustrates how knowledge is influenced by the researcher's viewpoint, highlighting the importance of recognising that understandings are constructed and are interpretative in nature. The creative analytical approach, combined with the use of crystallisation, was highly relevant to my application of validity frameworks in the study, as this research was rooted in the constructivist paradigm, emphasising the construction of meanings in a broad and multidimensional sense, and thus aligning well with the concept of 'crystallisation'.

Limitations of the Study

Although there was a strong sense of rigor and conscientiousness given to this study, there will certainly be limitations to any study, including this one. These limitations include but are not limited to the issues of: generalisability; the willingness and openness of participants in the study; depth of knowledge; level of interest or engagement of participants; communication issues; as well as the limitations of the chosen paradigm of research.

Considering the topic of generalisability regarding ethnographic research, researchers need to be mindful that ethnographic research findings are only representative of the context of the research study. That is not to say that broader connections to the research do not exists, however. Although qualitative research may resonate on a wider scale, the findings from this study are illustrative of the context in which they were constructed and will not be generalisable for primary schools in the national context (Mertens, 2010). Although the research findings may not be broadly generalisable to the national Irish context, they could still resonate with certain educational settings. The issues and implications raised might have relevance and potential transferability to other primary schools across the country. As a final reminder, Glaser and Strauss (1967) advise researchers to be cautious when generalising qualitative research findings, stressing that conclusions drawn from one population may not apply universally. They warn that the credibility of a study is weakened when specific findings are extrapolated to make broad claims:

> Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp.37, 52, 242-244) remind us that the generalizability of all qualitative research should be treated with caution. Care must be taken not only to assume that what we find in one population holds true for all other populations or situations, and the credibility of our study diminishes when we lead from particularistic claims drawn from our study to the universal assertions. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, cited in Thomas, 1993, p.64).

A further limitation of the study may relate to the participants' willingness and openness to participate in the study and to volunteer information freely. Cohen et al. (2007, p.55) acknowledge that "researchers have to ensure that volunteers [participating in the study] have real freedom of choice if informed consent is to be fulfilled". This includes ensuring that participants do not feel coerced or pressured to participate in the study and have the autonomy regarding their participation or not. A relationship of trust between the participants and the research will be imperative in relation to this issue, whereby the participants trust the researcher's intentions and respect relating to the information that she receives. If participants feel that there is a lack of trust, they may not wish to divulge information. Furthermore, for

participants to feel fully comfortable in their willingness and openness to participate in the research, they may feel the need to be guaranteed that any revelations made will have no negative implications. While the researcher cannot make definitive promises, it is important to emphasise issues of confidentiality and respect for participants and the information they provide prior to conducting the research. Establishing a good rapport and fostering cooperation with participants are especially vital in research conducted over extended time frames, especially in ethnographic or longitudinal studies. As Cohen et al. (2007, p.55) point out:

> Achieving goodwill and cooperation is especially important where the proposed research extends over a period of time: days, perhaps, in the case of ethnographic study; months (or perhaps years) where longitudinal research is involved.

The depth of participants' knowledge or interest in engaging with the research may also constitute a potential limitation regarding the study. If participants perceive themselves as lacking knowledge in the area relating to the study, they may be less willing to participate. Furthermore, limited interest in the research topic, may also reduce their willingness to engage with the research. Engagement with participants in this study, primarily focused on their own 'lived experiences', which they were able to discuss in depth. Although some participants may have had limited knowledge of broader issues such as international policies or systemic shifts regarding educational marketisation, this was unlikely to inhibit the richness of data related to their own lived experiences.

Undoubtedly, communication may be seen as a limitation relating to research, especially qualitative research. Both the participants' ability to effectively express themselves and the researcher's ability to interpret the meaning of their communication, are a potential limitation. Because of this, as researcher, I endeavoured to maximise opportunities for effective communication with participants. Additionally, care must be taken when interpreting the messages conveyed by the participants, while carefully analysing the data.

The limitations of the chosen paradigm of research; the constructivist paradigm, relate strongly to the limitations just previously outlined. The emphasis of the constructivist paradigm is on analysis and individual understanding of data gathered whereby findings are constructed by the human mind through interpretative research. Research undertaken within the constructivist paradigm does not offer absolute or definitive findings; findings are merely presented as they are interpreted by the researcher's understanding of data gathered in the context of the literature reviewed. Pollard (2002) states that:

> The interpretative researcher cannot accept the idea of there being a reality out there which exists irrespective of people, for reality is a construct of the human mind. People perceive and so construe the world in ways which are often similar but not necessarily the same. So there can be different interpretations of what is real. (Pollard, 2002, p.37)

Due to the nature of qualitative research, arriving at definitive findings is not possible, which poses limitations regarding the subjective and interpretative nature of the results. The research findings are constructed from the data assimilated by the researcher and their ability to interpret that data. While this represents a significant limitation inherent in all qualitative research within the constructivist paradigm, it also highlights a strength of qualitative research, capturing its multifaceted layers, complexities and nuances.

As aforementioned, primary data pertaining to this study was collected between 2013 and 2016, consisting of interviews, focus groups and ethnographic in-class observations. The research engaged in a longitudinal critical ethnography, incorporating visual ethnography (Pink, 2021) over a sustained period, contextualising the research and capturing developments in the school's culture over time, with later observations encompassing developments in the field up to 2025. While the initial findings offer valuable insights into participants' 'lived experiences' at that time, they represent a 'snapshot' within an evolving educational context. As with all ethnographic research, the data provides partial and situated perspectives and understandings, which may not encompass all of the developments over the timeframe. Consideration has been given to analyse and interpret the research in relation to the timing of

data collection, whilst also engaging with relevant literature developments spanning across the study period. This research however is situated in the constructivist paradigm, whereby meaning is subjectively constructed, and the multifaceted complexities and nuances of the research as it evolved over time are embraced.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodological framework that underpins my thesis, entitled: '*The (Educational) Market: A Longitudinal Ethnography. Exploring its Impact on Creative Teaching and Learning Within the Arts, in One Irish Urban Primary School'.* Central to this research is an exploration of how increased market forces prevalent over the last number of decades, influenced by the Global Education Reform Movement, shape education as product. Junemann et al. (2018, p.455) echo the sentiments of Rhodes (1997), observing that "globally the state is changing; there is a shift underway from government to governance. New ways of organising and delivering policy are being replaced by hierarchical and enterprise or market relations". In the context of the marketisation of education, changes in educational policy can reflect the institutionalisation of beliefs, values, cultures, and behaviours. In some instances, this process allows powerful stakeholders to directly support or promote their own agendas within policy frameworks, thereby shaping educational practices according to their vested interests (Marsh and Smith 2000; Junemann et al., 2018). Drawing on Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, a fundamental aim of this thesis is to examine how these underlying institutions of power shape our educational systems and impact on cultural practice:

> Bourdieu (1991) reminds us that institutions of power lie behind behaviour and cultural meanings that construct and limit choices, confer legitimacy, and guide our daily routine. This power is symbolic in that it relies on shared beliefs and ways of pressing those beliefs. Symbolic power is violent because it appropriates preferred meanings and represses alternatives. (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979, p.4, cited in Thomas, 1993. pp.6-7)

Through a longitudinal ethnographic study in an Irish urban primary school, I critically explored the impact of the educational market on creative teaching and learning. A key challenge addressed in this study, was navigating the tension between external pressures regarding market forces that are shaping education and fostering meaningful opportunities for creativity, specifically in arts education.

Certainly, ethical considerations in alignment with University College Cork's *Code of Research Conduct* (2012, 2021) were of immense importance in undertaking this study and I consulted these guidelines throughout the duration of this study. Research was approved by University College Cork's *Social Research Ethics Committee* on the 10th of June 2013 (see appendix 12). The respect and consideration of participants were of vital importance during the duration of the study, whereby their rights and dignity were placed to the forefront of this research. Informed consent was granted by the principal, Board of Management and participants prior to the undertaking of research, with privacy and anonymity being theoretically ensured.

This study was framed within the constructivist paradigm, which emphasises that reality is socially constructed. The use of critical ethnography provided a powerful lens in not only understanding the visible outcomes of educational policy but in assisting me to capture the 'lived experiences' of the participants in this study as they navigate these changes. Capturing the individual and collective narratives of school leaders, teachers and students was of key significance in this study, enabling me as a researcher to understand their perspectives and get a sense of their individual and shared 'lived experiences'. The use of critical ethnography, combined with qualitative semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, participant observation and analysis of work samples and policy documents, provided deep insights into the school community. These rich approaches and methods allowed me to observe how the marketisation of education, within the context of the Global Education Reform Movement,

impacted teaching and learning, particularly in relation to provision of opportunities for creativity, specifically in the arts. The use of critical discourse analysis and grounded theory in analysing the data, offered rich insights and interpretation of the research. Critical discourse analysis allowed for a deeper exploration of the power dynamics and semiotics of language used in educational policy and practice, revealing underlying ideologies and their impact on educational practice. Grounded theory facilitated the generation of theory directly from the data, offering a deeper understanding of themes and patterns emerging from the participants' experiences. I feel that these research approaches and analysis tools enabled me to capture vivid and comprehensive insights within the field. These complimentary methods of analysis provided a valuable lens in analysing data, facilitating the construction of meanings and fostering deeper understandings beyond surface level insights. Schutz (1972) suggests that most of us live in a 'taken for granted' reality, therefore the utilisation of critical discourse analysis and grounded theory approaches allows the researcher to challenge these assumptions and preconceptions, thus arriving at more reflective interpretations.

I believe that the depth and duration of this study, along with the research approaches and methods employed, contribute significantly to the rigor regarding its validity. The longitudinal nature of the research, conducted in the context in which I have worked for over sixteen years, has provided me with deep familiarity within the field. The variety of research approaches and methods used, combined with the in-depth analysis of the data, facilitated the assimilation and crystallisation of insights, therefore contributing to the validity of the research.

It is important to acknowledge the challenges and limitations of this research study. As the research was undertaken in one urban primary school, the findings of this study are not intended to be generalisable. However, findings may resonate with other research conducted nationally and internationally. Additionally, the long-term immersion of the researcher in the field, pertaining to longitudinal research such as this, requires significant time and access. This may

not be feasible in all research contexts. I was very fortunate to have such in-depth access to the research field as a teacher working in the study school for over 16 years, therefore I was able to undertake immersive ethnographic research over a sustained period of time.

Although the findings capture a 'snapshot' into the 'lived experiences' of participants within this specific context, their significance should not be underestimated. They may offer valuable insights that may resonate with other educational contexts, both nationally and internationally, particularly considering the ongoing impacts of the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021). Many schools face similar challenges and pressures arising from the marketisation of education and the drive for outcomes-driven improvement, accountability measures, intensification and standardisation. The nuanced ways in which these marketised forces may impact the fostering of creativity within arts education could provide a useful reference point for educators and policymakers across diverse educational settings. As Foucault (1991) notes, the 'problematisation' of these issues alone may serve not only as a form of action in itself but perhaps as an impetus for future change.

Next, the research findings from this study will be explored and contextualised within the broader conceptual and political frameworks that are impacting education, both at a macro (global) level, meso (national) level, and micro (cultural) level, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021). Chapter 5 will examine the educational market and its drive towards performativity, standards-driven 'improvement' and 'image-management', as well as how these shifts have manifested within school cultural practices within the field. Chapter 6 will explore the impacts of the marketisation of education upon creativity within the arts. Limitations in the provision for creativity within the arts will be investigated, as well as how the arts may become 'utilised' in effort to 'market' the school. This research is multi-faceted, in-depth and nuanced, having been conducted over a longitudinal timeframe.

Chapter 5

Contextual Framework

Navigating The Educational Market

The Rise of Performativity, Standards-Driven 'Improvement' and 'Image-Management'

Over the last decades, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement (or GERM), the Irish education system continues to be constructed within the mercantile paradigm. This marketisation of education exemplifies a rational, measurable, quantifiable approach to education (O' Sullivan, 2005). Market forces in education seek school 'improvement' and 'performance' which can be seen in quantifiable measurable data terms. The emphasis is on a results-driven model which exemplifies quantifiable learning targets, *measurable* improvement and performativity benchmarks, with schools aspiring to such specific *outlined* and unambiguous quantifiable learning targets and outcomes. The Department of Education (2011) published the *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* (DES, 2011), which was later revised and republished in 2020. This policy 'response' outlines the directive for increased provision and priority of literacy and numeracy education in Irish schools. Increased emphasis is placed on school 'improvement', benchmarks of attainment, standardised testing and learning outcomes. Indeed, with an increased 'market' focus on accountability and learning outcomes, schools are now under more pressure to raise student achievement. Indeed, they are expected to be more '*productive'* in light of these educational reforms (DES, 2011, 2020). The more recent *Primary Language Curriculum* (DES, 2019), which outlines directives for English and Irish language development, too places a stronghold on rigorous and explicit learning

outcomes, specific to every aspect of language development, almost perhaps to the point of dissecting and categorising every aspect of language teaching, learning and acquisition. These sentiments of productivity are echoed loudly in the Department of Education's outline of a selection of its "*national priorities*" for our education system (DES, 2011, pp.14-15):

> Improving literacy and numeracy standards is an urgent national priority for the Minister for Education and Skills and the Government. The Government will:
>
> - Set challenging targets for improvement that will require a comprehensive, national effort focussed on the progress of every child and on improving core skills of literacy and numeracy during all stages of the education system.
>
> - Clarify what we expect children to learn and develop in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings, primary schools and post-primary schools in order to prioritise the learning of literacy and numeracy.
>
> - Create a culture of continuous improvement in Early Childhood and Care (ECCE) settings and schools in the education system by improving radically the assessment and reporting of progress at student, school and national level and by focusing on school self-evaluation and inspection on literacy and numeracy.
>
> - Improve the professional skills of those who teach in our ECCE settings and schools in the teaching of literacy and numeracy, in planning and delivering rich learning activities, in assessing and monitoring progress, and in using assessment information to inform the next steps for learners.
>
> - Build the capacity of school leadership to lead improvement in literacy and numeracy and to support teachers in their efforts to improve standards of literacy and numeracy.
>
> - Monitor the progress towards achieving the demanding targets that have been set and adjust our actions as necessary to ensure that literacy and numeracy targets are realised.

Notably, all teachers interviewed in individual and focus group interviews indicated that they were very much aware of a distinctive 'educational shift' in past years. When I asked the participants if they noticed a shift in the way that education was progressing, one teacher responded:

> More and more recording… And, more and more kind of paperwork and accountability, definitely…more and more all the time. I mean, I started teaching altogether twenty years ago….and really the…. kind of, free reign a teacher had was

> much broader… Whereas now, you're very very, kind of, you're falling within these parameters all of the time. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

This participant appears to be alluding to the narrowing focus of teaching and teacher autonomy and professional judgement as education is progressing increasingly in line with the mercantile paradigm. She states that the "free reign of a teacher was much broader" previously and that now "you're falling within these parameters all of the time". This teacher's perception of educational parameters or limitations is interesting, as it prompts the question of whether teachers' freedom and professional autonomy are being threatened by marketised shifts in the Irish education system. This participant, speaking in a focus group interview, argued that trust should be bestowed upon teachers, enabling them to be autonomous: "It's just a matter of trusting the teacher…trusting their opinion" (Melanie, upper primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013). Fiona, who was part of the leadership and management team and had been teaching for over thirty years at the time of interview, discussed the intensification of teaching, specifically regarding the vast increase in paperwork and new perceptions of teacher accountability:

> Compared to even when I started teaching first, now there's lots of paperwork and filing and you're kind of conscious at all times of having the right policy or I suppose really of being caught out. You are very conscious that you don't want to leave the school down either. So there's constant record keeping, which has its place, I mean, the minutes of the staff meetings show exactly what we do and we're quite business like, but I think you know, that it can even lead to a small bit of resentment because the minute they [teachers] see you, they know that you're looking for something in the line of paperwork. (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014)

Interestingly, Fiona also describes the school as being "quite *business like*", making the connection between shifts in educational practice and the increased marketisation of education. She argues that this approach is resulting in less teacher autonomy with what appears to align with, an increasingly prescriptive approach: "with the business model [of education] and everything being so prescribed, I don't like that trend one bit!" (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014). She also remarked that "it's kind of a pity that it's become very

top-heavy with the administration", elaborating, "I'd be afraid that at the end of the day will teachers be little more than technicians rather than those who teach children" (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014). Fiona explained that the increased intensification of education and the increase in paperwork and educational directives may challenge teacher autonomy and professionalism. She elaborated further, stating:

> I'd worry about all of these programmes because down along the line teachers could literally be afraid to put a toe outside of the plan. But, as was the case in England, I worked in this school, and it had lovely grounds, and it was a lovely storybook autumn, I mean, it was fabulous. It was like what autumn should be. There were leaves and squirrels and there wasn't a leaf rubbing or a squirrel collage to be seen because it wasn't in the plan. And to my mind that just summed up everything that was wrong with the English system. I wonder whether our future teachers will know whether to be spontaneous or will there be an app and I'm being sarcastic here, or a programme for this, will it come to the stage where spontaneity will have to be taught? And I wonder will teachers become little more than technicians rather than those who teach children to wonder? (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014)

Fiona cautions that rigid curricula may stifle teachers' spontaneity and creativity, resulting in teachers being seen as "technicians" rather than educators who inspire curiosity and wonder in students. Further speaking in relation to the First Steps literacy initiative being undertaken within the school, in an endeavour to boost student attainment, Fiona remarked:

> I sometimes prefer just reading a book for the heck of it, [explaining that she didn't like the idea of] dissecting them up too much. I'm kind of wondering despite our best efforts that if we're going to start dissecting them too much, are we actually going to put the children off reading, you know (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014).

In a staffroom conversation, when speaking of recent policy developments, she stated, "I know I sound like a bit of a rebel, but while the idea of this team work is great, I much prefer having more autonomy and being left to my own devices and decision making", elaborating, "I hate being told what to do and I hate feeling pigeonholed" (Fiona, February 2014). When speaking of the introduction of the School Self-Improvement Plan, which was focusing on literacy and numeracy attainment at the time of interview, Fiona expressed strong reservations:

> I think that it's [the School Self-Improvement Plan is] an insult to our intelligence again as evaluation and improvement is inbuilt into every lesson. The whole process

> [of the School Self-Improvement Plan] is totally time consuming and I feel that it could actually be counterproductive. For instance, it's going to trigger a lack of goodwill from schools. This is just something that has to be done, another pain in the side really. I actually think ironically, because we're going to deliberately target an area, that we might improve that area and others will be given less attention. (Fiona, special education teacher, June 2014)

The School Self-Improvement Plan, according to Fiona is another accountability measure, an outcomes-based model synonymous with marketised education systems. Fiona argues that educational improvement is an integral aspect of education in its own (intrinsic) way, without the need for additional plans that increase paperwork, workload and pressure.

Another teacher expressed that she felt quite scared regarding the direction that education was progressing and made the connection between policy shifts and the increased marketisation of education and the desire to *"please industry":*

> I think the future of education is quite scary in this country because I think that the government policy seems to be [going] very much towards trying to please industry the whole time, and a utilitarian model seems to be the favoured more and more and more. And even the increased literacy and numeracy, it's fantastic to have increased literacy and numeracy but behind it [the policy] there definitely is a desire to please industry. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

These sentiments resonate with Ahmed's (2004) observation of how marketised education systems can produce significant *affects* upon participants and elicit strong emotional responses. Fiona, an educator with almost 40 years' experience, also illustrated the strong affects that she experienced, denoting that the literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011, 2020) signalled a threat to educators' professionalism:

> I think it shows a complete lack of trust in teachers' professionalism because we always did our best with regard to literacy and numeracy, and I *really don't like* this idea of prescribed programmes. There's a lot of good in them, but I don't like the idea of it just being set that you have to follow this to the letter of the law. And I think that we're adopting a business model because they're not realising that we're dealing with children and that they have such different needs. (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014)

This comment undoubtedly illustrates a very strong emotional response, at the perceived 'threat' to professional autonomy, coupled with Fiona's sense of lack of trust in her professional

judgement. Her suggestion that adopting a 'business model' (as seen in marketised education systems), negates the individual needs of the children; is particularly emotive. During our interview, the principal reflected on the ample opportunities that she believed existed to develop creativity through subject areas such as literacy and numeracy, citing programmes such as 'Maths Recovery' and 'First Steps':

> I think we foster creative development…if we look at say Maths Recovery now if you want to look at creative development, one of the things that we'd be doing in Maths Recovery is that there's not always just one way of doing a sum to get the answer. You don't have to learn it off, we try to get them to think and to think about what they're doing. For something like maths now you might think, well, that's not a very creative area, well, it doesn't spring to mind straight away, but I think we do, with some of the programmes we have, we do foster creative development in the sense of looking at different ways of doing things. In English now…fostering creative development…I suppose we do a lot in our First Steps which would encourage an awful lot of discussing ideas, you know, thinking about maybe a different outcome to certain things. We don't just take the story and say, "read it, that's it now", we get people to think about what they're reading as well. (principal, interview, October 2015)

These are of course worthwhile initiatives and can offer opportunities for creative development. However, from evidence elsewhere, this does not negate teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the pressure that they are facing regarding the increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and data-driven improvement. Lisa, a teacher who had been teaching for almost a decade at the time of the interview, outlined the increased 'fixation' on literacy and numeracy and highlighted the pressure she perceives teachers are under as a result of the growing focus being placed on standardised testing:

> Everyone is getting increasingly fixated on the literacy and numeracy, which is important but I think that teachers feel under a lot of pressure now with the standardised tests and all of that; compared to when I just started teaching, they were just tests that we did just to see roughly where they were, but we didn't take them as the only factor but definitely in the last few years everyone is analysing the results and nearly taking it as a personal reflection. But these tests are the same with the last I dunno how long and they don't suit every child and they don't tell you everything about a child. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

The performativity pressures that this teacher feels are clearly evident. Lisa acknowledges the importance of literacy and numeracy but also cautions about the narrow focus and emphasis of

standardised tests as a measure of achievement, especially as it relates to communicating scores to parents:

> I totally agree that there needs to be, you know, a focus on literacy and numeracy, but the standardised tests are only one tool, and I really feel that they're not going to tell you everything. So, there should be other types of testing available too that you can use. One test in the month of May when they're all winding down isn't gonna tell you everything and there's so many other factors that can affect it. But it's the one thing that you're communicating to the parents in the reports, but you're not telling them about the other tests that they've done as well. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

The Department of Education (DES) has placed greater emphasis on attainment and improving results in literacy and numeracy, along with communicating these outcomes to the Boards of Management and parents, with school management responsible for implementing these guidelines in practice. Lisa also observed that:

> They [DES] want us to meet targets and have more clearer [sic] objectives, but if it's all literacy and numeracy then teachers are going to be totally stressed out focusing on that, and the other areas of holistic development will suffer…it's very narrow. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013)

Áine, an upper primary teacher (interview, June 2013), argued that, regarding "the standardised testing, I don't think that they give a true reflection of the child themselves". Rebecca, a middle primary teacher, expressed her concerns that the performance of students on standardised tests would lead to implications of teacher performativity, explaining that tests "are now going to be kind of an assessment and a summative view of how the children are doing and how the teacher is doing as well". She further cautioned that "there's a danger of teaching to the test", explaining that "in lots of schools, and talking to other teachers, there's a definite feeling that people are preparing children for the standardised tests now" (Rebecca, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014). This teacher also noted how she felt pressure to place a narrower focus on literacy and numeracy attainment, especially in the lead up to testing, even if this was at the expense of other curricular areas:

> I suppose, at the start of the year, you're trying to put in a mix and match of everything and keep it broad and keep it fun but then you're very quickly brought back to the fact

> that these tests are looming and that you need to focus on them, so you're not really giving them a broad education for at least a third of the year. (Rebecca, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Pupils also felt these limitations in relation to constraints placed on the creative arts, as a result of performativity pressures regarding standardised testing. One child in the middle years reported that: "coming up the tests I was disappointed that we really didn't get to do much art" (Vicky, child focus group interview, June 2016). Another chimed in, "it was really worth it after the tests because, we didn't get to do much art when we had the tests but after the tests we had time to do *a lot* of art" (Jane, child focus group interview, June 2016).

In addition to this, the leadership team of the study school stipulated that teachers submit monthly literacy test records and samples of work from three 'tracker children' (selected to represent 'average', 'above average', and 'below average' attainment on the standardised tests), alongside their monthly plans and reports, in an endeavour to further 'monitor *progress*'. Samples of various types of assessment across the curriculum were, at that time, also encouraged to be submitted with the monthly reports, emphasising teacher accountability. Upon interview, the principal explained that "I think because we're a DEIS school as well that we have an awful lot of emphasis on attainment and learning outcomes and monitoring of progress in place" (principal, interview, October 2015). She elaborated that although increasingly there is more emphasis on quantifiable and measurable outcomes, which she believes to have some value, she cautions about it becoming over prescriptive:

> I think a lot of the time nowadays everything has to be measured, because it's all about end productivity and this is a very easy way to, it's a very blunt instrument, let's put it that way, for measuring outcomes in literacy and numeracy, so I'm assuming that would be part of the reason for it. What are my thoughts on that? I think it's a good idea to have some sort of objective way of measuring attainment; I have no problem with that at all. So I think in one way, it's a good way, it's good. In other ways then it could become prescriptive, but if you let it, but you have to keep it in its place, you know what I mean, as one form of measuring attainment; but that's all it is, is one form. (principal, interview, October 2015)

I recall speaking with students during the study, concerning their perceptions regarding the perceived limitations to creativity in school. Caroline (child focus group interview, June 2014), an upper primary student, argued that maths is less creative "because there's only one right answer". Tellingly, Caroline is focusing on the *outcome* rather than the *process* of numeracy, placing more value on the end-product regardless of the process. Perhaps the increased emphasis being placed on testing and communication of standardised test results to parents influenced this perception? Many teachers during interviews also spoke of the increased pressure felt by educators and students in the wake of the standardised test results being reported on and shared with parents. One teacher explained her concerns:

> Specifically in the last 2 years, I've noticed that it's mandatory [to report the standardised test results] in the school reports and there's a huge amount of pressure… Pressure coming from parents; already I can see that they are asking about the standard tests. Pupils are asking about the standardised tests before they even happened, which is a new thing. I would never have noticed that before. And I suppose also, there's increased pressure on the teacher, because the results are being written in the reports. And parents are comparing them from year to year. And sometimes I suppose, parents don't understand them properly and think that it's something the teacher has or has not done and this might be the reason that their [child's] STEN score [a standardised score on a scale of 1-10, whereby a score of 5 represents 'average'] may have dropped. So, I think there's huge pressure. And I especially noticed it this year. I would be very concerned that it's such a big part of the report now, it's such a big part of the school and I'd be worried for the future to be honest. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

This teacher clearly experiences the pressures of performativity, particularly in relation to perceived accountability and the impact of student attainment and results. Regarding observations in the field, I have witnessed many teachers say that they feel under increased pressure with the additional paperwork and emphasis on results and performativity. One teacher even stated that the month of May was going to be a "write-off" and that she would be "doing practically nothing else but Maths and English, with the standardised test results the end of the month"(Melanie, class teacher, April 2015). Is the increased emphasis on attainment and standardised testing by the Department of Education creating improvement in learning, or is it subsequently narrowing it? According to Melanie:

> The [standardised] tests are very narrow really. They only test a very little amount of their knowledge, looking at the English test, vocabulary that they might not have ever heard off before, it doesn't mean that they have severe vocabulary issues, or you know… They are very narrow tests anyway, so they don't test a whole lot. They don't give the full picture so I don't think we should be looking at the results only. (Melanie, upper primary class teacher, focus group interview, June 2013)

Furthermore, another participant, Lisa, stated that:

> You're not gonna spend your time in April or May teaching stuff that's not gonna be on the test, you know. You're not going to be doing open ended problem solving or different things that your know there's no need for them to be doing at that point because it's not on the test. You're going to spend your time revising things that are on the test, so it is narrowing the focus of your teaching, because you're focused on the result basically. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

I find this statement concerning, as it reveals the perceived pressure that this teacher faces regarding attainment and standardised testing, perhaps at the expense of a broader education which emphasises the process as well as product of learning. Although the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* (DES, 2003), 'officially' places a greater emphasis on the process of maths and highlights the significance of play and creativity, there still exists, at a cultural level, performativity pressures which have permeated the school over the last decade. What happens to the other areas of the curriculum, to student and teacher autonomy and creativity with such perceived pressure to perform and achieve results? Another teacher alludes to the performativity pressures pertaining to standardised testing, as she states that: "basically you're teaching them to memorise it and to produce it in a test, but it doesn't make a difference or not whether they are using it afterwards" (Áine, upper primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013). These findings I feel resonate with findings by Berry and Sahlberg (2006, p.23), which indicated that:

> too rigid and methodologically specific education policies and related national strategies, such as the NNS (National Numeracy Strategy) in England, lead to fragmented and non-innovative teaching that do not enhance risk-taking, creativity and learning of knowledge and skills that are needed in our modern knowledge world.

In this study, one English teacher explained that "having to follow the NNS, I can't see how you can do group work in maths as much as any other subjects because of the limitations"

(Respondent, cited in Berry and Sahlberg, 2006, p.17). Although mathematics has traditionally been viewed as a subject focused on formulas and procedures, as seen in the new curriculum, mathematics can explore creativity through problem-solving and constructivist approaches, including collaboration and group work. There is a clear dichotomy between *striving to meet* targets and creating meaningful *opportunities to engage* in the *process* of creating meaningful learning opportunities. Another teacher in this study cautioned that:

> The NNS will stop a lot of teachers doing group work- they will not see how it can fit into the structured lesson. We are all pressured by SATs [Standardised Attainment Tests], who isn't, and I guess that group work does not fit into preparing the children well for the tests" (Respondent, cited in Berry and Sahlberg, 2006, p.18).

Certainly, I feel that there are many parallels between these research findings and the sentiments expressed by the participants that I encountered. In both cases, it is apparent that educators feel heightened pressure to improve student performance on standardised tests, which seems to restrict and narrow their teaching approach, ultimately limiting the broader promotion of student learning. One respondent summarised the dangers of narrowing the focus of learning by communicating standardised test results to parents:

> No matter what you say "she's worked brilliant in her writing, has done amazing in this that and the other", I think that all the parents are going to see are those two STENs, and that's all they're going to take away with them. They're not gonna look at the broader picture once you start narrowing it down. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013)

The educational market however maintains its drive for 'improvement' in education, the raising of educational standards, and performativity. The improvement of the 'quality' of education and the increased flexibility of education to meet the needs and desires of the consumers of the education system can be seen as a broad aim of mercantile education systems. Schneider (2001, p.72) argues that:

> Although school reform comes in many forms, many if not most seek to create market-like forces to which schools must respond – by becoming more flexible, more responsive to the needs of their students and parents, by improving the quality of education.

The *"quality"* of education, as outlined by Schneider (2001) in relation to the educational market, implies an outcomes-based model of education (which meets the *"needs"* of the consumers of education, i.e., students and parents), a key feature of the mercantile paradigm. This resonates with one teacher's perspective during a focus group interview:

> [Speaking of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy] It seems to be just improving it in a very narrow way… it's just tending to reading, writing, arithmetic like the old model. You're not looking at a holistic model which we're supposed to have with this new curriculum which we were delivered. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013)

Lisa's sentiments also prompt me to consider Sahlberg and Boce's (2010, p.33) argument that: "the global education reform (GERM) movement (Sahlberg, 2007) and common performance standards and frameworks have narrowed perspectives on teaching to prescribed knowledge outcomes and products (Berry and Sahlberg, 2006; European Commission, 2008; Sahlberg, 2007)". When speaking of the emphasis on learning outcomes and attainment, Melenie outlined her fears, stating that, "it's not a nice future if that's the way it's gonna go you know… We may as well be just a robot" (Melanie, upper primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013). Upon interview, the principal of the school acknowledged that the standardised testing in literacy and numeracy was "being given a bit more emphasis because of the fact that it's being reported" (principal, interview, October 2015). When asked about performance in these areas the principal stated, "I think literacy and numeracy is really *really* important in our school" (principal, interview, October 2015). The principal also spoke about how performance was analysed within the school and how plans were made to maximise student attainment and performance in relation to standardised testing, resulting in cutting back on 'extra-curricular' areas:

> In our school, we've always analysed the results of our standardised tests, more-so than other places might have done, and looked at where we were 'falling down' or if we could improve areas and things like that. And we would have noticed I'm sure, remember two years ago, we noticed that there was that dip there in the 4th and 5th classes' STEN scores and we were wondering…we had an awful lot there [curricular activities outside of literacy and numeracy] that we shouldn't have had, and we worked

> on that and put a plan in place. I think performance is important in our school. (principal, interview, October 2015)

The priority given to analysis of the standardised test results is evident here, whereby "*results"* were analysed, perhaps even *"more so"* than other schools. There is a link created between the perceived decline in certain classes' test scores, attributed to abundance of other activities and subject areas outside of literacy and numeracy. Addressing these 'concerns' and putting a "plan in place" to address 'performance', echoes *The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy* (DES, 2011, 2020). They purport that "including a broader range of issues, topics and subjects in the curriculum runs the risk that the time available in school for the acquisition and consolidation of critical core skills may be eroded" (DES, 2020, p.44).

The principal also noted the pressure that teachers may be faced with as they try to maximise their students' performance on the standardised tests:

> I think that maybe in the back of your mind somewhere you might say 'oh my goodness, the standardised tests are coming up in May now, this group here isn't like the group I had last year, so I'm going to have to maybe emphasise one section more that I [previously] didn't have to emphasise. So I do think that it might have an effect like that on teachers and that's no bad thing either, because you know, keep an eye on how things are going. (principal, interview, October 2015)

Although performativity pressures were recognised, it was not seen as a "bad thing" as ultimately, there was an emphasis that teachers needed to "keep an eye" and evaluate student performance. All the teachers I spoke to during interviews and focus groups expressed feeling increased pressure regarding student attainment and performativity regarding the standardised tests in literacy and numeracy. Some of these teachers' sentiments can be captured as follows:

- Performance in relation to standardised tests would be important but more so with the children than with our principal who wouldn't put us under any extreme pressure. Obviously, she'd love to see scores going up, and in certain STENs movement in that, but I would feel more [pressure], just speaking with regard to my class this year, 5th class… There's a lot of pressure from the children and from parents, where you have children thanking you for bringing up their STENs. Children this year have been promised phones if they got two STENs of 10, which was followed through, so there's a huge pressure there. (Melanie, upper primary teacher interview, June 2013)

- I was just even thinking just a few weeks ago in May when we were doing our standardised tests… I felt that it was kind of quite pressurising on the teacher, because you had to make sure that you had your maths curriculum completed and then you were trying to find time to revise back over topics that you had done during the year. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

- You definitely change your style of teaching, especially in that month of May… April and May…because you know they're [the standardised tests are] looming, you're trying to finish off books, you're trying to cover as much as you can to get them to score well. If we're honest, definitely, that month of May we become different teachers. We almost become leaving cert teachers, you know. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

- I think that every teacher is definitely getting more fixated on those standardised test results so, unless they think about ways of broadening that or changing around the tests so that they're more comprehensive, or looking at a number of things, then we're all going to be teaching in order to improve their scores. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

- So it's becoming a very cold figure, so we are, we're under pressure to keep these scores up because you're sending them home at the end of the year. And the children are becoming aware. I had a child in my class this year who apparently thanked her teacher last year for increasing her STEN by 1: "Thank you for getting me from a STEN 7 to an 8". (Rebecca, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

There is a definite and palpable feeling of increased pressure from these teachers regarding the standardised tests. These pressures seem to emanate from heightened emphasis placed on student attainment and data-driven improvement, stemming from increased accountability measures such as the reporting of results to parents. The undeniable strain felt by teachers may also stem from internal cultural expectations, as noted in a conversation with staff in August 2014, during which a member of the senior management team emphasised the *"need to improve"* the standardised test scores, noting that maths was above the national average and literacy had only recently reached parity. This emphasis was linked to the requirement to meet School Self-Evaluation targets, striving to ensure continued improvement in attainment (field notes, August 2014).

Undoubtedly, school leaders *too* face pressures pertaining to performativity, especially considering Department of Education frameworks emphasising data-driven 'improvement', as

well as the increased focus placed on literacy and numeracy performance, as outlined by the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020). Michaela, a senior class teacher, during an interview conversation, implied that the standardised test results may be perceived as an indicator of teacher effectiveness:

> I think teachers find it quite stressful then because the results do go home and they are shared now with the Board of Management and you know, sometimes you might feel that it's kind of a reflection on the teacher, especially if children dis-improve considerably, you know… (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

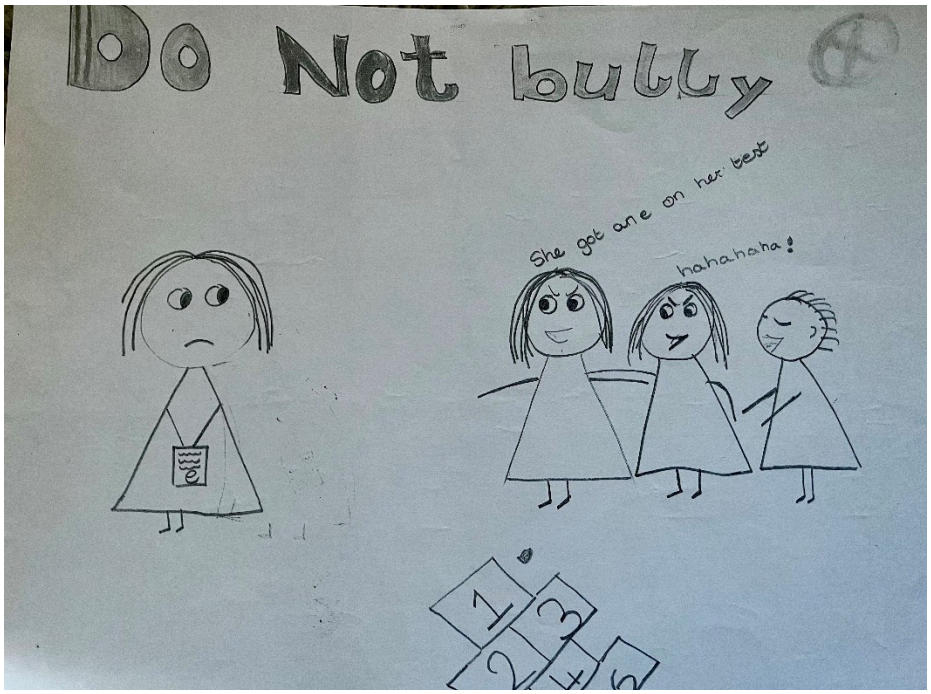
The stress that this teacher feels from the perceived performance pressures are obvious. It also appears evident that children are aware of the pressures that they face to perform on the standardised tests. Valerie, a middle primary teacher, also outlined her concerns, stating that:

> The fact that I'm sending them [standardised test results] home to parents and that they can compare them to the previous year, is a bit of a concern as well. And even for the children themselves, if they're being told they are this and they were that, I think that's a worry. (Valerie, middle primary teacher, interview, October 2014)

This teacher also noted the perceived competitiveness and focus on 'standards culture' regarding the standardised tests and stated that she would "be concerned that they would start, well, anything like league tables" (Valerie, middle primary teacher, interview, October 2014).

One middle primary child from my class in 2014 designed a poster on the theme of 'anti-bullying', depicting children laughing and teasing another child for her low grade. This certainly highlights the hyper-awareness that some children possess in relation to 'high-stakes' testing. Furthermore, in June 2013, one of my senior students, who was visibly distraught, asked if she could speak to me. She was distressed, explaining that she was upset over her standardised test results in maths (which had been reported to her parents). The child was crying as she blurted, "I'm upset with the score of a 4. It's really low. Mom and Dad were upset and annoyed with me because it was a *really* low score", also stating that her aunt agreed. She informed me that her parents had asked her to ask her teacher how she could study at home, explaining that she "really need[ed] advice on how to improve" (Sophie, field notes, June

2013). I felt deeply disheartened and affected by this (Ahmed, 2004), though I did my best not to show it. I comforted the child reassuring her that it wasn't a bad score, that it was only *one test*; that she had engaged well throughout the year, had tried her best, and that this was all that truly mattered. This memory has stuck with me throughout the years. No child should feel this level of pressure regarding a primary school maths test.



An anti-bullying poster drawn by a lower primary student highlighting her hyper-awareness of assigned values attributed to testing. The image depicts several children pointing to and laughing at a child who "got an 'e' grade on her test". The victim of this scene stands alone with a dejected and sorrowful expression. This image is accompanied by the message "Do Not Bully" written in bold as a firm reminder (2014).

Influences of the Marketisation of Education on Creativity

Performativity Pressures: Implications for Creative Practice

With increased pressures surrounding teachers regarding learning outcomes and performativity, do teachers have enough time to meaningfully foster creative development across the curriculum? Sahlberg (2013) outlines his concerns regarding the narrow focus of international

standardised tests such, as PISA: "I am worried about what happens to arts, music, PE, and other subjects not included in the Global PISA. We need a Whole Child approach!" (Pasi Sahlberg, *Twitter*, 2 April 2013). How does Sahlberg conceive a 'whole child approach'? Perhaps he is referring to the development of the child in relation to the fostering of *all* curricular areas, not prioritising some areas of development over others. That is not to say of course that creative development, as mentioned above, is limited to the arts subjects. From my own professional experience in my own educational context and from analysis of research data, I can relate to Sahlberg's sentiments regarding his concerns in relation to the detrimental effects of marketised education systems on a broad holistic education. Reiterating Conway (2013, p.52):

> The move toward GERM in Irish education policy reflects a considerable redirection, from a more general focus on standards, a strong emphasis on broad holistic curriculum (particularly at primary level), and an earlier emphasis on moderate rather than stricter accountabilities in Irish education.

Indeed, with increased emphasis being placed on 'consequential' accountability (ibid.), standardisation and learning outcomes (O'Brien and Brancaleone, 2011), are there real threats posed to a broad holistic education, with emphasis on children's holistic and creative development? One teacher during interview expressed her concerns regarding the DES Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011, 2020) and the increased emphasis being placed on learning outcomes and targets. She stated that:

> [The DES] want us to meet targets and have more clearer objectives, but if it's all literacy and numeracy then teachers are going to be totally stressed out focusing on that and the other areas of holistic development will suffer….It's very narrow. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013)

Undoubtedly, performativity pressures are significant in creating barriers to opportunities for the development of creativity through the arts. The intensification of education shaped by the Global Education Reform Movement, with increased emphasis placed on data-driven improvement and student attainment in 'core areas' such as literacy and numeracy, alongside

the pressure to perform, undoubtedly limits time and provision for creative pursuits. I spoke to the principal during interview, and she elaborated on this challenge:

> The limitations really are trying to get the work done. You know, you're trying to get your history done, you're trying to get your science done, and if you're pressed for time it's hard to allow people to just mull over a few ideas to see how they can come up with something; and you're looking at the clock and you're saying "oh my gosh, we're only so far through this lesson and we're going to have to move on to something else next…" I think that's a big limitation really because at the end of the day you're still going to have to get the curriculum covered you know. And unless you can bring it in somewhere through drama; now drama might be, you could get a lot done through drama as well… But, you might start off with all ideas early on in the year and then it comes to January and you're saying "oh my goodness, half the year is nearly gone and "I've to do xyz", so definitely practicalities come in. (principal, interview, October 2015)

Áine, a teacher who had been teaching over a decade explained the pressure that she felt under with the standardised tests looming and the impact that this had regarding provision for arts education approaching the standardised testing:

> Even from my own personal experience when we were doing the standardised tests during the month of May and even prior to it, I was doing revision or I was trying to tie up loose ends of chapters that maybe we hadn't fully finished and I wanted them to be able to answer the questions that may come up in the test, I found that my arts subjects were non-existent. (Áine, upper primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013)

Another teacher acknowledges that the main barrier to creativity is the standardised testing and the pressure that teachers are under to perform and meet targets of attainment at the expense of the creative arts:

> The main barriers [to creativity]; there's the standardised testing, because if you're focusing on that at the end of the year all the time, you're taking time from and it will be taken from the arts and the creative side of things, so you've that. The curriculum overload is a huge thing. I mean, we can barely do what's on the curriculum as it is and they still seem to be throwing everything…everything is on the school. And I suppose, the other thing is I suppose…that it's not even, it doesn't even have a pride of place in the cuntas miosiúil [monthly plan and report] as well I suppose, so there isn't the same pressure on you to do it. So you'll fill in the cuntas miosiúil and do what's in it but if creativity and the visual arts, if there isn't the same kind of pressure, you'll leave that until the end. (Claire, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

The symbolic value of the 'core' subjects (specifically, literacy and numeracy) and their perceived hierarchy over the arts subjects is evident by examining the structure of the monthly

plan and cuntas miosiúil (monthly plan and report) – whereby the planning template for core subjects is much larger and also is prioritised by being placed at the front of the planning template. Melanie, an upper primary teacher explained her tendency to prioritise the 'core' subjects over what she perceives as the more creative subjects: "I suppose the core academic subjects would be huge for me and therefore the creative subjects would definitely suffer as a result because I would give my extra time there [to the provision of literacy and numeracy development]" (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013). She further highlighted the impact that the communication of the standardised test results has on provision for creative development: "especially since we're writing the STEN down on the reports, definitely that third term 'creativity' takes a back seat" (Melanie, upper primary teacher interview, June 2013). Another teacher agreed that she felt the intense demand to prioritise literacy and numeracy in preparation for the standardised tests, even if it meant the expense of other curricular areas:

> I suppose during the month of May I found that other subjects did have to be sacrificed, I did have to sacrifice some subjects and other topics…because of time constraints… I felt that during the month of May, I was spending most of the day doing literacy or numeracy, whether was it just trying to if there was one or two topics, whether it was trying to tie up loose ends or whether it was just to go back over revision. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, June 2014)

Lisa also confirmed that "it was English and Maths literally for most of the month of May" (Lisa, middle primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013). Considering the ethnographic classroom observations which will later be discussed, there were certainly some opportunities for creative work being explored in the study school during this time, albeit limited opportunities. As one teacher remarked in an interview:

> For those teachers who prefer and would love to do more creativity, it must be very stifling. So I'd say an awful lot depends on the teacher themselves. You could fit it in, I mean, there's no excuse not to be still creative, but definitely, you always have to have it in the back of your mind that you are aiming towards something at the end of the year and I can't really spend too much time on art or craft or whatever, so for that reason, ya, it would be a consideration. (Máire, lower primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Claire, an upper primary teacher, reflected on the challenges of managing an overloaded curriculum and the impact this has had on her ability to incorporate creative work in the classroom. She expressed concern regarding the emphasis placed on core subjects, such as English and Maths, which often minimise time for the fostering of creativity, especially through the arts. As she explained:

> I think regarding the curriculum, that there's such a curriculum overload, I feel my focus in the curriculum now is always English and Maths. And even in the subject of English, I think it's very difficult to have any bit of creative work. I think you're always rushing and always trying to get something done. So I would definitely have fallen down this year on giving the children time to do any creative work. And across the visual arts subjects also, like, I suppose it was something like even if you look at the cuntas miosiúil it's given the smallest part at the very end, so I suppose there's more pressure on you to fill the literacy and numeracy box, so it's always what you'd try to teach and then the visual arts and creativity is left until last. (Claire, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

To reiterate, the prioritisation of 'core' subjects (particularly literacy and numeracy) over the arts subjects is evident by examining the structure of the monthly plan and cuntas miosiúil, whereby the dominance of core subjects symbolically reflects their perceived value and ranking. The 'pressure' that this teacher feels to prioritise literacy and numeracy is also apparent. However, I believe that, even in the face of such challenges, teachers will continue to find ways to engage pupils in creative tasks. The question is not whether creative work is being undertaken but how it is being *impacted.* Are teachers and pupils adequately able to engage in creative teaching and learning in the current educational context? Máire explains that while there's no excuse not to "still be creative" external pressures and aiming to meet targets can stifle creativity. Interestingly, children also felt this pressure regarding time constraints and the intensification of the school day. One child observes:

> I don't think that there's enough time in the day to be creative because you're trying to get books finished at the end of the year and the teacher is like trying to explain what do to and it's like two o'clock by the time you get started and the classroom can be really messy if you are doing painting. (Ellen, child focus group interview, June 2014)

Ellen is astute in her observations, creative work does take time and indeed can get messy, hence needing extra time in relation to managing lessons effectively. Notably, another child, Caroline, also makes the connection between the intensification of the school day regarding time pressures, task completion and standardised testing:

> At the end of the year you are trying to get all your tests and all of your books finished, then you don't have any time for creativity because you don't have enough time. You have to study and you don't have time for halla time [hall time for PE or 'extra-curricular activities] or anything like that. You don't really have time for creativity when you are doing your tests. (Caroline, child focus group interview, June 2014)

Caroline's perception of feeling obligated to 'study' with the looming tests, indicates the performativity pressures that children may feel regarding the standardised testing. A fellow participant explained that "during the summer tests you don't really get to do anything [creative] just like have to have a pencil and rubber and just do your work" (Sarah, child focus group interview, June 2014). Another student chimes in, offering further explanation: "that's true because you are trying to get everything done at the end of the year and you are trying to finish things so you wouldn't really have as much time to do much creative stuff" (Jannet, child focus group interview, June 2014). Ellen, an upper primary student elaborates on her experience:

> I think it's really non-creative like before you're doing the tests, because like the teachers are trying to get as much learnt as possible before the tests and to get a good score so like you won't get like a really bad score. And then it comes up to the tests and then you're doing the tests and we could have something really good planned and then we might have to re-schedule it. (Ellen, child focus group interview, June 2014)

The perceived prioritisation of learning outputs and performativity pressures over creative and artistic endeavours is quite telling in terms of the performativity burdens that even children feel (Ahmed, 2004). The communication of the standardised test results through reporting to parents increased the pressure that some students felt to perform. Eleen explains, "you don't want your report coming home and getting like a *really bad* result" (Ellen, child focus group interview, June 2014). Some children offer wise words of comfort during the interview:

- I think that the schoolwork that you've done all year is the most important because like the score is only like one test that you've done and you could have been in a different way on that day when you done the test. (Sarah, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- I think that the work that you do throughout the year is what matters because I was looking through all my work that I've done over the year and then I look at the test and it's only that big, but then I have all this work that's like this big [gesturing a bigger measure]. I mean, I know it is like a huge test, but I mean it doesn't really matter as long as you did a lot and you tried your best. (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014)

It is commendable that these children have the insight to acknowledge that the testing is only a small part of the bigger picture regarding the 'work' that they engage in during their time in school. Although this is true, performativity pressures are still pervasive and, clearly, they are impactful on *creativity*. Another child observes that there was less opportunities for creativity "when we were doing the tests because you kind of just had to focus on one thing" (Jannet, child focus group interview, June 2014). Interestingly, another child voiced the perceived pressures that she felt in school to conform to external standards or expectations from her peers, stating:

> I think that I'm not as creative in school as I am at home. I think it's because you're with your family and you can trust them but when you're in school there's that pressure of all the other girls mocking you and like you have to fit in. If you don't it's kind of like you're left out. (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014)

Regarding the marked developments in relation to the implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy (DES, 2011), one interview respondent argued:

> If they're [referring to the DES] setting targets that are specific, like my understanding from the literacy is you know that this targets every child in 5th class will be able to do…isn't that the way it is, that they'll be able to do x, y and z…they're really narrowing the focus and that is prescribed knowledge and outcomes and products rather than you know, focusing on the creative side of English and they're only children they should be more focused on that side of things. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, focus group interview, June 2013)

Quite telling is Lisa's 'understanding' of the implementation of the literacy (and numeracy) strategy as being reduced to seeing learning as a "product" rather than "focusing on the creative side" of education. This seems to be a very affirmative statement as to Lisa's perceived

emphasis of learning outcomes as products, rather than emphasising the process and creative aspects of education, within the context of DES directives on literacy and numeracy strategies. This corroborates Brancaleone's (2011) finding, that learning outcomes are expressive of commodified, product-oriented perceptions (and realities) of modern-day education. Lisa reiterates this point in her statement below, as she argues that even education within the arts is being reduced to product versus process:

> I'm just always rushing to get things done and to fit in the next thing, and I'm definitely guilty of not giving them enough time to explore things fully, because you've a timetable, you've a cuntas miosiúil [monthly plan and report]….it's all about getting things done and not giving yourself enough time to give the children more time to be creative and to tease things out. And even in the arts education, you know, you're just trying to get a list of things done rather than giving them time just to explore and be creative, because you're just focused on having a finished product and ticking a box basically, in your cuntas miosiúil. (Lisa, middle primary teacher interview, interview, June 2013)

Valerie, another teacher of the middle years students at the school outlined her perspective regarding the tensions that exist between time constraints and allowing enough time provision to foster meaningful opportunities for the exploration of creative learning experiences:

> I don't think that there's enough time at all to do anything too creative…. It is time consuming and it is all about the process and you don't want to rush it and there's an awful lot and so many different stages to it that within the school day there's so much to cover that it's very hard to give it the time that it needs to actually work to the best of its ability, because you are very much constrained time wise that it's very hard to actually give it the time that it needs to actually be I suppose really creative. (Valerie, middle primary teacher, interview, October 2014)

Noreen, a middle primary teacher also discusses the time limitations regarding the provision for the development of creativity within the arts. She notes the importance of prioritising the skills of literacy and numeracy first and foremost:

> It [creativity] definitely probably isn't given the time that's needed, and I suppose it is not a priority. And I suppose I can see the reasoning behind that too like and I mean, children do need to have good levels of literacy and numeracy, especially going into secondary school like, I can see why you would prioritise it. But I suppose, you need to find a happy balance too, that it's [creativity] not being neglected. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Indeed, I can relate to these sentiments from my ethnographic observations *as well as* my own 'lived experiences' during the last decade within the study school. Increasingly, under the influence of the mercantile paradigm, there has been an increased emphasis placed on the performance element of arts education, for example, through performing school pageants such as Feis Maitiú and Cór Fheile. Feis Maitiú is a competitive, performance-based showcase of music, drama and the performing arts, across all ages, that primary school students can partake in. While Cór Fheile presents a similar showcase of arts-based performances, but specific to primary schools, in a non-competitive capacity.

During this period, there was also a significant reduction in the budget allocated for art resources, with the school's materials pooled into a single press in the staffroom (see images below). Additionally, an allowance of €2.50 per child was granted for teachers to spend, a reduction from the previous generous budget of €10 per child. This figure was later changed to a maximum spend of €50 per class. It is important to be clear that, *of course*, this does not suggest that school leaders would deliberately curtail funding for the visual arts. The *reality* is that schools often face intense pressure to make decisions when resources and government funding are limited. Also, considering the directive from the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020), which placed schools under increased pressure to prioritise literacy and numeracy provision, it is understandable that the school may have felt compelled to safeguard funding towards these areas as a necessary priority. These tough choices are, in large part, a consequence of insufficient funding from external bodies, particularly the Government of Ireland and Department of Education, which are ultimately responsible for ensuring that schools have adequate resources across the curriculum. School leaders are hence tasked with balancing the needs of the school and deciding where resources are directed. These dilemmas can obviously affect (Ahmed, 2004) school leaders as they face tough decisions and balancing acts. I remain mindful of the challenges that educational leaders

face in navigating these competing demands, which may at times feel like an impossible task, with no decision being entirely without consequence.

Several teachers expressed frustration to me regarding the lack of visual arts materials, noting that they felt unable to cover key areas of the curriculum, such as printing and clay work, for example. Some resources, such as the clay, were labelled with reminders to be mindful of their usage, due to lack of provision for materials. In December 2013 there was a discussion regarding the purchasing of Christmas art materials, whereby Claire, an upper primary teacher, asked a member of the management team what resources would be made available. When told that the art press contained mostly paper and card and that any extra materials could be purchased with teachers' additional budget, Claire responded by questioning the provision available, noting that it was "just paper so is it?" She added that she would "be in trouble" in the event of an inspection, as her planning would not align with classroom practice due to insufficient resources (field notes, December 2013). The feeling of frustration was palpable. I recall another staffroom conversation with Claire in September 2014, whereby she questioned, "what's the story with the art press?", highlighting the lack of resources available and asking how art was supposed to be effectively taught under such conditions. I recalled the sparsely resourced art cupboard, accompanied by the sign "please note that there is half a bag of clay for every class". Claire outlined her disappointment with the lack of provision for art resources, emphasising that the situation was "not fair on the children", given their enjoyment of art (field notes, September 2014).



Images of the 'art cupboard' containing visual arts resources for the school (2014). This reflects the difficult financial decisions that school leaders may need to make when funding is limited, and they face 'performativity' pressures pertaining to other 'core' areas. This situation highlights the broader questions surrounding the resourcing of the creative arts across schools, and the extent to which they are valued alongside other curricular areas within policy and practice.

From examining these findings, it appears evident that marketised 'choices' have clear affects (Ahmed, 2004), pertaining to the feelings of frustration and concern among certain staff members regarding the lack of resources available for the visual arts. However, it is important to reiterate that school leaders are often faced with the difficult, if not the impossible task of making decisions within the context of limited funding. These affects were not limited to teachers within the school, with children also outlining their perspectives. During a focus group interview with 3rd class students, a number of students spoke of their disappointment at the lack of resources available for art:

- There probably isn't [enough materials in the school to be creative]. You know the way down in the art press, there's like paint and pastels and things, if someone doesn't have colours and they probably don't have like colouring pencils and things like that and they probably don't have like enough paper. They probably have like enough orange or purple but they don't have enough blue and then they're [referring to the school] not buying blue; then the blue is used up so then there's no more blue, so you can't use any blue so you have to think of something else to use. (Ava, child focus group interview, June 2016)

- We did clay throughout the year and we only had half a bag of clay and it wasn't even enough for 17 of us, and some classes have more than 20 [students] like the 2nd class. That actually wouldn't be enough…and even if like you had more than

we had, you'd only have enough for like half of the class. (Ava, child focus group interview, June 2016)

- I think that every class should get at least a bag of clay because we only got one class out of half a bag of clay so that wouldn't even be enough for two times when we're doing it. (Gina, focus group interview, June 2016)

These statements to me are somewhat concerning, considering Eisner's (1972) notion of creativity as a fundamental and ethical right. Although funding was curtailed for the visual arts, the school was able to allocate some funds towards the performing arts though the purchase of and investment in costumes for the Christmas pageant as well as providing ongoing musical instruction. This signifies the clear 'sign value' (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020), being placed on products of performance. Further, this represents a product of managerialism too, as in marketised education systems, whereby decisions are sometimes made on behalf of the 'managed' teachers and pupils. Within such systems, schools often face heightened pressure to prioritise elements (or products) of performance as a means of 'school promotion', in order to enhance their visibility and reputation in the competitive educational 'market'. Therefore, it is understandable perhaps, that school leaders may feel compelled to prioritise areas that they perceive as having an elevated 'sign value' (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020) or 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2020) within the marketplace – perhaps denoting a sort of 'hyper-reality, or produced representations of reality, that may become increasingly valued over reality *itself* (Baudrillard, 1994, 2023).

A significant challenge to fostering creativity in the classroom, as noted by Claire, an upper primary teacher, was the limited resources and inadequate funding available for creative activities. Claire highlights the stark contrast between the initial generous budget she received for the visual arts when she began teaching and the subsequent restrictions, which she believed hindered her ability to provide students with the materials necessary for creative exploration. She explains:

> A really big barrier to creativity is the lack of resources and budgeting. When I started first we were given a big budget, like €10 per person [per student], but compared to what we have now, now it's what's in the [art] press and €50 of your own [per class] which is very limiting. But even that €50 is very little. If you go to the art and hobby shop with €50 you're getting very little; you'd get a good Christmas art [lesson] out of it but that might be it! So definitely resources and money and funding, definitely [are a barrier to creativity]. (Claire, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

This emphasises the small budget available then, was felt to be insufficient to support meaningful, *creative* artistic projects. This reflects the broader issue of how financial constraints impact teachers' ability to fully nurture creativity in their students. Ravitch (2011, p.235), argues that "through the arts, children learn discipline, focus, passion and sheer joy for creativity. We should make sure that these opportunities and the resources to support them are available to every student in the school". Interestingly, although money had been invested in the purchasing of costumes for performance-based drama pageants and school productions (while visual arts resource spending had been curtailed), by 2013 the drama section of the monthly plan and report in our school was actually omitted by the school leadership team 'in consultation with teachers', in favour of integrating drama across the curriculum, whilst meeting the demand to spend more time on literacy and numeracy development. Although this decision has subsequently been reneged, it sent a very clear message at the time regarding the '(sign) value' placed on drama within the curriculum. Also, of notable interest, when teachers were asked in interviews whether they taught drama as much, considering that it was removed from the school's formal monthly plan, a number of teachers reported that the undertaking of drama suffered. One teacher explains:

> Because the drama was omitted this year [from the monthly plan], I personally feel that I didn't do as much drama this year, 'cause I suppose when you are planning and you have your own little grid for drama, you think more about ok how am I going to… I was thinking of drama as more of a subject, but this year, because it was (eliminated from the monthly plan), I use it more as a methodology. I find that I didn't do as much drama this year in comparison to other years. (Áine, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

Here, can be seen the clear effects of managerialism too, within the influences of marketisation. Interestingly, this teacher, who taught the creative drama lesson that I observed during in-class ethnographic observations, reported that she did not in fact teach much drama in her class *at all*, due to feeling pressure to *meet targets* and learning outcomes in 'key' areas of the curriculum. Performance, however, appeared to dominate. Another teacher that I spoke to during an interview, outlined her perspectives regarding performativity within the school:

> Performance is very important but it's performance that people outside can *see* we're performing, as opposed to actual *creative* performance. So it's very prescriptive, it's very narrow in the sense of the curriculum in that our performance is generally song-singing. Today we had our talent show, so we played the piano, guitar and uillean pipes and that's just out of 3 classes. And we have never used those in any meaningful way during the year. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

I find Michaela's (upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014) observation of "it's performance that people outside can see we're performing as opposed to actual creative performance" very revealing. These findings resonate with Ball's (2003), notion of 'image management', regarding how performances are used to elevate the public image of the school, whereby the emphasis is placed on the product (seen), at the expense of the creative process (unseen). In numerous conversations with staff, members of the senior management team were deliberating on how we could "market the school", with one member stating that there was a need to enhance the school's public profile in endeavour to attract enrolments and elevate its public image (field notes, June 2014). This sentiment validates Michaela's argument that the schools' public image is of importance. Senior managerial staff, in consultation with teachers, also talked in-depth about taking photographs of the school's activities and events to include on the school website, as a means of *'showcasing*' some of the work that goes on in the school, in an effort to attract more students to the school. These are 'typical' examples of how schools 'compete' and make themselves visible in the educational market. Noreen, a middle primary teacher, also spoke of the importance of the school's image affirming that:

> Image is definitely important….and I can understand why too if you're trying to attract people to the school. I can completely understand why. But they are I suppose, the events like the pageant and Seó le Pádraig [St. Patrick's Day performance], they are less shows and more showcases of trying to get people into the school. There is that element of it. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

I believe that performativity and image-management in the context of marketisation of education is clearly evident, from these observations and sentiments. I recall asking children, in a focus group, if there were instances where they could be less creative in school. I found it interesting that the topic of the pageant arose from the children themselves. One child explained that she felt that the Christmas pageant did not provide opportunity for creativity as "it's the same every year" (Julia, child focus group interview, June 2014). Niamh (child focus group interview, June 2014) argued that "changing it up or making it more creative" would be an idea. One child added; "we are all doing the same thing really and we are acting like robotic" (Sarah, child focus group interview, June 2014). The description of the pageant as 'robotic', suggests that it is almost devoid of any individual expression or individuality. Julia, (child focus group, June 2014), also described how there was no expectation of change any year as students "know" what they are going to "get":

> With the Christmas pageant I felt that it was robotic, it's not like they're gonna jazz it up. And if you're going into 3rd class you know that you're either gonna get the angel song or whatever the other song is. There's no real surprise in terms of what you're gonna get.

Brenda, (child focus group interview, June 2014), a fellow upper primary pupil, also piped in: "I think that it is a bit robotic like because like every year it's the same song and the same dance and same routine, so that's why I think it's robotic". Niamh, in agreement with the other children instead tried to offer a solution to create more pupil autonomy, variation and *'creativity'* during the Christmas performance:

> I think there should be like maybe like someone doing like dancing solo or something, or just like, changing it up or making it more creative and just a little more free even, but still…you know…obviously routined and just, know what you're gonna do. But, ya, it is a little robotic because it doesn't really give the children any freedom to do anything. (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014)

Although the children, in these interview comments, outline their desire to engage in more creative performances with greater emphasis on individual expression, I recognise that other children may enjoy and even prefer teacher-led performances. In December 2013 during a rehearsal for the Christmas pageant in the church, I observed one teacher addressing the class regarding their performance. She reminded the children to stop scratching themselves and that they needed to remain still and smile while singing. Another teacher issued a series of instructions aimed at 'improvement', calling for "big smiles!", prompting pupils to open their mouths, stop fidgeting and looking around and instead instructing them to "be still like statues!", again emphasising "big smiles!" (field notes, December 2013). The strong emphasis placed on performativity and image-management at the expense of the process and children's autonomy seemed apparent in this instance. However, I can also recognise the institutional pressures that teachers may face to ensure that performances meet expected standards, particularly in contexts in which school events are publicly showcased.

Claire voiced her concerns about the challenges that children face regarding school performances, whereby regimental expectations and emphasis on the final product may hinder their ability to express themselves freely. She explained:

> They're told how to express, they're told what kind of voice to use. It's hard for them. And I feel you're nearly kind of getting cross with them trying to tell them to speak clearly and, nobody can hear you, stand this way, move that way. It's all the end product really I suppose for the audience. (Claire, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Michaela, an upper primary class teacher, also expressed her concern regarding drama performances within the school, particularly regarding their prescriptive nature, which may stifle creative expression:

> What drama do we do? We do the pageant. It's prescriptive. We have a script, the same script every year, the same costumes, the children are told what songs they are singing. And I know it has to be some way prescriptive because that's what it is. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Reflecting on the distinction between 'structured' performance and true 'creative' expression, one teacher pointed out the limitations and restrictions of pre-planned showcases such as the pageant. As Noreen, a class teacher, shared:

> For the pageant, every class knows what they are going to do and there's set dance moves and there's set costumes, and it's prescribed; it's like a conveyor belt, every year it's the same. I really wouldn't class it as creative as such. It is a performance and it's great, I absolutely love it and there's fantastic skills involved in that too but it's not really a creative experience for them. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

The Christmas pageant has changed slightly over the years, with some variations regarding performances and songs, although to this day we still include some songs that were present from over a decade ago. Lancaster (1990, p.6), argues that "there is a creative urge in every human being – young and old alike – for we all have a natural desire". Lowenfeld contends that it is unethical to regiment children into a homogenous way of expression:

> Methods which are not serving the individual child and the differences in his growth are detrimental for education. Have respect for the individual. It is unethical not to regard an individual as an individual and to straitjacket him (sic) and regiment him (sic) into a sameness of expression. (Lowenfeld, 1982, p.40)

Lowenfeld (1982), presents the conflict that may be experienced, between fostering creativity, and meeting aesthetic/performance-based expectations held by the educator. If a teacher expects children to conform artistically to his/her aesthetic ideals, expectations or standards, can creativity and individualism be every truly fostered?

Of course, arts education, isn't the only area where creativity can be fostered, but it is worth noting the perceived exclusion of other curricular areas where creativity is promoted, due to the increased emphasis being placed on literacy and numeracy provision. I feel that there are links here with issues emanating from Tanggaard's (2011) research which examined educators' experiences of feeling increasingly controlled by external demands to meet targets and learning outcomes: "What is of particular interest is that the questions about creativity seemed to imply answers to, and to prompt discussions about which external demands actually hinder teaching

for creativity or creative teaching" (Tanggaard, 2011, p.224). I find it interesting that when exploring their conceptions of creativity that educators (notably from three different educational contexts, in both primary and second level in this study), felt compelled to highlight barriers to creativity, stemming from external demands. Persistently participants in Tanggaard's study outlined issues regarding perceived external pressures which challenged creative development in their educational contexts:

> [One respondent], who is a teacher at the upper level in secondary school, emphasises the experience of an increased focus on the measurement, accountability and public comparisons of grade levels in public schools as a kind of surveillance that makes it difficult to insist on a form of teaching which may not lead to better evaluations. (Tanggaard, 2011, p.228)

Regarding my ethnographic observations in my own school, teachers have overwhelmingly outlined their frustrations regarding a perceived lack of autonomy and inability to promote creativity due to external demands. Perhaps resonating with the above respondent, as outlined in Tanggaard's research (2011), one teacher interviewed argued that:

> Creative teaching requires classroom organisation and if you're trying to fit that into the time, it just doesn't compute, it just doesn't add up. And…really…when you have the emphasis of these tests, particularly after Easter time, you're going to naturally give more time to English and Maths, English and Maths, and try to bring up their ability for the tests so you don't have time for creativity. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

Melanie's observations suggest a perceived lack of time to foster creativity within classroom practice. This raises broader questions regarding how such pressures and time constraints may impact the provision of a creative, holistic, child-centred education in certain contexts.

Ball (2003) warns of threats to a holistic education in what he coins 'the terrors of performativity'. Ball notes how teachers may struggle as they may find their values challenged due to externally imposed measures of performance. One UK teacher asks, "what happened to my creativity? What happened to my professional integrity? What happened to the fun in teaching and learning?" (G.E. Johnson, cited in Ball, 2003, p.216).

Considering performativity through the arts as a form of school promotion and image management (Ball, 2003), there has undoubtedly been a shift in how schools utilise the arts and performance to market the school. Claire, an upper primary teacher, (interview, June 2014) discussed the external pressure faced by schools regarding performativity: "I would say many schools are under pressure to perform and to sell themselves. And we're at the stage where we are trying to sell ourselves". A number of other teachers observed the emphasis that was placed on the performing arts during the time of interview:

- The main focus always is the, in terms of the art displays or the musical performance, it's more of a performance or a product, rather than [emphasising] creativity. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

- People seem to put an awful lot of emphasis into our shows at the different times of the year. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

- When I first came, we were trying to sell ourselves and our school a lot at the time. There was huge emphasis on performance and making it more public the better, whether it would be on a central stage or having constant shows, to the point that it almost led to a revolution amongst the staff because it was just too much and we couldn't cope with the academic performance. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

- What drama do we do? We do the pageant. It's prescriptive. We have a script, the same script every year, the same costumes, the children are told what songs they are singing. And I know it has to be some way prescriptive because that's what it is. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

- In actual fact, sometimes I think they end up looking like soldiers and there's too much of an emphasis entirely on product, and the end product and how it looks to the audience. I don't think the children and how they're enjoying it and what they've got out of it comes into it at all. (Claire, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Lisa reflected on the challenges of implementing the creative aspects of music and drama, due to time pressures and emphasis placed on performance for specific events:

> Music, will be done if it's for a communion or confirmation or a concert, the song singing performance will be done, but I definitely don't feel that the other aspects of music are done in general; across our school anyway… I mean most people I talk to, it's all the same… They're the things that suffer; composing, I don't think anyone's doing much of it, or listening or responding…very little of it; all those creative things… And in drama sur (sic), it's pretty much just happening only when it can be integrated and it's all time, time, time and they're the things that suffer straight away…

> In general, I think, well that's what I'm observing anyway. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

Michaela, a senior class teacher makes a direct connection between performativity in the arts and marketing the school:

> Why is the performance given that importance? A lot of it I think is advertising for the school to be honest. I think that they're just trying to get the school's name out there, get parents in to see the performance. Of course, some of it is for the children, but I do think a lot of it nowadays is trying to get numbers [for pupil enrolment]; and we do a Christmas show and we do a summer show, and "come and see us and this is our school"…. And it gets the [school's] 'name' out there more I think. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

One upper primary teacher shared her thoughts on school performances, expressing concern that although they were of high quality, they lacked variety and were focused on 'image-management'. She explained: "we're doing good performances, but we're doing too much of the same type and that is for the stakeholders, that is for the image" (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014). Another senior class teacher shared her views on the role of performance in the arts and the conflict that can arise between performativity and opportunities for the development of creativity through the arts:

> I think performance is important, but I think that it takes up an awful lot of time in the curriculum. And I think that the performance wouldn't be that of creative performance. I think it's more performance that we're telling them what to do and you're nearly giving them the lines for the acting and you're nearly telling them what song they're singing so it is important, but it takes up too much time, and the children aren't being creative themselves, I think. I'd prefer if it was more creative performance, if they could work on it themselves and then you wouldn't be taking up as much time from every other subject, at certain times of the year especially. (Claire, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

For example, the school takes part annually in high-profile showcases of musical performance such as Cór Fhéile and The National Children's Choir, whereby children practice and prepare for months on end, before performing alongside other schools. Although it is not explicitly a competition, teachers have spoken of the high standards that are expected as the children perform alongside other schools. In essence, the performances of various schools are being showcased on a large stage for all to see. During interview the principal spoke about the

school's participation in Cór Fheile [a non-competitive showcase of primary school performances in the areas of music, drama and dance]:

> Have you been to Cór Fhéile? It's a lot of work but it's good fun and you can see all of the work that the girls are doing, and the standard is a very high standard. It would be worth doing because it's a lovely night because there's no competition element and everybody is just chatting to everybody else and you meet the other schools who are there as well. That I think is a very good way to give people an idea as to what the school is all about, you know. (principal, interview, October 2015)

Although the principal mentions that Cór Fhéile is "fun", she also mentions that "you can see all of the work that the girls are doing" and mentions that the "standard is a *very high standard*", despite there being "no competition element". It is also perhaps evident that she may conceive Cór Fhéile as a school promotion or image management tool, mentioning that it's a "very good way to give people an idea as to what the school is all about". This resonates with Ball's (2000) notion of 'impression management'. She further elaborates:

> And talking to parents now as well, they're a very *very* high standard [talking about musical performances]. I know from parents talking to me about that and then going to other places and that, they would come back and say that the girls in our school have so many opportunities to perform. And I know it's not all about performance, but they're exposed to an awful lot of the arts, musically especially, compared to other places. That would be something that we could blow our trumpets about. (principal, interview, October 2015)

I think it is commendable that the principal recognises the value of exposing the students to the arts, while also acknowledging that "it is not all about performance", indicating an awareness of the inherent benefits of engaging with the arts. The principal mentions that musical and arts-based performances can be a fun experience for students, which resonates with Ravitch (2010, p.235) argument that "through the arts, children learn discipline, focus, passion, and the sheer *joy* of creativity". However, this instance presents a sort of dichotomy between the intrinsic, enjoyable elements of engaging with the arts and their use as tools of school promotion and 'image management' (Ball, 2000).

Although I am sure that there are many children who do enjoy teacher-led or stage performances, some of the children that I spoke to during interviews shared their own perceptions and experiences:

- I don't think it's fun, I just think that like some of the Moms kind of like get bored of it, especially if they have to go to it every year. (Brenda, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- I think like, since I've been in 1st class, and even when my sister were here, they have been doing the same songs over and over again, and even my Mam said it's kind of like getting boring. (Sarah, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- [Talking about the Christmas pageant] I think like there should be someone doing like a dancing solo or something or just changing it up or making it more creative. (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- For the Christmas pageant we didn't really get a choice regarding what we wanted to do so we had to do that same song and the same dancing, so it was kind of hard. I wasn't really comfortable with that. (Jannet, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- When you're doing a performance, there were load of classes that did it before you, and you might be thinking that they might have done it better than you. That may make you feel under pressure I think; that you might do worse than the other classes or the other people doing the dancing. (Rachel, child focus group interview, June 2014)

When we discussed the children's perceptions of musical performances, interestingly, some children perceived the symbolic 'value' of their performances in terms of 'image management' and their role in representing the school. One child explained that perhaps some teachers felt that their performances were important "because like you want it to be *perfect* for the audience" (Brenda, child focus group interview, June 2014). Another child, Sarah also agreed: "I think they do like want it to be a good standard 'cause they [the teachers and principal] are representing your class" (Sarah, child focus group interview, June 2014). Indeed, the children's perceptions were incredibly astute in recognising the value that performances hold in terms of boosting the status and public's perceived image of the school. This resonates with the notion that in marketised paradigms, education is valued for its worth regarding the potential gains for individuals and society as a whole, in relation to their 'human capital' and economic 'sign

value' (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020). These potential gains from showcasing arts performances may relate to the notion of curating as positive public image of the school to bolster its ranking in the community (or educational market). Some teachers however felt under pressure to meet certain expectations and standards regarding performances, with a strong emphasis on the final product, aware that parents would be watching. Noreen, a middle primary teacher, explained:

> There's a huge pressure for Seó le Pádraig [St. Patrick's Day Show]. I think when it's each class doing their own thing and you know that the parents are going to see it and that they might be using that as their barometer for how good a teacher you are in Gaeilge. Or you know, regarding the pageant, again, the parents are going to see it, so there's that pressure that they're [the children are] walking on properly and that they're walking off properly and that they're looking well in their costumes, as opposed to pressure that they weren't exactly being creative in those instances in themselves. There's pressure to perform but it's pressure that they're behaving well as opposed to the actual pressure of the arts subject. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Noreen elaborates further:

> At the end of the day there's this pressure that you're going to have a very polished end product, so instinctively, if the children are trying to be creative and if what they're creating is a disaster, in terms of it mightn't be the best that it could be, you'd feel like you'd need to step in there as a teacher and correct the grammar mistakes or provide your own thoughts or suggestions as to how it should be, because again, it's a performance for you as a teacher as opposed for them, you know. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

During her interview, the principal expanded on the importance of marketing the school, explaining that due to falling student numbers it was important to market the school:

> As for marketing the school I think that's only a problem when you have falling numbers. The numbers in this school obviously are falling. This is due to a lot of different things you know. So, marketing the school at the moment is important. (principal, interview, October 2015)

The principal was also very direct in speaking about curating and maintaining a good image of the school:

> I think that maintaining a good image of the school is important. Because when I speak to parents generally, people notice. They're watching what's going on. They're making evaluations of the systems. So I think that the image of the school is important. Now, that sounds very shallow in one way because they look nice, they're well

> behaved, but that's what people see. It's very hard in a primary school to talk about your academic achievements because it's only one thing in the whole education process in primary school as opposed to secondary schools where you have their leaving cert results at the end of it, if you want to have a look at them. Most of the time people make an evaluation of the schools based on what they see themselves and by talking to people who already have children who are going to the school. So, I think that a good image of the school is important. And as you know yourself, I would be putting that message out there fairly well, to the children, when they're representing the school and that they would be expected to portray a very good image of the school. And, in fairness they do. (principal, interview, October 2015)

In a conversation with staff in August 2014, a member of the senior management team spoke about the importance of the school's image regarding outings and performances in the public eye, whereby classes would be representing the school. This resonates with the notion of 'image management' that is often prevalent in marketised systems of education. This member of management also noted that there was a need for the school to become more visible within the community and to develop further ways of promoting the school in the locality (field notes, August 2014). These statements also show the marketised pressures that school leaders face, as they feel compelled to compete in the educational market, illustrating how macro-level and meso-level cultural shifts can impact on a school's cultural practices.

In recent years, children from middle and upper primary classes also participated in The National Children's Choir, alongside other longstanding performances such as Cór Fhéile. These musical performances are undertaken with participating schools and performed on a national stage to the public. A member of our leadership team remarked that children can get great enjoyment from these performances, while also acknowledging that it is a great way of promoting the school (field notes, March 2024). I was fortunate to see the children practising for Cór Fhéile and The National Children's Choir this year (2025) and I sensed that many of the children felt genuine enjoyment and pride, beaming with smiles as they performed. The performances incorporated harmonies and, in some cases, dance routines executed in meticulous synchronisation. As mentioned, Wetter et al. (2009) note that music is an important part of our culture and that engagement in it can enhance various skills and activate several

parts of the brain. Caldwell and Vaughan (2001) also draw on research that explores the potential benefits that engaging in the arts can have on students' wellbeing (Caldwell and Vaughan, 2011). Findings such as these illustrate that, despite the 'performance' element that may accompany such initiatives, positive impacts can be experienced among pupils.

Over the last decade there has also been an increasing emphasis placed on the development of the school website as a marketing tool, to show the parents and wider community the work and activities that are being undertaken by the school. The principal in her interview acknowledged the importance of the school website as a marketing tool to showcase the school:

> We put an awful lot of information about what's happening in the school on the school website for parents. It is definitely a very important tool for giving people an idea or a snapshot of the school and that's what most people who don't know a school will do nowadays [look at the school website]. They won't come to look at it [the school], they'll check out the website first. So, I think that the website is a huge marketing tool… So, there's definitely a place there for marketing the school. (principal, interview, October 2015)

In a conversation with staff in June 2014, the leadership team discussed the development of the school website as a tool for promoting the school and enhancing its public image. The importance of marketing the school to attract students and improve its overall profile was emphasised. The role of showcasing school activities through photographs on the website was also discussed as a means of highlighting the school's work to attract prospective students, and to "boost the profile of the school to the public" (fieldnotes, June 2014). The idea of distributing parent, pupil and teacher surveys in relation to SSE (School Self-Evaluation) and SIP (School Self-Improvement) was also discussed as a means of improving the school and increasing its attractiveness for students and parents. Of course, these are government and Department of Education led processes. The School Self-Evaluation process (SSE) is a required six step, evidence-based, cyclical process regarding school evaluation and improvement. The School Improvement Plan (now known as the DEIS Action Plan in DEIS schools), engages with the SSE process and outlines DEIS specific actions pertaining to these

schools. Here, we can observe the way in which schools as positioned as an educational 'product', designed to meet the needs of the 'consumers' of education (namely, parents or guardians), resonating with the key tenets of marketised education systems (Friedman 1955; Schneider 2001; O'Sullivan 2005; Sahlberg, 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the stark impacts of the marketisation of education, that are felt on the ground, as school leaders, teachers and students navigate the pressures of performativity, the drive to achieve, and the need to curate a desirable image of the school (Ball, 2000, 2013). These impacts were seen to have effects on cultural 'practice' within the school, as well as emotive *'affects'* (Ahmed, 2004), as experienced by school leaders, educators and students. The utilisation of the arts, as a tool for performativity, 'image management' and school promotion, was evident from the findings presented. This further resonates with Baudrillard's (1994, 2023) notion of creating 'fabrications' or 'simulacra', or a perceived 'sign value' in the marketplace, to elevate the image of the school. This is turn can create a sort of 'unreality' and 'intensification', amidst the pressure to curate desirable images or 'productions' of perceived value within the marketplace – "with the constant push and pull to self-maximise" (O'Brien and Rudd, 2020, p.158).

The impacts that these marketised systems have are *real* and evident in terms of the lived experiences that educators and students hold. These influences have had a marked impact on creativity in arts education, illustrating a sidelining of the creative arts due to performativity pressures. These findings resonate strongly with the study's central question, which explores how marketised educational reform is experienced and negotiated, and how it impacts creative teaching and learning within the arts.

However, one reflective teacher offers hope: “I think definitely that not all is lost because the imagination is a powerful tool, it doesn’t cost anything and it can be used right across the curriculum, so regarding that, there are opportunities abound” (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014). Let us now explore the creative potential that exists, despite these challenges faced. The following chapter will examine the creative life force, that resides deep within the school’s culture, investigating ways in which educators navigate these (marketised) challenges, leveraging the inherent power of imagination to create meaningful, creative opportunities for students.

Chapter 6

Creative Expression within the Arts: Navigating Marketisation

Understanding Creativity: Perspectives from Teachers and Students

Creativity as an Individual, Expressive and Imaginative Process

It seems noteworthy to examine teachers' and children's perspectives regarding creativity. How do they conceive or define creativity? What personal understandings of creativity do some of the teachers and students have? Upon undertaking interviews and focus groups with teachers and students, alongside classroom observations of arts lessons exploring creativity, (as described in Chapter 4), I asked the participants how they would define creativity.

Although there are many definitions of creativity, according to Lowenfeld (1982), creativity "means the ability to imagine and explore and invent in whatever medium we use" (Lowenfeld, 1982, p.15). Therefore, according to Lowenfeld's (1982) understanding of creativity, one's imagination, or the individual thought processes of the creator are significant. Also, there is emphasis placed on exploring and inventing in various media. This implies that creativity endeavours to create something individual or new, as exploration and invention processes are needed. The person does not merely replicate something that already exists, but designs, invents explores and creates something perhaps of a personal and unique nature. If creativity is individual in nature, then surely self-expression would then naturally manifest itself through tasks that are of a creative temperament? Self-expression has also been hypothesised by Lowenfeld (1982, p.41), as he states that self-expression is a mode of expression, whereby "the child expresses himself according to his own level of thinking, feeling and perceiving". Conversely, Wegerif (2010), sees creativity as taking the form of "lots of little sparks of insight that add up to a new view of the world or perhaps contribute to the creation of a new product.

Creativity, in however small and everyday form, always seems to involve a leap from one way of seeing things to another" (Wegerif, 2010, p.54). In envisaging creativity, Wegerif (2010) perhaps sees the significance of spontaneous or inspired thoughts that culminate to new ideas and viewpoints of the world, which may lead to creating a new piece. What may be interesting to note in this instance is that for creativity to exist in Wegerif's (2010) definition, that creativity does lead to new views and understandings of the world, but does not necessarily or always manifest itself in a new product. Creative thought therefore is believed to exist without necessarily creating a tangible piece. This concept denotes the idea that creativity thought precedes creation. Creative pedagogy, therefore, emphasises the *process* of creation, rather than just the final product.

Although teachers' and students' conceptions of creativity were diverse, many of them outlined similar qualities of creativity, where individuality, personal thought and self-expression were key factors associated with creativity. Melanie, an upper primary class teacher, (focus group interview, June 2013), argued that educators should have the inherent freedom to be creative as professionals: "we're supposed to be I suppose creative, and we're supposed to have freedom somewhat as professionals". Creativity in this instance is viewed as a fundamental right, and a core aspect of Melanie's identity as a teacher. Claire, a teacher of senior level students further hypothesises that creativity is the ability to use one's imagination to create something unique and original, independent of external rigid instruction. In essence, it involves children having the autonomy to explore their ideas and engage in meaningful opportunities for self-expression:

> I would think creativity is, that you would depend on your own imagination to make or do something without any real guidance from another adult or teacher, and that maybe you wouldn't need as much help and support…you wouldn't need step by step instruction... that they wouldn't need as much guidance as the person next to them, that they would be able to depend on their own imagination to kind of come up with the end product; be it English writing or arts or musical composition or whichever. (Claire, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Áine, an upper primary teacher, highlights the inherent connection between creativity and the arts, emphasising how students can channel their thoughts through various mediums. She asserts, "I always think that somebody is very creative when they are very musical and artistic and they can put their thoughts through a medium, and I think that's very creative" (Áine, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013). One child in a focus group interview stated, "I think creativity is having the freedom of expressing yourself" (Jannet, child focus group interview, June 2014). Further, Sarah, (child focus group interview, June 2014) thought of creativity as "something that you can do in your own way, like you're not being told to do it a certain way". Similarly, Deirdre, (child focus group interview, June 2014), explained that *"*creativity is being able to express yourself and your feelings". Originality as a factor of creativity was also highlighted by several children during the focus group interviews. One child explained, "I think creativity is like being original and expressing like your artistic self" (Rachel, child focus group interview, June 2014). Another child who participated in the focus group interview elaborated further, saying: "I think creativity is something where you have the freedom to express your imagination or even expressing your feelings through art or writing etc., where nobody can really dictate what you're writing or drawing or wearing" (Róna, child focus group interview, June 2014). A key factor influencing ability to be creative appeared to be the concept of freedom of expression without barriers or limitations. I feel that the use of the word *"dictate"* by Róna reflects a strong opposition to what she perceives as factors that inhibit creativity. Creativity for Róna ceases to exist if one is being "dictated" to. Several other children also envisaged creativity as an endeavour without limitations and instead offering endless possibilities. During a focus group interview the children stated:

- I think [creativity is] it's like when you do something in class, the teacher doesn't give too many instructions on what to do or what to do it on, you can do *anything*. (Ellen, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- Creativity is something that you can do in your own way, like you're not being told to do it a certain way. (Sarah, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- [Creativity is…] You can do what you want, you are not given a title that you have to do…. You're not pressured that you have to write down something and it has to be like that specifically, like it's an open thing. (Hannah, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- I think it's [creativity is] a passion. You are free to do whatever you want. It's not someone telling you what to do. (Julia, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- Creativity is like writing or drawing anything you want, anywhere, anytime. (Caroline, child focus group interview, June 2014)

- Martin Luther King, he was creative by standing up and giving his 'I Have a Dream' speech. (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014)

These notions of creativity as emanating from freedom of expression resonate with Eisner's vision of creativity when he argues that:

> No artistic community would permit restrictions regarding what an artist can create; such restrictions have no place in a free society. When one enters a wedge saying, *'this is what you can study and this you can't'*, where that wedge stops no one can tell. The freedom to enquire and create should be available to all free men [sic]. (Eisner, 1972, p.237)

Eisner essentially views freedom of enquiry and creativity as a fundamental ethical right of man [sic]. Upon interview, one teacher defined creativity as the following:

> I suppose [creativity involves] thinking outside the box I would say; not always having to have the same ideas; having different ideas and maybe being allowed to explore different ways of doing something. I suppose that's creativity. Some children, you can see, even at a young age have these ways of thinking and they are I suppose confident enough to go with it and to not always feel "oh God, I can't do this, I should be the same as somebody else". I suppose that is a big thing too and having the self-confidence to know that mine isn't the same as everybody else's, because it's worthwhile. And definitely, thinking outside of the box, coming up with an idea that nobody else has thought of, that's real creativity isn't it. (Máire, lower primary class teacher interview, June 2014)

Another teacher agreed that "being able to think outside the box or being able to think abstractly and being able to problem-solve and not just do something but figure out why and how to do something, and not just do it; I think that's creativity" (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014). Fiona, a teacher with over thirty years teaching experience at the time

of interview, also mentioned the significance of individual and critical thinking in relation to creativity:

> I would think of it as thinking outside of the box, closing the eyes and making a picture in the mind about a text and then talking about it, making pictures and models, because they're also *individual*….and being given materials and coming up with your *own* ideas, I always love that myself; and we do it with recycling projects and that's brilliant!...the way that they'll just literally turn rubbish into something. And giving them freedom to just explore. (Fiona, special education teacher, interview, June 2014)

Affording children the autonomy to explore different ways of doing something, resonates with Eisner's belief that children should be given the freedom to explore and to be creative. Valerie, a middle primary teacher mentioned that children are creative when they "get to show their own original thinking and come up with their own spin and their own ideas and things" (interview, October 2014). She also envisaged creativity as when children have the opportunity "to come up with something new or something innovative" (Valerie, middle primary teacher, interview, October 2014).

Brenda, an upper primary student, connected creativity with imaginative possibilities, pupil autonomy and freedom of expression: "I think creativity is when you can use your own imagination and like nobody can tell you what to do" (Brenda, child focus group interview, June 2014). Similarly, Vicky (child focus group interview, June 2016), a middle primary pupil, explained that to be creative "you should never copy someone and take your time to think of something to do and to be creative use your imagination". Bernadette (child focus group interview, June 2016), a fellow classmate, also reiterates that "you can be creative using your imagination". Insightfully, Casey, a middle primary pupil drew attention to the lack of creativity in process art and emphasised the originality that is intrinsic to the creative process. She argues that: "it's not creative if they have the exact same, then you're just looking at the exact same picture, but if they're creative then they are all different and you'd be able to tell the differences in the pictures" (child focus group interview, June 2016). Debbie (child focus

group interview, June 2016), a fellow classmate, associated creativity with the notion of "doing lots of art!"

During our interview, Melanie, an upper primary teacher, shared her thoughts on what creativity entails in the classroom. She emphasised the importance in giving children the freedom to explore materials and techniques without rigid instructions, emphasising the process of creativity over the final product:

> Creativity is, for me, probably with regard to art more than anything else, or writing, not giving a template and letting the children very very open with regard to materials, what they use, how they choose to use them. It's very hard to do, sometimes you don't get the end product or as good an end product as you do from template type art because it's totally wide open. (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

Upon observing creative lessons within the classrooms, I asked some children what their understandings of creativity were. One child explained:

> Creativity is when you see things through your own mind and let your imagination drift away. If a teacher gave you a picture and said to colour it in, that's not creative, but if you were to use your imagination and come up with your own picture then that's creativity. (middle primary child, classroom observation)

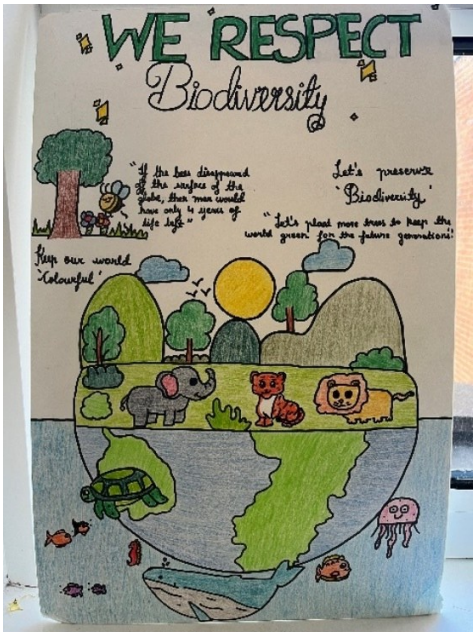
Interestingly, here again we are presented with the notion of creativity as individual and expressive, devoid of didactic intervention by the teacher. From the above examples, freedom of expression and exploration of one's imaginative possibilities can be seen as key factors of creativity. The principal during her interview also outlined her ideas of how she would define creativity. For her, she envisaged creativity as a mind-set, as a way of *being*, not limited to the arts:

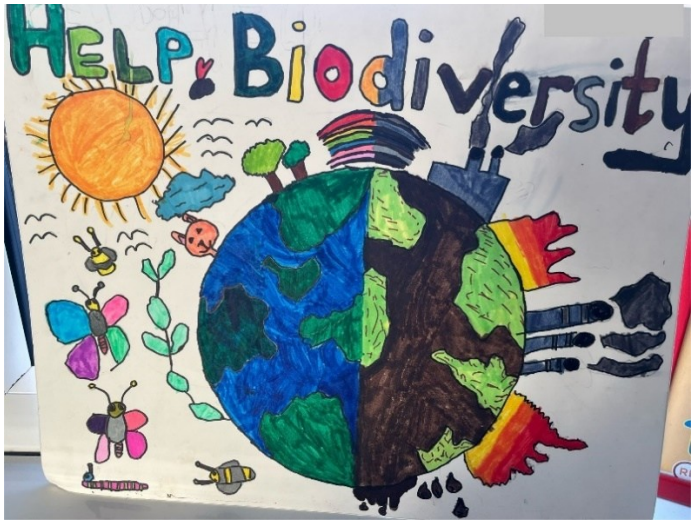
> For me creativity isn't just being artistic, you know. It's not just being good at painting or some sort of art or something like that. I think being creative is an awful lot to do with as well; thinking about things, looking at things, seeing if there's a different way to do it, or even just mulling things over in your head, looking at "maybe we could try it this way rather than the other way", and I think that we try to foster that in school as well. I'm sure you do that with your Green-Schools committee and throw out a few ideas for them and see, instead of presenting them with answers, try to come up with ways of doing things. Well, I would try to do that anyway with the children and get them to think really. I think a lot of creativity is thinking as well, but thinking not just woolly, airy-fairy stuff – thinking of an idea and saying "right, how can we actually work that in practice? What are the pros? What are the cons?", you know. And

> bouncing ideas off of other people as well and talking about it in a group. I think that all helps creativity. (principal, interview, October 2015)

Interestingly, the principal also noted the importance of open-ended exploration regarding the promotion of creativity whereby children had freedom to explore and develop their thoughts and ideas. Also noteworthy was her emphasis on the significance of fostering opportunities for collaborative learning opportunities in pursuit of the promotion of creativity. The principal mentioned the creative and critical thinking fostered through the Green-Schools initiative, which prompted me to reflect on the many imaginative artworks and posters that children have created over the years. I have acted as the Green-Schools coordinator in the school for over a decade and there were many ways that the creative arts could be linked with the initiative, such as designing posters to create awareness or creating artworks from recyclable materials. These pieces serve as a wonderful example of how creativity through the arts can be linked with science and the broader curriculum.











Children over years have designed many creative artworks or posters related to Green-Schools' themes or wider SESE initiatives. I love seeing the imaginative possibilities of children's artworks, deeply rooted in their sense of self-express and connected to their individual understandings of their world. The images presented above relate to the Green-Schools 'biodiversity' theme (2023-2025). As the Green-Schools co-ordinator for over a decade in our school, I try to encourage creative approaches, creating opportunities for children to connect with the various themes creatively, through use of various media.

I recall an interesting conversation that I had with one senior class teacher during an interview. Although she noted the value that creativity holds, for open-ended and free

exploration, she believed that 'products' of creativity may not be as 'good' as those arising from a more didactic approach. As Melanie noted earlier, "sometimes you don't get the end product or as good an end product as you do from template type art because it's totally wide open" (interview, June 2013). Surely though, regarding creative approaches, the emphasis should be placed on the *process* of creation rather than on the product or outcome. However, another teacher, while believing that the process is important in promoting creativity, highlights the dilemma that teachers often face in producing pieces (products) that are considered to be of high quality:

> I suppose when you're being creative, like, again, ideally you shouldn't be emphasising the product, it's more process based. So, if it was a school whereby displays are very important in art and you feel that you had to have a really fabulous outstanding art display outside your door constantly and that everything looked really good visually… In art, it might look very abstract and completely wrong, but there might be very valid reasons why a child chose to do that in that way…why they chose that combination of colours or you know, if it was clay, why it looks a certain shape; and to the eye it may not be as visually attractive and I might not look right, it might not fit the mould or whatever and if you are under pressure to have a very good display, you'd kind of feel like you know fixing it yourself, you know. (Lisa, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2013)

Noreen, a middle primary teacher described her perspective on creativity in teaching and learning, emphasising the importance of freedom of expression and the significance of the process and individuality rather than prescribed outcomes:

> [Creativity involves] using your own thoughts and your own ideas and that you're not being dictated to by anything. I suppose, it's led by the individual and I think the emphasis would be more on the actual process as opposed to the end result….that it's evolving organically I suppose; it's very much trial and error for children and for us I suppose as creative teachers you know, you have to be quite open and you kind of have to go with the flow I suppose, in terms of what's working and what's not working. But that it's not just prescribed and that there isn't one destination or that there isn't one set product that it can have multiple results you know. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

When there is a temptation to place too much emphasis on the final product or lessons are over structured and didactic, there may be little room for creative exploration, individual expression and originality. However, there may be reasons as to why teachers at times over-emphasise the

product over the process, such as time constraints, classroom management or image-management (wanting the end result to 'look good'). Again, one may wonder whether these preoccupations with the final 'product', 'looking good', are rooted in market-influenced notions of 'image management' (Ball, 2000, 2013) or 'simulacra' (Baudrillard, 1994, 2023); denoting a 'hyper-reality, or produced representations of reality, that become increasingly valued over reality *itself*.

Although schools undoubtedly face challenges, such as time constraints, as well as issues relating to provision of resources, teachers arguably still have the flexibility to encourage creativity among their students. As Melanie, an upper primary teacher (interview, June 2013), states, "I think in primary [school], you have the flexibility to introduce that creativity". This shows that, despite the inherent pressures, teachers maintain some freedom to incorporate creative activities that support students' creativity and self-expression. Michaela, an upper primary teacher, noted the importance of planning and integrating for creativity across the curriculum and the inherent learning value that this holds: "I think if you're well planned you can teach a very creative lesson and they can learn the same amount from it in the same time" (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014). Let us now explore how teachers navigate and unlock the creative potential within the arts by delving into the creative practices that unfold within their classrooms.

Unlocking Creative Potential

Ethnographic Insights: Observing Creativity in the Arts Education

As part of my ethnographic research, and with the consent of the teachers, I requested to observe several lessons with a focus on exploring creativity within the arts (aforementioned in Chapter 4). Parents were also informed in writing of the details pertaining to classroom observations and had the choice to withdraw their children from participation in these lessons,

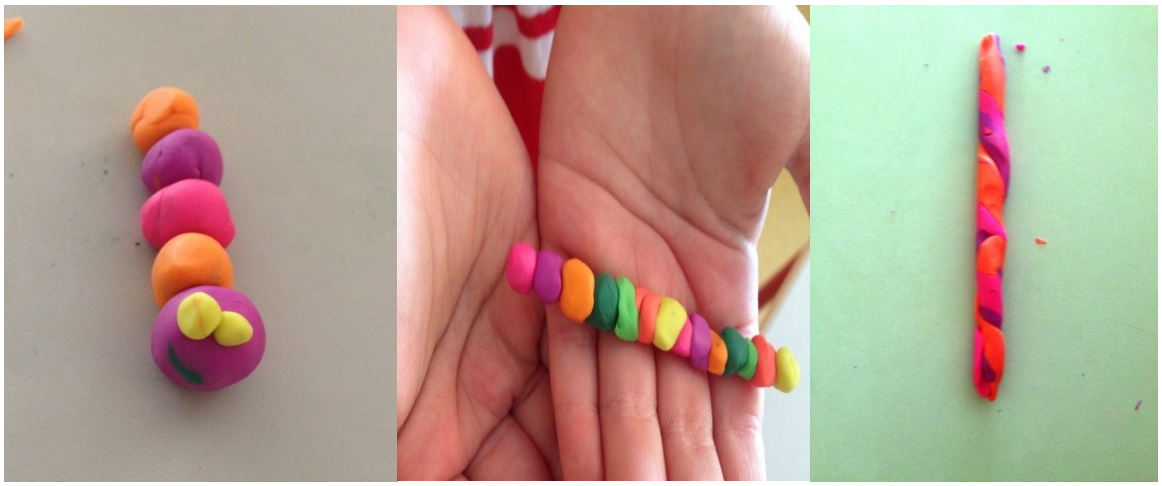
however, no one choose to do so, resulting in full class participation throughout. The selection of lessons was left entirely to the teachers, to maintain their autonomy, professional judgement, and creative freedom. The primary aim of these observations, (using a critical ethnography approach), was to explore teachers' conceptions of creativity, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the creative processes, occurring within arts education in the classroom. The subsequent sections will provide an analysis of the arts-based creative lessons that I observed.

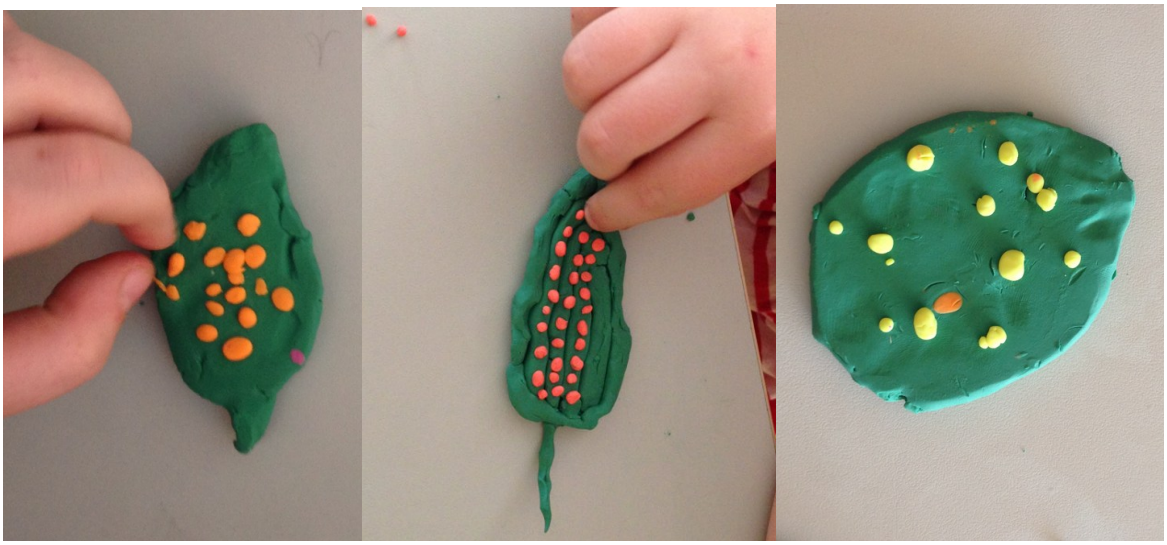
Playdough Creations: Metamorphosis in Motion

In one of the lower primary classes, I observed an art lesson which was integrated with science, whereby children created the various stages of the life cycle of the butterfly from coloured plasticine. This lesson was undertaken in June 2014. Máire had been teaching for over thirty years, mostly with junior classes and was very obliging regarding my observations within her classroom. During a previous interview, Máire, a teacher of younger children, spoke of the dilemma between wanting to foster creativity and affording the children enough time to be creative. She stated, "I can't say that we'd knock, or stunt their creativity, if anything I think we're always encouraging it. Now, whether they get enough chances to do that [be creative], probably not" (Máire, lower primary teacher, interview, June 2014). So, when I found out that this creative art lesson was integrated with science, the lifecycle of a butterfly, I thought that this would be a noteworthy opportunity to observe a true to experience example of how creativity though the arts may be integrated across the curriculum, navigating time constraints that teachers may experience.

Children were very familiar with the lifecycle of the butterfly, which added valuable context, and were able to recall the key stages as they experimented with the play dough. There was a flurry of excitement as children experimented with and manipulated the plasticine. Children were free to experiment with different ways of moulding the plasticine, from twisting, rolling,

pinching, pulling, flattening, etc. They were also free to explore with some of the various colour combination and colour mixing opportunities. Even though the teacher encouraged children to experiment with different techniques and colours saying that "there is no right or wrong way to do it". In some instances, the lesson was quite teacher directed, which may have stifled some of the imaginative possibilities. In certain cases, for example, the teacher gave very clear directions to follow, "I don't think you would have a pink leaf, what colour are leaves…..? Green". Furthermore, the topic itself was a closed topic, considering that the children were focused on making the exact same thing, the stages of the life-cycle of the butterfly. Although, there was *some* room for creativity to be explored in how the children created the three-dimensional models. Nevertheless, children were allowed to experiment to an extent regarding how they chose to manipulate the plasticine and were free to express their choice of colours in *most* instances.





Children experiment with the creative potential of plasticine (June 2014).

While there were some didactic elements to the lesson, this may in part reflect the nature of the lesson itself, given its focus on biology and the lifecycle of a butterfly. The integration with science also appeared to shape the openness of the task, particularly in relation to expected outcomes such as colour choices (e.g. leaves being green, depending on the time of year). I recognise the value of integrating lessons with themes from other subjects, both to enhance curricular linkage, and to address time constraints while enriching and contextualising the learning experiences. I wonder though if children were prompted by the lifecycle of the butterfly to create imaginative and inventive minibeasts, for example, perhaps there would have been more room for creative exploration?

The Butterfly Lion: A Journey Through Drama and Music

An additional lesson that I observed, in June 2014, was undertaken in a middle primary classroom, whereby the teacher was relatively newly qualified, with a few years teaching experience. The lesson focused on the development of creativity through drama and music, integrating with the class novel, 'The Butterfly Lion'. This lesson was undertaken in the

classroom, whereby the teacher had moved the furniture to one side to create some additional space. The children appeared to be excited as the class formed a circle in preparation for 'circle-time'. Discussion focused on a section of the novel, starting with closed questioning to reiterate the key events within the story before moving on to gaining children's inferences regarding how some of the characters were feeling, including how they would feel if they were in the same position. Noreen, the class teacher, skilfully created opportunities for language extension and vocabulary development, while focusing on elements of grammar including synonyms. The strong emphasis on literacy development was apparent. The teacher re-read a chapter of the novel and invited children to close their eyes if they felt comfortable, to imagine the story unfolding. The teacher appealed to the children's sense of visualisation and imagination by inviting them to do so.

Children were then assigned in groups of three to create 'freeze frames' (dramatised still images) or a 'still snapshot' of the key events from the focus chapter. The teacher reminded children in their dramatic roleplay to "think about facial expressions". Children collaborated in their groups to re-create dramatised scenes from the chapter. A wave of excitement emerged as children engaged in role-play within their groups. There was some use of props, including a few black hats, which I believe had previously been used for a Cór Fhéile performance, as well as some classroom props such as furniture and coats.

I walked around and spoke to the children in their groups asking them how they would define creativity. One child explained, "I think creativity is when you express your individuality". Another child remarked, "I think that creativity is when you can be yourself" (Lucy, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014). Other children shared these sentiments:

- I think that creativity is imaginative….you are creative when you create things by yourself and use your own thoughts. (Abigail, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014)

- Creativity is something that's unique and nobody else can copy it. (Catherine, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014)

- Creativity is when you see things through your own mind and let your imagination drift away. If a teacher gave you a picture and said to colour it in that's not being creative; but if you were to draw your own picture from your imagination in your own unique way then that is being creative. (Emma, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014)

- I like being creative as you can express your own individuality and express your imagination. (Dorothy, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014)

- You can be yourself when you are being creative. (Karen, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014)

- I like being creative because you can use your imagination and escape into another world. (Laura, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014)

- You are creative when you don't copy from anybody else. (Olivia, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014)

From examining the above comments, children associated creativity with a sense of imagination, originality, endless possibility, individuality and freedom of expression.

The following activity involved children, once again, forming a circle, whereby individual groups were given the opportunity to create their freeze frames within the circle, to share with the class. Some children were also given the opportunity to explore 'hot seating' and 'thought tracking', further delving into the creative possibilities of role-play. Children discussed their interpretations of the drama, and the teacher commended the class on their individuality of the roles, "I like the way that they are so different, and everyone has interpreted different things" (Noreen, classroom observation fieldnotes, June 2014). I wondered whether the children undertook drama regularly in school, so I asked them if they partook in drama frequently during class time. Although they seemed to get great enjoyment from the drama lesson that I observed, they reported that they did not practise drama regularly during school time and if they did that it was mostly integrated with Irish. There may be many reasons for this, as teachers explained, such as time constraints and performativity pressures; therefore, it may be more feasible to integrate drama through Irish or other subjects to maximise curricular opportunities. When I asked the teacher if she undertook drama regularly, she responded:

> I don't do a lot of stand-alone drama, when I do drama I integrate it with other subjects. I just don't have the time, especially with such focus on literacy and numeracy; you're just trying to get through the material and finish the topics and books for the monthly report and tick the boxes. I probably don't do as much creative stuff like that as I should, but you just don't have time. In the month of May I did no drama and didn't even get to do art because of the standardised testing. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, classroom observation, June 2014)

The pressures that this teacher feels regarding marketised 'performativity demands', literacy and numeracy attainment, and standardised testing are apparent, considering their impact on provision for creativity in the arts, although the integration of drama alongside literacy offers some opportunity for creative expression through the arts.

Following the drama improvisations, children regroup in a circle, and the teacher reads an extract from the novel again focusing on language extension and discussion around the theme 'lament'. Children were given a variety of musical instruments to explore and compose musical compositions to accompany the lamenting mood of the chapter of the novel. As the children partake in violin lessons in school from a visiting music teacher, they seemed very familiar with the violin in particular and were free to add layers of percussion instruments as desired. The teacher reassured the children of their creative autonomy by reminding them, "It's open to you; you can use voice, violin, percussion instruments…. There's no wrong or right way; it's totally up to your interpretation" (Noren, middle primary teacher, classroom observation field notes, June 2014). She further explained, "This is just an idea; it doesn't have to be perfect. There's no wrong or right" (Noren, middle primary teacher, classroom observation field notes, June 2014).

The lesson gave children ample opportunity to explore drama and music creatively linking with literacy development also, which contextualised their work and offered some depth of understanding. When I asked the teacher if she undertook this kind of work often with the class, she reported that she did not have enough time, especially with the current emphasis being placed on literacy and numeracy. While the creative possibilities were undoubtedly

evident during the lesson, I found it interesting that the teacher stated that this was not a typical occurrence in her classroom due to external pressures related to learning outcomes in 'key' curricular areas. It was evident from observing this creative lesson centred on drama and music, the sheer joy and enthusiasm that the children experienced through active learning opportunities, allowing them to express their creativity and individuality.



The school has invested in a wide selection of percussion instruments alongside a whole class set of violins and a set of oboes.

None-the-less, considering the enthusiasm that the children showed during the lessons, the teacher noted that she would like to undertake more of this creative work. This sparked hope within me that this lesson somehow may act as a catalyst for further exploration of such creative endeavours in the future.

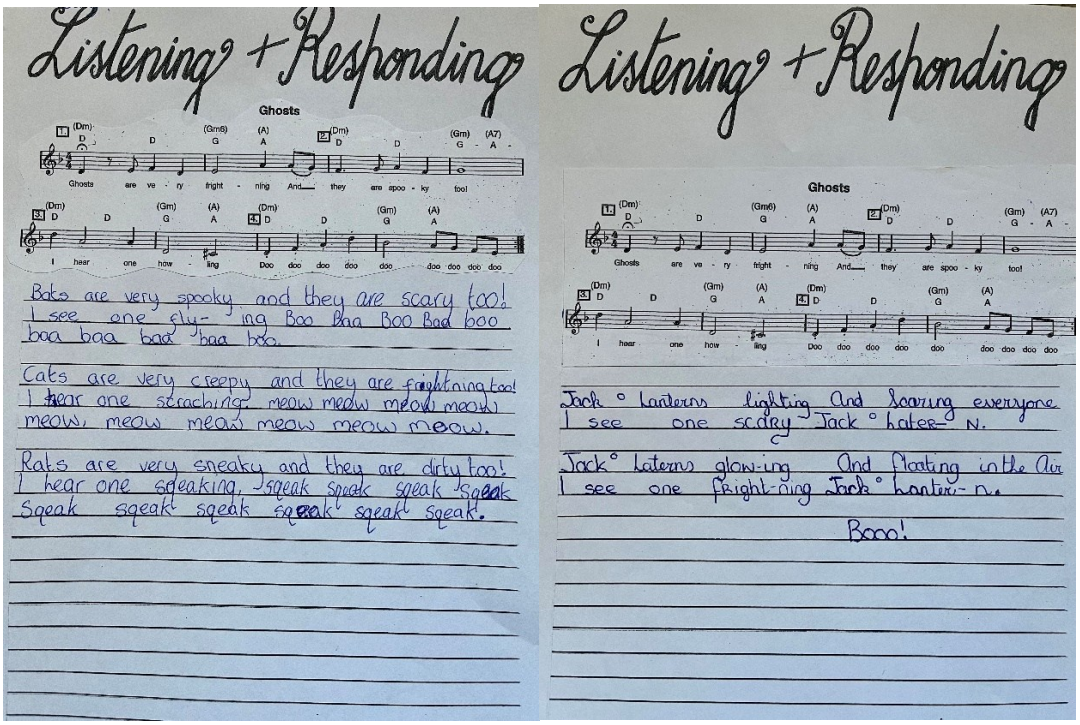
Where Music Meets Imagination: Exploring Creative Compositions

I observed a music lesson with a senior class, which took place in their classroom in October 2014, and focused on creatively responding to a piece of music though the creation of written musical compositions. Stefanie, an upper primary teacher introduced the lesson using the song 'Ghosts' from 'The Right Note' music programme, presenting a musical score of the song. The children were instructed to focus on the rhythm and beat of the song, with the teacher modelling

the rhythm through clapping. The children then mirrored the teacher's claps, following patterns such as a single clap for a crochet beat, a pair of claps for two minims, and a trio of claps for three quavers. The children attentively listened to the song, which featured two overlapping voices in a musical round. The teacher highlighted key musical elements, explaining that the major key creates a happy atmosphere, while the minor key adds a spooky or frightening tone, noting the use of D minor in this piece. Throughout the lesson, the children actively participated in a discussion referring to the music's atmosphere, rhythm, and key. In this music lesson, the teacher effectively modelled key concepts to provide structure and clarity for the students. This approach ensured that the children felt confident in their knowledge, deepening their comprehension and ability to engage with the music.

Adequate time was given for the children to discuss and express their thoughts and responses to the music. Through this process, the children were able to draw inspiration from the music, allowing for vivid and imaginative understandings of the piece, which enhanced the creative possibilities. They shared their own interpretations, with one child describing the staccato rhythm as "almost snapping," and another noting, "It's a frightening key" (Beibhinn, classroom observation field notes, October 2014). The children also discussed the dynamics of the piece, pointing out contrasts in volume, and made observations regarding various sounds created by the musical instruments. One child compared the sound to "a tap dripping" (Tori, classroom observation field notes, October 2014), while another compared it to "a horse clicking with his mouth" (Kate, classroom observation field notes, October 2014). One child eagerly expressed an interest in dancing, asking, "can we dance later?" (Jamie, classroom observation field notes, October 2014), to which the teacher responded, "they love dancing" (Stefanie, upper primary teacher, classroom observation field notes, October 2014). I wonder whether this moment may have represented a missed opportunity for integrating spontaneous, creative expressive dance into the lesson. Incorporating such an activity could have further expanded the children's

engagement with the music, encouraging them to explore other forms of expression. Despite this, the lesson offered numerous imaginative opportunities for the children to develop their creative potential, particularly through collaborative musical composition.



Images of children's imaginative musical compositions, as they experimented with creating their own lyrics to accompany the melody.

Firstly, the children were encouraged to sing the original song without the aid of the music, fostering their confidence and ability to recall and perform the melody. The musical score displayed various musical symbols, which guided the children as they sang. As the students also attend violin lessons within the school with a qualified violin instructor, and had previously undertaken tin whistle lessons, they had a good sense of musical literacy. Building on this foundation, the children collaboratively composed their own lyrics, using the rhythm and beat of the song. The children recorded their lyrics on teacher-designed worksheets that focused on 'listening and responding', allowing them to write their musical compositions while reinforcing the skills they had been developing. Their creativity flowed as they imagined and created new lyrics, such as "Jack the lantern's glowing", transforming the song into their own unique pieces.

The children then sang their musical compositions in groups, performing the song in rounds, with overlapping voices and expressive, dramatic interpretation. Although the song's lyrics maintained the original melody and rhythm, the children demonstrated their ability to creatively adapt the musical composition. New verses were created collaboratively, with the children utilising their imagination and teamwork to expand the piece.

Although the children displayed great enthusiasm regarding the lesson, when reflecting on their experiences, I asked the children if they had ever composed a song before, to which they replied, "no". The children's response indicated that creative composing activities are not typically incorporated into their music lessons, even though composition is a key strand of the music curriculum. This suggests some dichotomy between the curricular expectations and the actual classroom practices, potentially limiting opportunities for students to engage in creative musical composition and fully explore this aspect of music. Although Noreen, another class teacher in her interview during this time, did mention that the violin instructor did try to incorporate elements of composition within music lessons. I suppose the subjective nature of individuals' own perspectives also needs to be considered regarding their recollection of their experiences. While they may not recall composing a 'song' before, this does not negate the possibility that they may have had some opportunities to explore composing within instrumental pieces or music without lyrics.

Their teacher acknowledged that the children got great enjoyment from this type of creative work and admitted that she should incorporate such activities more regularly into her classroom practice. She explained that there were significant performativity pressures, regarding literacy and numeracy attainment, as well as demands associated with Confirmation preparation, including the learning of songs for the ceremony, which took up a substantial amount of time. However, after observing a simple yet powerful example of how creativity can be easily and

readily incorporated through musical compositions, the creative potential is both palpable and abundant, offering numerous possibilities for the future.

Celebrations at the Castle: A Dramatic Tale of the King's Birthday Banquet

I also observed a creative drama lesson undertaken by a middle primary class, in June 2014. Their teacher had been teaching for over a decade at the time and had experience in teaching across many class levels. This lesson unfolded in the school hall, with access to a stage, which provided ample space, allowing the children the freedom to explore through the dramatic lens. The stimulus for the lesson was centred around a story about a king's birthday party. As an introductory activity the class partook in a circle-time discussion, led by the teacher, re-capping the main events of the story, whereby children shared their insights. I was struck by the enthusiastic engagement of the children. Two children then read extracts of the story on the stage, reading with fervent expression. The theme of the story evolved around being invited to a King's birthday party, held in an extravagant castle.

Next to unfold was a role-play activity. The 'teacher in role' read a sample invitation to the King's birthday party, theatrically dramatised to stimulate the children's imagination and sense of role-play. Following this, children were divided into improvisation groups, with one child per group designated as the reporter and the others assuming the roles of guests. The activity involved children acting as news presenters, as the teacher suggested some possible news stations that may be broadcasting the event. One child in each group took on this role, while the remaining group members portrayed famous figures arriving at the castle gates, based on creations from their imagination. The children actively engaged in improvisational role-play, where they embodied different characters, such as the Lion King, Hansel and Gretel, and Humpty Dumpty. The imaginative possibilities were abundant. Children were afforded the freedom to choose their own personas to add a creative interpretation to the original story.

There was an element of fun and mystery created as audience members then attempted to guess the identities of these characters. As part of the improvisation, the presenters announced the arrival of guests in 'carriages', using creative props such as items of clothing (hats, scarves, etc.), cushions and shoes to enhance the performance. Additionally, one child incorporated a musical element by singing as part of their performance, integrating both drama and music into the creative experience. Children were given autonomy to express their creativity in ways that felt meaningful for them.

Following the performances an opportunity was given for whole-class discussion, whereby children shared their feedback in response to the dramatic improvisations, outlining what they liked, and also what they would see as opportunities for further development. The teacher informed the students that when they returned to class they would write a report relating to the drama they had undertaken, offering an opportunity to integrate drama with literacy and writing development. I was afforded a brief opportunity to speak with the children to gain their insights. I asked the students if they liked drama, and they enthusiastically shared their love of drama. One child explained, "yes, it's fun and you can let your mind go anywhere" (Chloe, child participant, classroom observation field notes, June 2014), while another exclaimed, "I enjoy dressing up and going crazy. You can be anything you want!" (Patricia, child participant, classroom observation field notes, June 2014). It was a delight to witness the children come to life through the use of their imagination. One child explained that in drama, "you can let your imagination run wild" (Ann, child participant, classroom observation field notes, June 2014), while another shared that drama was "fun and you can let your mind go anywhere" (Grace, child participant, classroom observation field notes, June 2014). One child summed it up, beaming, "I love arty stuff and using your imagination!"

The enthusiasm, curiosity and sheer joy that children exhibited while using their imagination was evident. It is clear that children gain a lot from engaging in such creative tasks through

drama. I was curious to understand how the children defined creativity, so I asked them: "What does it mean to be creative?" The children's responses revealed a strong sense of freedom and self-expression, as well as the importance of imagination in their understanding of creativity. One child described creativity as "letting yourself go crazy and expressing yourself", while others emphasised "using your imagination" and "letting your imagination go wild" (child participants, classroom observation focus groups, June 2014). These responses suggest that the children view creativity as an uninhibited process, whereby imagination is central to their creative experiences. Furthermore, when I asked the children how they felt about me being there to watch their drama improvisations, they were very enthusiastic and excited, with one child saying, "I feel excited!" and another child stating, "We love drama!" (child participants, classroom observation field notes, June 2014).

These reactions clearly illustrate the children's enthusiasm and emotional connection to the creative drama activity, further reinforcing the notion that creative expression through the arts fosters a positive and stimulating environment for the children to work collaboratively and creatively. Reflecting on the challenges faced in balancing opportunities for fostering creativity with demands regarding performativity, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy, the teacher expressed her concerns in relation to the pressure she felt to prioritise 'core' subjects over creative opportunities in drama. She explained:

> This is how I would have taught during my Dip ['Diploma year', an induction year after qualifying as a primary teacher, in which an inspector would observe lessons as a form of evaluation]. I should be doing more of it, but you feel under pressure to cover the curriculum, especially with literacy and numeracy. (Rebecca, middle primary teacher, classroom observation, June 2014)

Rebecca's statement illustrates the performativity pressures that educators face, which often compel them to place increased focus on literacy and numeracy, considering the pressures of standardised testing, at the expense of nurturing creativity through the arts. This teacher acknowledged the internal conflict she experienced, between adhering to curriculum and

performativity demands, and wanting to engage students in more meaningful creative learning experiences. This teacher further emphasised, "you feel under pressure, and it is *wrong* because they are *children*" (Rebecca, middle primary teacher, classroom observation, June 2014), expressing her frustration with performance expectations. This pressure of attainment regarding academic standards, particularly in literacy and numeracy, may often leave less room for teachers to incorporate more imaginative and creative activities through the arts that can enrich children's learning experiences. Despite these pressures, it was evident that this teacher valued creative activities, such as the one observed, which offers hope that such creative opportunities may be prioritised going forward.

Perspectives on Creative Opportunities: Educators' and Pupils' Reflections

The inherent creativity that people possess is an innate and natural part of the human condition. As noted by Lancaster (1990), the desire to be creative is within every individual, regardless of age. Although undoubtedly there may be barriers to fostering creativity in the arts within the educational setting, largely due to the pressures emanating from market-driven forces in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement, I argue that the freedom to express creativity is fundamentally a matter of social justice. As Eisner affirms: "the freedom to enquire and create should be available to all free men [sic]" (Eisner, 1972, p.237). During an interview with the principal, she reflected on the complex balancing act that teachers face in relation to performance pressures, meeting the demands of an extensive curriculum, whilst fostering opportunities for creativity, while also considering the additional responsibilities inherent in a DEIS school:

> We are very performative but at the same time then we do try to balance it with creativity, to the best of our ability, given the size of the curriculum. That's a problem, I think. In our school as well we've got Irish dancing, cooking, computers…there's something all of the time, so something's got to give. Literacy and numeracy are the main thing. And being a DEIS school as well we have extra responsibilities I suppose because most of the work will be done here, during school. And there's no one else in

> some cases apart from us to do it, you know. It's a big responsibility and it takes time. (principal, interview, October 2015)

Although the principal clearly recognises the challenges faced by teachers with curriculum overload and standards-driven demands, she also acknowledges the school's efforts to "try to balance" these pressures by fostering opportunities for creative development. Melanie, a senior class teacher, highlights the innate creativity that young children possess, as well as the dichotomy between the vast opportunities that the arts offer for fostering creativity and the time constraints that can limit such exploration: "Young children are very creative. There's loads of opportunities in art, music, drama… there's a lot of opportunity there, just not the time" (Melanie, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2013). Another teacher further argued that although significant time constraints do exist, it is still possible to prioritise the development of creativity:

> I think there's a lot of pressure if you're trying to [meaningfully foster creative development across the curriculum], but I think that it can still be done at the same time. I think it's more pressure to get all your subjects done but I think that you can still approach the ones that you do creatively. I suppose the trouble is then that creative lessons do take more time and that's the overall pressure that you're under, but I think that it can be done. So, in a way, I suppose no, there's definitely a shortage of time. I think that it can still be done, but you're under pressure doing it like. (Valerie, middle primary teacher, interview, October 2014)

The integrity of teachers' efforts to promote creativity despite the performativity pressures they face is acknowledged by the principal. She also observes that although time constraints are a significant pressure in school, the promotion of creativity can also depend on an individual teacher's personal interests and confidence in it:

> I think some of it [creative development] now to be perfectly honest is a matter of time as well and different teachers' interests as well. Some teachers might have a great interest in drama so they would be bringing that into all different areas of the curriculum. For other people it might actually be art itself, you know, the visual arts and they might do that. I would think that…the problem is time. It's actually the amount of time; how much you have to cover, and also your own interest in the areas of arts as well and your own confidence in using it, so that you're actually…that your students are benefiting from it rather than eating into the time that you don't actually have really. (principal, interview, October 2015)

Michaela, an upper primary teacher, shared her strong commitment to arts education and the development of creativity. Despite the time limitations and pressures that face teachers, she notes that the arts and creative approaches can be carefully planned for and integrated across the curriculum for increased efficacy:

> I would consider myself as being an advocator of the arts [in] education, so I do enjoy teaching drama, music, art, so I do feel that when you have a teacher who's… that's [sic] their interest, they will find time to foster a creative environment. It can be difficult at times, but I would integrate a lot of my art and my subjects from the arts education, so I think it's just about planning for it carefully so that you can integrate it into different areas. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

It is interesting to note that this teacher considers herself to be an ambassador of the arts, and maintains that one's interest in a curricular area may impact how they prioritise its implementation within the overall curriculum, despite the external demands and challenges that they may face. Meaningful planning and integration could be seen as valuable approaches for maximising opportunities for the fostering of the creative arts.

During an interview, one teacher discussed the increased freedom that students have, to explore and present their learning creatively. She highlighted how children today are offered more opportunities to be imaginative in both their research and the ways in which they showcase their work. Michaela views creativity as a holistic process, encompassing everything from how students approach research to how they express their ideas and present their final creations:

> I think children have more of a free reign now in the way they explore things, they can be creative in how they find out information, and develop those skills and they also have more scope in how they present their work at the end… so they can be creative in how they get the point across; either in presentation or project work or portfolios, things like that, or pieces of art. (Michaela, upper primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

The principal notes that although the school as a whole strives to promote creativity despite academic and performativity pressures, she believes that teachers' personal interests regarding the arts, in areas such as art or drama, may determine how they integrate these areas across the

curriculum. Additionally, a teacher's confidence in incorporating the arts into their practice may play a role in how students may benefit from creative activities. Although the cost of resources and limitations for provision of materials may restrict the variety of opportunities for creativity in the arts, the principal maintained that there are still ample opportunities in school despite this barrier:

> When we are looking at opportunities to introduce [creativity] for the children we always have to look at the cost and see whether the school can bear most of the cost. You know those music for fun things, like, they are €10 per child…and we're saying, "now that's a lot of money if you've got a few children"…so we don't have those sorts of luxuries for the children to do things like that. But then I think in other ways then we make up for that you know, because people [teachers] take them to the Glucksman, you know what I mean...we do different things ourselves to make up for that. So, I wouldn't say they're losing out a whole lot because they can't make it to the music for fun or they can't get to the Opera House, you know. We have other ways of including them or inviting them in, even with children here in school partaking in the school music and choir and that. (principal, interview, October 2015)

Indeed, opportunities are created to bring children to art galleries, and we are lucky to be in close enough proximity to such amenities to take advantage of these valuable learning experiences. I have brought classes many times to Crawford Art Gallery, as it offers a rich source of creative inspiration through the visual arts, while also providing opportunities for pupils to create their own art, (such as observational sketches using mixed media), in direct response to artworks in situ. It is noteworthy to mention that The Glucksman Art Gallery also creates stimulating art-based partnerships and creative workshops with primary schools. I have brought classes to The Glucksman previously and engaged in activities such as print-making using a variety of materials. Teacher CPD (continuous professional development) courses are also available, such as their summer course, *Learning Through Creativity* (which I will be undertaking in summer 2025). These establishments provide an accessible and valuable creative haven for teachers and students to meaningfully engage with the creative possibilities of the visual arts.





Images from Crawford Art Gallery (November 2013). Classes can avail of the opportunity to visit Crawford Art Gallery every school year (with the exception of the next few years as it is being renovated). Both Crawford and The Glucksman Art Galleries also have a wealth of educational support materials on their websites to use with classes.

Noreen, a middle primary teacher discusses the challenges and rewards that may be associated with allowing children the autonomy to explore creativity, whilst noting the sense of chaos that may arise with this freedom. This teacher acknowledges the sense of trust among fellow staff members to engage in creative activities with more liberal classroom management strategies:

> I suppose again, it comes back to being a facilitator and being able to give them free reign. And it can be chaotic like. And I suppose we're lucky because if someone walked into our classroom and saw that going on they wouldn't judge you. They wouldn't think, well she's lost control of the class, because I think we're lucky that we have an accepting staff. Because if your classroom is noisy, which it usually would

> be, or chaotic during a creative thing like that, they wouldn't judge you. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

I interviewed the student participants in three separate focus group interviews, which involved children in middle primary and upper primary classes. The children were very eager to share their thoughts regarding the focus of the interview and had the freedom to express themselves in a respectful shared space. When I asked the children about the opportunities that they had in school to be creative, many of them associated being creative with a sense of autonomy and freedom of expression. One child mentioned that one could be creative by "drawing your own picture in art based on *whatever you want* in art and painting it" (Deirdre, child focus group interview, June 2014). Another child also commented that she felt that she could express her creativity through "projects, where sometimes you have freedom to pick whatever topic you want" (Jannet, child focus group interview, June 2014). The notion of autonomy and freedom of expression is clearly expressed as an important deciding factor regarding whether a lesson is creative or not. Ellen (child focus group interview, June 2014), an upper primary pupil explained: "In art we can be really *really* creative because if we're drawing a summer picture, you don't say "draw the beach" or "draw something specific" you would say "draw a summer picture like on *whatever you want"* like". Over the years a number of the teaching staff have led after-school activities for children, in areas such as the visual arts, music, drama and physical education. I have organised after-school classes in the visual arts and drama over the years and plan on doing so again in the future. One child spoke of the opportunities that she had to be creative during the classes that she attended: "In the after-school club you let us choose what puppet we wanted to do, 'cause sometimes the [other] teachers might say that you have to do a certain thing, but the decision was open to us" (Hannah, child focus group interview, June 2014). Looking at a collection of photos of the puppets that children made (featured below), one can clearly see how unique each of the creations are. While undoubtedly there were artistic techniques and skills specifically *taught* and acquired for the project, it was

important to me as a teacher and ambassador of the creative arts that children had the *freedom* to design and create their puppets as they envisioned. I recall how excited children were in being afforded this freedom and opportunity for self-expression. It undoubtedly made this creative project feel a lot more meaningful and personal for them.



Puppets that senior primary students created in art classes with me (June 2014). I undertook puppet making projects with middle to upper primary pupils within class time and also in an after-school art club.

Reflecting further on findings from the research, student autonomy and self-expression were also associated with opportunities for creativity in drama. One student stated that, "I think the best show that you can be creative in is Seó le Pádraig [St. Patrick's Day performance], because it's *your* idea and you get to come up with it yourself" (Brenda, child focus group interview,

June 2014). Another child chimed in sharing her ideas regarding the drama performance for the school's St. Patrick's Day show:

> I think this year was the best Seó le Pádraig because you let us be the most creative and do what we wanted to do. Most years teachers say, "right you're this person", but you said [speaking to me] "right, who wants to be…?" (Julia, child focus group interview, June 2014)

Noteworthy yet again is the importance that children place on student autonomy and freedom in relation to creativity through drama. Upon reflection a more fitting question to ask the children would have been, *"who* do you want to be?" When undertaking drama lessons within my class I like to give the students as much free rein as possible to open them to creative possibilities, rather than tying them to a pre-made script with assigned roles. One child noted how she liked the shift away from scripted dramas, whereby children had the freedom to explore their own ideas in relation to creating drama:

> I thought like that it was a really good idea to, like last year we done The Three Little Pigs but there was already a script done, but this year you took our ideas and we did something that everyone wanted to do and we all had like a really good time. (Ellen, child focus group interview, June 2014)

Regarding the drama performance for Seó le Pádraig [St. Patrick's Day performance), Niamh explains: "what I really liked was that it was always really creative and there was always a really fun way of doing everything" (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014). Another child mentioned that children can have more opportunities for creativity when they can write their own drama scripts: "In drama, you could think of a play and make up a play yourself" (Caroline, child focus group interview, June 2014). Niamh suggests that creativity can be expressed even more freely through improvisation, without the need for a written script: "in different types of drama you can express it [creativity] more than actually writing it down, you can express it more" (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014). Niamh, an upper primary student, also spoke about being able to express herself creatively in drama and notes

again how freedom of choice and autonomy were significant factors in promoting student creativity:

> The drama that we're doing right now [is creative], I mean it's not very limited and we still have a lot of choices to choose from. And in drama we can make our own interpretations or if it's in history, you know… (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014).

Regarding music, Ellen (child focus group interview, June 2014, is enthusiastic about the idea of composing songs in music: "I think if you made up your own songs that would like be really fun and creative and it would be a bonding activity". Noreen, a middle primary teacher noted that the violin instructor did try to incorporate some creative tasks into music lessons for the children whereby they had some opportunity to explore and compose their own musical pieces:

> I think that our classes are quite lucky in that, in violin this year, there was an awful lot of composition. [The violin instructor] did try to include it as much as possible. You know, when the children were doing scales, they were allowed to do variations of the scales or they would try to make up their own tune on the violin or try to pick out tunes by ear and play with various things as opposed to just playing the same tune day in and day out, they were given that aspect to it so that kind of opened up a whole new creative side to the girls in my class and I can definitely see it. (Noreen, middle primary teacher, interview, June 2014)

Rachel, another child argues that children would be afforded more creative expression if they had creative freedom regarding the dances for the Christmas performance:

> Well like, I like the songs and the dances [regarding the Christmas pageant] but I think that maybe if classes got a chance to maybe make up a new dance every year themselves it would be a way more fun and better, because if each song has the same dance every year then it would get boring. (Rachel, child focus group interview, June 2014)

She further affirms, "I think you should really have a choice because like the pageant is supposed to be fun" (Rachel, child focus group interview, June 2014). As a teacher, I did try as much as possible to provide a balanced curriculum and explore opportunities for creativity in the arts, including exploring the strand of composing in music. However, there were some performance pressures, for example regarding 'song singing' for the school choir and the

sacramental classes, as well as the Christmas performance. One child observed that you can be more creative during "special occasions like Easter or St. Patrick's Day, because you can do a lot of art and do drama" (Deirdre, child focus group interview, June 2014). This child associates the arts with creativity. Ellen also commented on how creative opportunities exist in integrating the arts strands together in a project format to allow for further creative exploration:

> I thought that your idea of doing the drama was really good because then at the end you can do like a poem or a song and then like show the artwork that you done. And I was talking to my Mom, and she said that it was a really *really* good idea for the end of the year and just to have like, a lot of fun. (Ellen, child focus group interview, June 2014)

The notion of 'fun' that Ellen mentions is also significant. The joy of being creative and expressing creativity through the arts should be fun and enjoyable for children. Niamh an upper primary student, observed how there are certain times of the year that she felt she could be more creative:

> Like say, in the middle of the year, we could be the most creative, because at the end of the year you're kind of rushing around the place to get things finished and put away. Whereas at the start of the year you're kind of getting used to the class and so as time goes on you feel more free to express yourself and to be more creative. (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014)

Interestingly, she speaks of feeling "more free" to express her creativity, with the passing of time. I wonder whether this is linked to a sense of trust within the class and the feeling of her ideas being valued and accepted, devoid of external expectations. She also touches on the inevitable time constraints that can impact creative work, particularly towards the final few months of the school year when the teacher is trying to complete the curriculum. Niamh also acknowledged my efforts to provide opportunities for creative work by undertaking after-school clubs for children to partake in creative work though the arts: "I think it was good that when there may not have been enough time in school to do art that you made an after-school club where we could do art after-school" (Niamh, child focus group interview, June 2014).

It is evident that both teachers and students have a strong creative urge within them and a natural innate ability to express this creativity where desire meets opportunity. The creative possibilities are abundant, when given the nurturing conditions to flourish.

Extending Opportunities for Creativity in the Face of Marketisation

Although marketised education systems have generated significant challenges regarding meaningful provision for creativity within the arts, opportunities to extend creative practices may persist amidst these pressures. In early 2023, I was now part of the school leadership team. Although the arts were not specifically within my assigned responsibilities, as an ambassador of the creative arts, (coupled with my longstanding passion for creativity), I proposed to members of the management team that we repurpose an unused classroom (then used as a learning support room) into a dedicated art space. I suggested that transforming this space would not only provide an enhanced environment for both creative teaching and learning but would also serve as a valuable tool for school promotion. As noted previously, boosting the profile of the school and *marketing* the school are significant in competing in the 'marketised' educational landscape. Additionally, I argued that pooling existing resources to support the new art room could be a cost-effective approach, considering that schools often face funding demands across various curricular areas. This proposal was enthusiastically received, and with great excitement, I set about organising the space, ensuring that it would be ready for use by September 2023.

To develop this creative space, I took the initiative to invest in a variety of supplies and reconfigured the room to maximise its creative potential. This included the purchasing of some art materials as well as painting and decorating storage presses, giving them a new lease of life. I handmade a colourful window installation featuring upcycled tins and coloured organza material to depict 'tins of paint pouring', secured with fishing line and carefully hung by our

caretaker. The room was also decorated with hanging bunting which was skilfully crafted by my mother. I also sourced fabric remnants for the fabric and fibre strand of the curriculum, added additional paintbrushes, coloured pencils, markers, and oilcloth table coverings, as well as decorated the space with motivational quotes designed on Canva to inspire both students and staff. The materials were carefully organised into the storage areas according to the strands of the visual arts curriculum, ensuring that teachers could easily access them for lessons. The creation of this dedicated art space highlights the significance of creative leadership in an era of marketisation, especially when driven by a commitment to the creative arts.

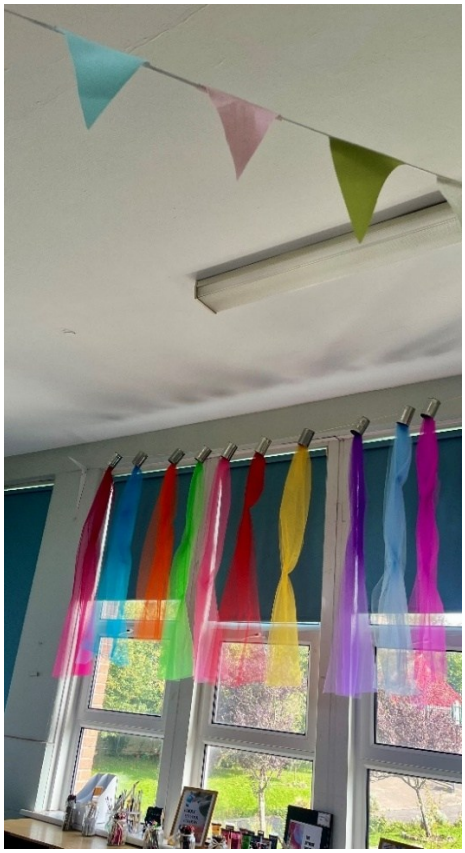


Images of the 'Art Room', a creative space established for the visual arts in our school (September 2023).









I organised and decorated the art room, focusing on elevating its potential to inspire creativity. I hand-crafted the hanging window installation of 'coloured paint pouring from tins', created with upcycled tins and coloured materials. My mother created colourful, decorative bunting to hang across the room (September 2023).

In planning and setting up the space, I actively sought input from teachers to ensure that it met their needs and the needs of the students. The teachers were highly receptive to the idea of using the room as a hub for creativity. As the space was shared with part-time EAL (English as an Additional Language) learning support, I coordinated a timetable to ensure the art room could be utilised by various classes within the available time allocation. The significance of the creative arts as an approach for inclusion, is also an important factor to consider. Once completed, the principal, staff and students expressed great enthusiasm for the new art space. Although the available resources were initially limited, both teachers and students demonstrated creativity in utilising the materials on hand, making do with what was available.

I was struck by the notion of how 'space' not only acts as a physical location but can also possess experiential and perceptual qualities. The prominence of a creative environment itself, can inspire, influence and facilitate creativity, becoming a catalyst for meaningful creative exploration and inclusion across all class levels. This initiative marked a significant and symbolic step forward in the provision of creativity within the school. It not only provided a dedicated space for the visual arts but also signified the increased 'sign value' (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020), being placed on creativity as a valued part of the curriculum.



Inspiring creative potential. Every child is an artist. Be unique, let your colours shine (2023).



I had fun creating this art themed clock (pictured above). Materials were organised and made readily available for classes to use (2023).

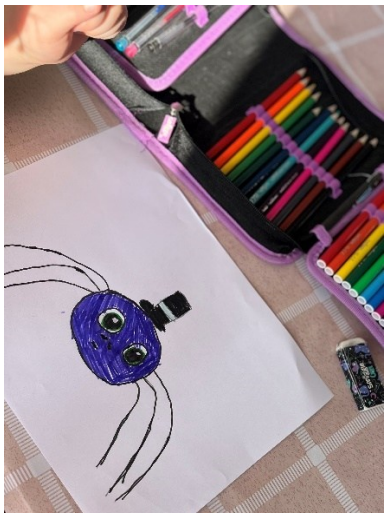
In a conversation with some members of the leadership team in November 2024, I suggested that perhaps (if feasible) we could consider increasing the provision of art materials and resources to enhance opportunities for students to engage in creative curricular work. Ensuring,

in so far as possible, that teachers have the necessary resources to effectively deliver the strands of the visual arts curriculum, (including drawing, fabric and fibre, painting and colour, clay, printing, and construction), is crucial for its successful implementation. I explained that, while the newly established art room provided an excellent space for both teachers and students, the additional €2.50 allowance per child for resources (with a maximum of €50 budget per class), was insufficient to cover the baseline materials required to implement the curriculum meaningfully and effectively. Furthermore, I suggested that the fostering of creativity in the visual arts could be linked to creativity in other subjects, particularly considering the renewed emphasis placed on creativity, critical thinking, exploration and self-expression within the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES, 2023) and the *Primary Mathematics Curriculum* (DES, 2023). Following discussions, the leadership and management team agreed to increase the allowance to €8 per child, a €5.50 increase, resulting in an additional €110 per class of 20 students. This decision represented a significant advancement in the recognition and support for visual arts education, reflecting an increased appreciation for creativity within the curriculum. This is, perhaps, an example of how the concept of educational 'refraction' (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, 2016) may be conceptualised as a form of mediation and in relation to existing dominant cultural practices. Goodson and Rudd (2016, p.184) reflect on the notion of 'refraction' as a means of "helping us to better understand how and why dominant (and global) waves of reform are mediated and can result in a range of varied responses". Additionally, they explore how:

> Refraction in education can be seen as a change in direction arising from individuals' and groups' own beliefs, practice and trajectories that are at odds with dominant waves of reform and policies introduced into the field (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, p.5).

The notion of 'refraction' prompts us to critically examine our own professional identities and practices as we either conform to or resist prevailing policies and cultural norms.

Additionally, it was envisioned at that time that essential materials, such as paint, paper, card, scissors, glue, and other necessary tools, could be replenished as needed, outside of this revised budget. This development felt like a significant victory for the promotion of the creative arts within our school, providing students with the tools they need to develop their creativity, work collaboratively, and express themselves through various mediums. This is an example of how mediating existing policies, with a call for action and 'change' can influence the critical functions of the arts. The creative arts need not exist outside of policy imperatives; indeed, they are neither contradictory to them, nor separate from wider educational goals. Recognising the importance of promoting the creative arts, as well as its benefits within the wider curriculum, is significant.







Images of artworks created by children from various class levels, using a variety of media (2023-2024).



Image of our ‘Art Room’, a welcoming and creative space for all teachers and pupils (2023).

Policy Connections – Situating Creative Arts Practices

In line with the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework* (DES, 2018), our school collaborated with Oide to develop our Wellbeing Strategy and engage with the School Self-Evaluation six-step process. I was invited to join a ‘core’ focus group tasked with this initiative, although the whole staff were involved in the collaborative process. Although policy development can often be seen as a contested space, the wellbeing team designed and administered questionnaires to students, parents, and staff, exploring the area of wellbeing within the context of our school. One prominent theme that emerged from the student surveys was the need for greater opportunities for student voice, with pupils expressing a desire to have more opportunities to express themselves. In collaboration with Oide, our core group identified

specific targets, goals, and an action plan to strengthen student voice within our school. One of my contributions to this discussion was the suggestion that students be provided with more opportunities for creative and collaborative expression through drama, free from the constraints of performance-based showcases whereby the focus is placed on the final outcome rather than the creative process. Additionally, I suggested that the storage of the costumes (previously used for pageants) in the school hall, near the stage, would make these resources easily accessible. Over the years, I have also accumulated various drama props, which I store in what I call my 'drama box'. I suggested that these could be relocated to the hall for wider use across all classes. In support of this idea, I recommended exploring the potential to create a timetable for teachers that included time for creative drama, supported by a resource bank. This would perhaps encourage teachers to prioritise and incorporate creative drama more effectively. I also noted the potential for drama to be integrated with other subjects, such as SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education), SESE (Social, Environmental and Scientific Education), music, visual arts (for costume and prop design), as well as literacy development. This cross-disciplinary approach may enrich student learning across the curriculum whilst challenging time-constraints.

The core group, including members of the leadership team, responded positively to these ideas. The principal had previously begun organising and moving drama costumes and props into a designated space in the school hall and was very enthusiastic when I later supplemented this resource bank with some extra costumes and props. I further suggested that we could perhaps extend this goal to the arts more generally, aiming to enhance student voice, collaboration and opportunities for creativity. In the visual arts, there is ample opportunity to enable children to engage in creative decision-making regarding their own work as well as discussing their work and the work of others (as sources of inspiration) through looking and responding to art. Additionally, I explained that although we have high quality musical

performances in our school and are fortunate to undertake violin lessons with a professional musician, we could perhaps enhance opportunities to engage more in the composing and listening and responding strands to increase opportunities for children to express their creativity, autonomy and self-expression, alongside the performance elements of music. We are fortunate that we have a school culture that is very welcoming of ideas and the consideration of different perspectives and suggestions. I am hopeful that the 'problematisation' (Foucault, 1991) considered here might, in time, signal a reconsideration in the way we view and teach the arts, recognising that while the performing arts have their place, they should not overshadow other expressions of creativity central to the arts.

Fostering Creative Arts Partnerships

Over the last number of years, there has been some opportunities available to our school to work with external arts partnerships, focusing on adopting a creative approach towards the arts. We are fortunate that our principal and leadership team encourages such creative partnerships and actively seek opportunities to promote creativity within the school. In January 2023, several lower and middle primary classes worked with a creative dance professional, through the BLAST [Bringing Live Arts to Students and Teachers] programme, to engage in a creative dance project. Our principal had approached me to gauge my interest in the programme and of course I was delighted to partake with my class. The BLAST programme, funded by the Department of Education, coordinated with Creative Ireland, partners schools with an artist in residency, focusing on a creative project. Classes engaged in several exploratory workshops, exploring the creative potential of dance and musical performance. My class were fortunate to participate in this worthwhile initiative. The children enthusiastically engaged in improvised and expressive dance performances, accompanied by *The Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns (which the children had previously been familiar with and choose themselves as

part of this creative project). The children decided to use props such as scarves and animal themed fur hats to enhance the creative potential of their performances. This partnership created a valuable opportunity to re-imagine the creative potential of music and dance orientated performances, in contrast to more rigid and teacher-directed performances that may constrain children into a sameness of expression (Lowenfeld, 1982).

Our school was also fortunate to work with Graffiti drama and theatre company in spring 2025 to engage in a creative partnership, exploring the imaginative and expressive elements of drama performance. The initiative consisted of several weekly workshops with a drama facilitator whereby children, from middle and upper primary classes, explored the imaginative and creative potential of props, through dramatic play. These props acted as a stimulus, whereby children created their own imaginative narratives and characters, creating improvised drama and mime, centred around the use of these items. Children also attended Graffiti Theatre, whereby they had the opportunity to engage with a drama production by the company, as well as perform themselves in a creative capacity. Students were also afforded the opportunity to experience 'behind the scenes' aspects of dramatic performance, gaining insight into this art form. The student's teachers noted that children relished in the creative potential of this partnership and enjoyed it immensely. Perhaps this partnership could indeed act as a stimulus for further exploration of creative drama within the classroom.

Children from a middle primary class also availed of the opportunity to engage in a creative visual arts initiative, funded by the Creative Ireland Programme, in spring 2025. This was a creative arts partnership between community artists, in collaboration with University College Cork and Crawford College of Art and Design at Munster Technological University. Children had the opportunity to liaise with a marine biologist, examining the tools that are used in this field. Students undertook an investigative field trip to a nearby beach, whereby they engaged in inquiry-based and photographic work on site. These experiences generated a significant

artistic response, with children collaborating alongside artists, engaging in exploratory and collaborative work across the strands of the visual arts curriculum, through the use of creative stimuli. Children explored through the mediums of paper, clay, sketching, printing, etching and created artworks in the distinctive oil pastels, influenced by the colour block style of a visiting artist. There was a strong emphasis on fostering children's creativity and individual expression. Teachers reported that children thoroughly enjoyed this worthwhile initiative as they explored the creative possibilities of various art materials, inspired by local artists.



Imaginative art compositions, created by children through the use of oil pastels on paper. These artworks were influenced by their collaboration with community artists, as well as their engagement with marine biologists, fieldtrip to a local beach and exploration of photography (2025).



Collaborative mixed media composition, created by children through the use clay, textiles, natural artefacts, paint and colour. This artwork was influenced by their collaboration with community artists, as well as their engagement with marine biologists, fieldtrip to a local beach and exploration of photography (2025).

Although the signalling of these creative projects and partnerships is welcome, there may need to be a greater financial commitment by the Government of Ireland, the Department of Education and external bodies, to sustain and expand such initiatives. This investment and commitment is crucial to meaningfully embed creative practices, fostering a cultural shift away from outcomes-based models, influenced by the marketisation of education; singling their prominent 'sign value' within the wider curriculum (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020).

Conclusion

Over the past decades, the Irish educational landscape has undergone significant transformation, shaped by the mercantile paradigm, which emphasises a market-driven or business-oriented approach to education. This shift is not unique to Ireland but is part of the broader Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2019, 2021). The educational system has increasingly been defined by a quantifiable, data-driven, and outcomes-based framework. These changes are evident at both the macro- and meso-levels, as reflected in global and Irish educational policies. From the research presented, we can see how these influences have permeated through to the micro-level, shaping the lived experiences of school leaders, educators, and students.

The marketisation of education has had a profound impact on school culture and practice, resulting in heightened accountability for educators, increased administrative burdens, the intensification of professional duties, and an increased focus on academic attainment. Furthermore, the prominence of standardised testing in literacy and numeracy, along with the data-driven School Self-Improvement model, underscores the prevalence of market-based models in shaping educational practices.

This paradigm shift has had tangible consequences for the provision of creativity in arts education. The pressure of time constraints and external demands placed on educators has led to challenges in prioritising creativity within the curriculum. In addition, the strong emphasis on performativity extends beyond academic outcomes to include the use of the arts as a tool for school promotion and image management (Ball, 2000, 2013). Despite these constraints, creativity remains an intrinsic element of the human experience that resists suppression, for "there is a creative urge in every human being – young and old alike – for we all have a natural desire" (Lancaster, 1990, p.6.). Teachers and students continue to place value on creative

expression, as demonstrated by the ethnographic research, which highlights how educators adapt and navigate the pressures of a marketised system while maintaining creative practices.

While acknowledging the challenges they face, teachers have shown considerable resourcefulness, integrating creative arts into the broader curriculum and providing meaningful opportunities for student expression and the creative process. The establishment of a dedicated art room, increased provision for the creative arts including arts partnerships, and the growing recognition of creativity's role in the wider curriculum, indicate a shift towards greater recognition of the importance of creativity in the arts, despite the influence of the mercantile paradigm.

In conclusion, while the impact of marketised forces on the education system is undeniable, I remain optimistic that educators and students will continue to advocate for and engage in practices that promote creativity through the arts and beyond, maintaining its value within the curriculum, both in pedagogy and *practice.*

Chapter 7

Revisiting the Research: A Critical Ethnography

Introduction

This study consisted of a critical ethnography within an Irish urban primary school. The title of this thesis is: '*The (Educational) Market: A Longitudinal Ethnography. Exploring its Impact on Creative Teaching and Learning Within the Arts, in One Irish Urban Primary School'*. Research critically explored how the marketisation of education, as shaped by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021), has impacted provision for creativity in arts education, in primary school settings. Research is contextualised by first examining the macro-level impacts of the global educational market, followed by an investigation of the micro-level influences observed within this Irish ethnographic study.

The motivation for this research arose from my concern regarding the potential sidelining of creativity within the arts, influenced by marketised shifts, including outcomes-based frameworks (especially regarding literacy and numeracy), and the intensification of educators' roles, particularly under the pressure of performativity and accountability metrics. I was further interested in the perceived utilisation of the arts as a product to elevate the cultural capital of the school (Bourdieu, 2020) and also as a means of bolstering 'image management' and 'performativity', whereby participants construct representations of themselves (or 'fabrications') as a means of 'cultural (re)production' (Ball, 2020; Bourdieu, 2023).

This ethnographic study explored the 'lived experiences' of the participants within their field of practice, as they engaged in a form of cultural re-production (Bourdieu, 2023), shaped by broader market influences. Research explored the following key areas:

- Educators' perceptions and experiences of change within an education system that is being increasingly shaped by market forces.
- How children perceive and explore creativity within their learning experiences.
- Influences and consequences of increased market forces on creative teaching and learning within the arts, set within one Irish urban primary school.
- Impacts of increased emphases on learning outcomes and performativity (exemplified by literacy and numeracy attainment) on creative teaching and learning.
- Barriers for creative teaching and learning in the case study research context.
- Opportunities for creative teaching and learning in the case study research context.

This research was chiefly qualitative in nature, grounded in the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2010). This study was conducted through the lens of critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993). A fundamental aim of this study was to capture (in so far as possible), and represent, the 'lived experiences' of participants as they navigated their daily practices. My longstanding position as a teacher in the case study school, offered me extensive access and a valuable opportunity to become intimately familiar with the research field (Bourdieu, 2023). Research consisted of journalling and keeping detailed field notes regarding ethnographic observations, alongside analysis of policy documents, artefacts and the visual environment. Visual ethnography (Pink, 2021) was undertaken in combination with a critical ethnographic approach to offer a richer, multidimensional analysis and representation of the research. I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups with nine mainstream and one special education *teachers,* eighteen *students* and the *principal*. I undertook ten individual interviews with teachers and four focus group interviews, one with teachers and three with students from middle and senior primary classes. In addition, ethnographic observations were undertaken within four classrooms, engaging creative teaching and learning within the arts, focusing on visual arts, drama and music. Teachers and students participated from various class levels,

contributing to a diverse and a representative sample. Critical discourse analysis and grounded theory were employed to analyse and interpret the data. These approaches complimented one another effectively and were framed by the constructivist paradigm of research.

This research challenges traditional notions of validity, such as those found in 'triangulation', by adopting 'crystallisation' to enhance validity, adding a deeper set of layered understandings. In postmodern research, the concept of validity moves beyond rigid frameworks, such as in triangulation, embracing more nuanced, multidimensional and flexible approaches that account for complexity, as exemplified in 'crystallisation' (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005).

This chapter will outline a summary of the key findings from this study, a reflection on the strengths and limitations of this study, as well as implications for further research.

Summary of Key Findings

Performativity and Pedagogical Shifts: School Culture in a Marketised System

Research undertaken clearly demonstrated the very tangible, 'lived' impact that the marketisation of education had on school culture and individual teachers' and pupils' experiences. The shift towards an outcomes-based model of education was exemplified by the directive for increased provision and priority of literacy and numeracy education in schools. This can be seen by the release of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* (DES, 2011, 2020), which promotes the 'safeguarding' of 'core' literacy and numeracy skills over *all* other curricular areas, alongside a focus on learning outcomes, attainment benchmarks, improvement measures and standardised testing. The culture of 'performativity' in the school can be seen and felt in the intensification of teachers' workloads, a preoccupation with the 'core' subjects of literacy and numeracy, increased emphasis on standardised testing outcomes,

mounting pressure related to curricular demands and, what O'Brien and Rudd (2020, p.158) describe as, "a constant push and pull to deliver [and] self-maximise". Outlined below are some of the core findings that exemplify these key themes emerging from this study:

- Research indicated that teachers felt under increased pressure to maximise learning outcomes, especially relating to the 'core' areas of literacy and numeracy, sometimes at the expense of other subjects including the creative arts.
- There was a culture of *perceived* over-emphasis on the standardised testing of literacy and numeracy, signified and perpetuated by the increased prominence being placed on these areas (DES, 2011,2020), as well as the communication of these results to parents and the Board of Management.
- Educators experienced an intensification of their workload, driven by performance pressures, the demands of effectively delivering a full curriculum, and an increased burden of administrative and paperwork responsibilities.
- Children were not immune to these pressures and also felt the weight of performance demands associated with standardised testing in literacy and numeracy.
- According to several teachers interviewed, some parents perpetuated the importance placed on achieving high scores in standardised tests by rewarding their children for academic performance. This pressure undoubtedly contributed to the burden that teachers felt in relation to performativity and standardised testing, perhaps carrying heightened connotations of teacher effectiveness and accountability.

The emergence of a school culture influenced by market-driven ideals of performativity and productivity, marked by the intensification and the maximisation of educators' roles, was clearly evident. Next, let us examine how these marketised shifts impacted creative practices within the case study research context.

Creativity Under Constraint: Marketisation and The Arts in Education

Research findings exemplified the profound and real impact that marketised shifts had on the provision for creativity within the arts. The marginalisation of the creative arts was evident, alongside the instrumental use of the performing arts, which reflected the 'lived' experiences of a culture of performativity. These findings illustrate how these shifts became embedded in the cultural practices of the school during the research period:

- School documents, including the monthly plan and report template, emphasised the importance of literacy and numeracy over all other subjects by assigning them priority placement at the beginning of the plan and allocating a larger section for their planning; perhaps echoing the prioritisation of these 'core' areas by the Department of Education (2011, 2020) in the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*. In contrast, the arts were given significantly less space, reflecting their lower status within the planning framework. Notably, drama was removed from the plan for several years in favour of an 'integrated approach' (before being eventually reinstated). These practices echo Foucault's (1983, 1991) notions of 'disciplinary power' and 'governmentality', highlighting how ordinary tasks and what we might call 'disciplinary technologies', can embed power into a culture.
- Throughout the majority of the study period, funding for the visual arts was significantly limited, with an increase only introduced after some time. The lack of funding and resources available for the visual arts impacted teachers' capacity to undertake creative work within the visual arts and to implement the curriculum fully. A number of children also noted the perceived lack of resources regarding the visual arts and how this inhibited their creative capacities.
- Throughout the study, there was a great appreciation for the development of music within the school, demonstrated by the investment in musical instruments and the

ongoing engagement in violin and oboe lessons led by professional music instructors. Children are fortunate to have such opportunities.

- The research indicated that, on occasion, there was a strong culture of performance within the arts, particularly in music, sometimes with an emphasis placed on the product, 'something that is seen', rather than the creative process, 'something that is often unseen'. This was evident, for example, in performances for the school pageants, Cór Fheile and The National Children's Choir. There was some scope for creativity in performances such as Seó le Pádraig (St. Patrick's Day performance), although there appeared to be a strong emphasis on the leveraging of performance to promote a positive school image to the wider public (the *'consumers'*). This resonates strongly with Ball's (2000) idea of 'image management', influenced by Baudrillard's (1991, 2023) notion of 'simulacra', whereby establishments deliberately produce representations or 'fabrications' of themselves, denoting a symbolic 'sign value' or perceived value in the marketplace.
- A number of children experienced pressure to perform, not only in terms of standardised testing, but also relating to structured musical or stage performances. These formal teacher-directed showcases, at times, left little room for creativity or individual expression. While some children did indeed enjoy partaking in these performances, others voiced frustration about their lack of autonomy and expressed a desire for more opportunities to express themselves freely.

The strong emphasis on performativity was palpable and emerged as a core finding derived from the lived experiences of the research participants. Notably, marketised education systems not only had substantial effects on cultural practices, they also produced significant *affects* on participants (Ahmed, 2004). Both educators and students experienced the emotional burden associated with intensification, attainment pressures and standardised testing. Although I am

aware that some children enjoyed the pageant and other prescriptive performances, the discomfort that some children expressed due to their lack of autonomy and freedom of expression was noteworthy. Eisner (1972, p.237) argues that:

> No artistic community would permit restrictions regarding what an artist can create; such restrictions have no place in a free society. When one enters a wedge saying, *'this is what you can study and this you can't'*, where that wedge stops no one can tell.

Within this performativity model, the value of an organisation or individual is often tied to production, over its inherent or intrinsic worth. Performativity, is considered by Ball (2013) to operate as a form of oppression, resonating with Bourdieu's (2020) notion of 'symbolic violence'. This further resonates with Freire's (1996, p.58) concept of a "banking model of education", a "dehumanising power" whereby children remain passive recipients of knowledge which "inhibits their creative power". Noteworthy to consider is Foucault's (1991) concept of 'governmentality' and the bidirectional influence that these power dynamics have (top-down from the government and bottom-up from the social actors), a cyclical validation of this model of education. In essence, the participants become social actors who, while being acted upon, also participate in the perpetuation of the cultural 'ideals' imposed upon them, thereby reinforcing these ideologies and embedding them within everyday cultural practices.

Cultivating Creativity Amid Neoliberal Educational Reforms

Amidst the significant pressures that marketised education systems place on educators, research has shown how these pressures impact the provision of opportunities to foster creativity in the arts. As previously noted, significant constraints exist including the erosion of time allocated to the creative arts due to increased performativity pressures, compounded by a lack of funding for resources, and the perceived prioritisation of performance arts over creative arts. Although these findings hold true regarding the lived experiences of participants in this study, it is important to acknowledge the more nuanced understandings and layered analysis

arising from the research. *Despite* these findings, there were also valuable and significant opportunities to foster creativity within the school. Goodson and Rudd (2016, p.184) reflect on the notion of 'refraction' as a means of "helping us to better understand how and why dominant (and global) waves of reform are mediated and can result in a range of varied responses". They further consider how:

> Refraction in education can be seen as a change in direction arising from individuals' and groups' own beliefs, practice and trajectories that are at odds with dominant waves of reform and policies introduced into the field (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, p.5).

Refraction indeed "requires us to explore professional narratives and action that leads to the reproduction, re-contextualisation, de-contextualisation or refraction of policies" (Goodson and Rudd, 2016, p.189) and to consider our own positioning and autonomy in either conforming to or resisting existing policies or cultural norms in relation to our own professional practice.

This research indicates that contrary to the pressures being placed upon educators and students, there remains a strong understanding and appreciation of the importance of creativity pertaining to the arts (and indeed across the curriculum). Creativity often resists, persists and even flourishes amid external pressures, as "there is a creative urge in every human being – young and old alike – for we all have a natural desire" (Lancaster, 1990, p.6). Research indicated an appreciation for the inherent value of creativity in the arts, as well as the beginning of a shift in cultural practices regarding now-established norms:

- In-depth discussion with educators and children, demonstrated their conceptions of creativity. Collectively, they envisaged creativity as an innate part of being human, underpinned by original and creative thinking, freedom of expression, and the absence of inhibiting constraints.
- Despite the performativity constraints experienced by teachers during the duration of this research, they artfully undertook creative lessons within the arts which I observed

through the lens of critical ethnography. Interestingly, teachers (perhaps instinctively) integrated the arts with literacy, science and, in one instance, another arts subject, illustrating that creativity within the arts can co-exist and even thrive when interwoven with other curricular areas, challenging the limitations of rigidly defined 'core subjects'.

- Regarding my ethnographic classroom observations, children delighted in the opportunities given to them to explore creatively, whether through drama, music or the visual arts. Creativity appeared to be an innate and natural part of their personhood, expressed through their creative potential in a supportive setting.
- The establishment of the 'art room' marked a significant shift in the symbolic 'sign value' assigned to the visual arts within the school (Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020). Giving priority to a dedicated creative space for the visuals arts within the school signalled a renewed valuing of the visual arts. This also illustrates the significance of active forms of 'advocacy' or 'refraction' (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, 2016) in defence of the creative arts and the power they hold in challenging and shifting existing cultural norms.
- The increase in the funding allocated to teachers for the visual arts towards the end of this study denotes another signifier of the increased 'sign value'(Baudrillard, 1981; Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011; Bourdieu, 2020) being placed on the visual arts.
- The longstanding prominence of musical performance in the school, alongside violin instruction with professional musicians, may offer an avenue into more creative approaches in the future.
- Research indicated that engaging in creative art partnerships with community artists and organisations offered rich and meaningful opportunities to explore creativity within the arts. A further financial commitment by the government, Department of Education

and external bodies for such creative initiatives would be welcome, in recognition of their value to arts education.

- Engaging management and the wellbeing planning team in discussions regarding the creative potential of the visual arts, music and drama, and advocating for increased opportunities for integration across the curriculum to maximise learning opportunities and promote student voice, constitutes a form of (positive) 'problematisation'. According to Foucault (1991), this act of questioning and rethinking of established practices ('problematisation') can be seen as a form of action in itself.

It is clear from engaging with the research that the marketisation of education has had a significant impact regarding the marginalisation of provision for creative teaching and learning in arts education. The Department of Education's (2011, 2020) *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*, heralded a significant shift towards the prioritisation of literacy and numeracy attainment, data-driven improvement benchmarks, increased time provision for these 'core' subjects and the erosion of time for arts education. They state, "we have to acknowledge that understanding and using literacy and numeracy are such core skills that time for their development must be safeguarded, sometimes by delaying the introduction of some curriculum areas" (DES, 2020, p.44). These shifts, coupled with an intensification of educators' duties, increased administrative tasks and paperwork, alongside a shared responsibility to market the school and manage its image, resulted in a sort of performativity culture, with an emphasis on positioning 'education as product'. Despite these research indicators, teachers and students were still able to create some meaningful opportunities to engage in creative work within the arts, illustrating the nuanced nature of educational practice and the school's shifting cultural dynamics.

Noteworthy to mention is that in recent years, there has been a shift in the educational climate, with a renewed policy emphasis being placed on the fostering of creativity. The launch of the revised Mathematics Curriculum (DES, 2023, p.29) places a renewed emphasis on play and exploratory learning, advocating "opportunities for exploration, investigation, challenge, creativity, choice and independence" and encourages "valuing the process as well as the product of learning". The launch of the new *Primary Curriculum Framework For Primary and Special Schools*, developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), marked a departure from 1999 primary curriculum, with a renewed emphasis on a holistic and child-centred curriculum and an increased awareness of the fluidity of curricular areas (DES, 2023). There is also a welcome focus placed on opportunities to foster creativity across the arts:

> A broad experience in the arts is integral throughout a child's experience in primary school. The arts give expression to and extend children's understanding, imagination, and creativity through a broad range of experiences. Such experiences have the capacity to engage, inspire, and enrich all children, exciting the imagination and encouraging them to reach their creative and expressive potential. (DES, *Primary Curriculum Framework*, 2023, p.12)

The introduction of the PISA 2022 Creative Thinking assessment engages students' capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving skills, "that can result in original and effective solutions, advances in knowledge, and impactful expressions of imagination" (OECD, 2023, Creative Thinking - PISA (oecd.org)). The OECD's inclusion of creativity in recent PISA assessments may be influenced by broader shifts towards creating a 'knowledge economy', whereby creativity is increasingly measured and valued, positioning creativity as essential for fostering innovation and economic competitiveness. Although this push aligns the notion of creativity with neoliberal frameworks, focused on market-driven incentives, it simultaneously (maybe paradoxically) creates a space for teaching and learning to engage with creativity in expressive and imaginative ways that may transcend narrow viewpoints. This question remains open and new research may be prompted to respond by further exploring this topic. Certainly,

creativity remains an inherent part of being human, surpassing the external values imposed on it, and we may now need to be reminded of this truth.

Critical Reflections of the Research: Strengths and Limitations

This research is distinguished by several methodological and conceptual strengths that enhance its inherent value, including its depth and scope and contribution to the wider research field within education, particularly with regard to the Irish context. The ethnographic and longitudinal nature of this study, I believe, adds significant value to this research, as it allowed for in-depth and sustained exploration within the field, fostering a greater engagement with the research and a deeper understanding of impacts, patterns and evolving school culture dynamics over time. This chronological depth is especially valuable in ethnographic research, as it allows one to capture a more nuanced understanding of participants' lived experiences within their field of practice, influenced by broader marketised shifts that have occurred within education. The multidimensional approach of this study integrated numerous perspectives and data sources, allowing me to construct a rich and multi-layered analysis of the data. Adopting a critical ethnographic approach, using visual ethnography, field notes, classroom observations, analysis of policy documents and artefacts, individual and focus group interviews with both educators and child participants, allowed for a comprehensive and detailed analysis. The depth and scope of these approaches add rigor to this study and have enhanced my understanding of participants' lived experiences over time. As is the nature of ethnographic research, the findings of this research represent a 'snapshot' of the participants' views and 'lived experiences' within specific times and settings and may not encompass all perspectives or changes across the entire duration of this study.

A further strength of this research was the use of critical discourse analysis and grounded theory approach in a systematic (yet constructivist) manner. These complimentary approaches

supported a detailed analysis of the data gathered, synthesising participant narratives and emerging themes that are grounded in the research. Crystallisation of the data, as opposed to more traditional notions of validity such as triangulation, complimented the interpretative and constructivist nature of this study. Crystallisation offered a multifaceted and layered approach to constructed knowledge and concepts of validity, whilst acknowledging researcher subjectivity and the complex nature of qualitative inquiry, recognising that there is always more to know (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). Cumulatively, these methodological approaches contribute to the credibility, depth and analytical rigour of this study, offering valuable insights into the complex realities and lived experiences of the participants of this research.

Limitations regarding this study included researcher subjectivity and positionality, observer effect, researcher presence, and the small sample size and limited generalisability (though generalisability is not a primary concern here). Due to the ethnographic nature of this study, researcher subjectivity and positionality were important considerations, especially considering that I have also been a teacher (participant) within the school context for over 16 years. While 'back yard' research (Malone, 2003) can present ethical and positionality challenges, and ethical considerations must always be accounted for, this too can offer a deeper exploration within the research field and enhance access over time (Cohen et al., 2007). Although interactions with participants and researcher interpretations were inevitably influenced by my positionality and subjectivity, this is typical of highly qualitative investigative work, particularly given my dual role as a researcher and staff member within the field of practice. Reflexivity, multi-layered data collection and thorough data analysis were significant in fostering ongoing critical awareness of my positionality during the research, including sustained reflection considering how my prior experiences, assumptions and professional identity shaped the generation and interpretation of the data.

Reflecting on my longstanding role as educator within the research context, my presence as researcher may have reduced, but not eliminated, the potential for an observer effect, as participants were very familiar with me in day-to-day interactions. I recognise that an inherent sense of trust and respect had been built within our professional relationships over the years. However, my long-term immersion in the field also introduced nuanced complexities considering my dual role as 'insider and researcher' and may have subtly influenced participant interactions or how I interpreted these experiences.

Considering the small, context-specific sample of this study (which is often typical in ethnographic research), findings are not intended to be generalisable beyond this specific context. Rather, this ethnographic study offers deep, situated insights into the lived experiences and culture within this research setting. Although these findings are not generalisable, they may be transferable to similar contexts and resonate with broader shifts and trends typified by the marketisation of education within the Global Education Reform Movement.

Final Thoughts and Implications for Future Research

This study engaged in a critical ethnography within an Irish urban primary school, to explore the impact of the educational market on creative teaching and learning within the arts, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021). The research critically examined how global policy trends shape educational practices and impact on school cultures. Research examined both the macro-level influences of global marketisation, meso-level effects nationally, and the micro-level impacts observed in the case study school, as revealed through the lived experiences of the participants. This study has highlighted the pressures that constrain provision for creativity within the arts, whilst too acknowledging that despite these constraints, "creativity and ingenuity stubbornly resist standardisation" (Ravitch, 2013, p.241).

This study contributes to knowledge by examining how marketised educational reform is experienced and negotiated by educators and its impact on provision for the creative arts, in one Irish primary school, through a socio-historical lens. It applies critical theory, exploring concepts such as Foucault's (1991) notion of 'governmentality' and the concept of 'refraction' (Goodson and Rudd, 2012, 2016), as interpretative lenses for understanding how educators navigate educational reform. In doing so, it offers insight into the complexities and nuances of participants' 'lived experiences' and professional identities.

This study has initiated a dialogue on the impact of marketised shifts upon creativity in arts education, not only in terms of direct provision for the creative arts, but also in considering how the arts can be reconceptualised and 'marketed' to elevate the school's 'sign value' (Baudrillard, 1981) and 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 2020). In spite of these shifts, this study indicated that there is a consensus among research participants regarding the significance of creativity within the arts and its inherent value, alongside a strong desire to foster the expression of that creativity through various art forms. As previously noted, while this study is not generalisable on a national level, it echoes national and global trends shaped by the 'marketisation of education'. This research holds significant value as it captures the real, lived experiences of educators and students within the context of this study. These experiences may resonate with others as they navigate the impacts of the educational market within the context of the Global Education Reform Movement.

As aforementioned the DES (2011, 2020) *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* motivated an increased prioritisation of literacy and numeracy standards and outcomes-based models in Irish education, alongside a sidelining of the creative arts. With a subsequent revaluing of creativity through the launch of the new *Primary Curriculum Framework* (DES, 2023), came a refocus on imagination and the aim that children "reach their

creative and expressive potential" (DES, 2023, p.12). The Department of Education (2023) further attest that:

> The arts give expression to and extend children's understanding, imagination, and creativity through a broad range of experiences. Such experiences have the capacity to engage, inspire, and enrich all children, exciting the imagination and encouraging them to reach their creative and expressive potential. (DES, 2023, p.18)

I believe that further research is needed to explore how educators and students may navigate existing challenges (aforementioned) to fully foster and embed meaningful creative experiences and practices within the arts, and indeed across the curriculum, as a whole. Furthermore, it may be significant to investigate how fostering creativity within the arts may impact children and educators, in terms of their 'lived experiences', but also concerning their intrinsic identities and values. Further inquiry could also consider undertaking action research, rooted in the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2010) and framed by a critical ethnographic approach, examining the impact of teachers and students engaging in a creative arts initiative, that is linked to and embedded within the wider curriculum. It may be valuable to explore the transformative effect and *affect* (Ahmed, 2004) that the purposeful implementation of creative practices may have upon educators and students. Further research could also examine how fostering the creative arts can positively influence student and teacher wellbeing, with an emphasis placed on happiness and the *joy* of teaching and learning (Noddings, 2003; Ravitch, 2010). Dowling Long (2015, p.275) acknowledges the capacity of the arts to foster creativity, imagination, critical and divergent thinking, further stating that:

> It is a well-known fact among educational researchers that the arts embrace pupils' humanity, support social and emotional learning and, depending on the level of teaching and expertise of individual teachers, contribute to overall happiness of pupils in particular and to the school and wider community in general.

This perspective emphasises the *intrinsic* and deeply personal value of education in individuals' lives, in contrast to extrinsic, outcomes-based or economically driven models, as seen in marketised education systems (Sahlberg, 2011, 2021).

For meaningful provision for creativity within the arts (and indeed across the curriculum), there needs to be a prioritisation of resources and investment by the Government of Ireland and the Department of Education to ensure effective implementation in schools. This would not be limited to increased access to funding towards arts resources, but would also include provision for partnerships through *The Arts in Education Charter* (2013) with external bodies such as The Irish Arts Council (Dowling Long, 2015), the Creative Ireland Programme and community artists. The role of *The Arts in Education Charter* (2013) is to "promote both arts education and the arts-in-education among young children and young people through the alignment of a joined up, integrated and collaborative approach across Government Departments, education agencies, and arts organisations" (cf. *Arts in Education Charter* website, cited in Dowling Long, p.267). The promotion of creativity in primary schools can be seen as a valuable tool for the wellbeing and holistic development of the child. O'Sullivan et al. (2023, p.23) acknowledge that "creativity as a strategy for well-being, health and resilience is advanced in the current 5-year Plan which established Creative Health and Well-being as one of the pillars supporting the Creative Ireland programme (2023-2027)". I also believe that increasing opportunities for educators to engage with meaningful and high-quality CPD would positively enhance teaching and learning in the discipline. While creativity may be seen as intrinsic to all individuals, the fostering of creative practices does not occur in a vacuum and therefore adequate deployment of resources and the safeguarding of time, are essential. Given the breadth of the curriculum and its many priorities, effective time management is essential for maximising learning opportunities. I would recommend that educators adopt an integrated approach regarding the exploration of creativity within arts education (whilst still retaining the integrity of the core values of the arts) – not only to make the most of limited time, but also to encourage a more holistic perspective that fosters inter-connectedness and embeds the creative arts more deeply within the wider curriculum.

Engaging in this research has had a profound impact on my own personal and professional practice. It has deepened my critical awareness of the wider socio-historical, political and sociocultural influences that shape global and national trends, thus impacting and shaping our cultural practices. I was particularly struck by Foucault's (1991) notion of 'governmentality' and the bi-directional power relations that often co-exist between governance and self-governance. I feel compelled to consider my own agency and to challenge these acts of 'self-governance'. Rudd and Goodson (2016, p.184) urge that, "now, more than ever, it is vital to explore these refractions and representations and to consider alternatives that might replace a historically precarious neoliberal model". I further reflect on the values I aim to impart as an educator, an ambassador of the creative arts, and a proponent of holistic, child-centred education, that embraces creativity, imagination, individuality and self-expression. I would hope that other educators may feel inspired to reflect on their own professional practice and consider the values they hold dear, as well as recognising their innate power and potential to foster meaningful change. In education, it is imperative that we, as educators, reflect on our own personal narratives; our positionings and actions that inevitably lead to the "production, re-production, re-contextualisation, de-contextualisation or refraction of policies" (Goodson and Rudd, 2016, p.189).

References

Ahmed, S. (2004). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge

Arts Council England, (2014). *Evidence Review on the Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society.* Manchester: Arts Council England.

The Arts Council of Ireland, (2016). *Making Great Art Work, Leading the Development of the Arts in Ireland: Arts Council Strategy (2016-2025).*
Available at: The Arts Council Strategy 2016-2025. [Accessed: 18 June 2025]

Arts in Education Charter. (2013). Available at: Publication2 [Accessed: 18 June 2025]

Au, W. (2007). 'High-stakes testing and curricular control: a qualitative metasynthesis'. *Educational Researcher.* Vol. 36, No. 5, pp.258-267.

Bamford, A. (2006). *The Wow Factor: Global Research Compendium on the Impact of the Arts in Education.* Germany: Waxman.

Baudrillard, J. (1981). *For a critique of the political economy of the sign.* St. Louis, MO: Telos Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1994, 2023). *Simulacra and Simulation.* Translated by S. Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor, MI. University of Michigan Press.

Ball, S. (2002). 'Performativities and Fabrications in the Education Economy: Towards the Performative Society'. *Australian Educational Researcher.* Vol. 27, No. 2.

Ball, S. (2013). *The Education Debate – Second Edition.* USA. The Policy Press.

Ball, S. (2003). 'The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity'. *Journal of Educational Policy.* Vol. 18, No. 2, pp.215-228.

Beach, D., Bagley, C. and Marques Da Silva, S. (eds). (2018). *The Wiley Handbook of Ethnography of Education*. USA: John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Becker, G.S. (1994). *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education, 3rd ed*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* Garden City, New York: Anchor.

Bergson, H. (1946 [1903]). 'Introduction to Metaphysics'. In *The Creative Mind.* New York: Citadel Press, pp.159-200.

Bergson, H. (1910 [1889]). *Time and Free Will* (trans. F. Pogson). London: Allen and Unwin.

Berry, J. and Sahlberg, P. (2006). 'Accountability Affects the Use of Small Group Learning in School Mathematics'. *Nordic Studies in Mathematics Education.* Vol. 11, No. 1, pp.5-31.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2012). 'Giving Teaching Back to Education: Responding to the Disappearance of the Teacher'. *Phenomenology and Practice*. Vol. 6, No. 2, pp.35-49.

Bogdan, R.G. and Biklen, S.K. (1992). *Qualitative Research for Education* (second edition). Boston MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Bourdieu, P. (2023). *Habitus and Field.* USA. Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1988). *Homo Academicus.* California: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2020). *Language and Symbolic Power.* USA. Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P., and Passeron, J.C. (2000). *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* London. Sage Publications.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. (1979). *The inheritors: French students and their relation to culture.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brancaleone, D. and O'Brien, S. (2011). 'Educational Commodification and the (Economic) Sign Value of Learning Outcomes'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education.* Vol. 32, No. 4, pp.501-519.

Brice Heath, S. and Roach, A. (1999). 'Imaginative Actuality'. E.B. Fiske (ed.). *Champions of Change: The Impact of Arts on Learning.* Washington, DC: 'The Arts Education Partnership, The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities', pp.19-34.

Caldwell, B. and Vaughan, T. (2012). *Transforming Education Through the Arts.* USA: Routledge.

Catterall, J.S. and Peppler, K.A. (2007). 'Learning in the Visual Arts and the Worldviews of Young People'. *Cambridge Journal of Education.* Vol. 27, pp. 542-60.

Charmaz, K. (2012). *Constructing Grounded Theory, A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis.* London: Sage.

Chen, K. and Ling, T. (2010). 'Creativity-Provoking Design Education Based on Jungian Psychoanalysis Theory'. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences.* Vol. 2, pp.4555-4560. New York. Elsevier.

Clancey, P. (1998). In: Farrell, B. (ed). *Issues in Education: Changing Education, Changing Society.* Dublin. ASTI.

Coe, R., Waring, M., Hedges, L.V. and Ashley, L.D. (2021). *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education* (third edition). Los Angeles: Sage.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education.* New York. Routledge.

Conway, P. (2013). 'Cultural Flashpoint: The Politics of Teacher Education Reform in Ireland'. *The Educational Forum.* Vol. 77, pp.51-72.

Cosgrove, J., Sheil, G., Archer, P., and Perkins, R. (2010). *Comparisons of Performance in Ireland PISA 2000 to PISA 2009: A Preliminary Report to the Department of Education and Skills.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education.* New York. Routledge.

Craft, A. (2008). *Creativity in Schools: Tensions and Dilemmas.* London and New York. Routledge.

Creative Ireland Programme (2017). Available: Creative Ireland - Connecting people, and wellbeing. [Accessed: 8 May 2025].

Damerow, M. (2023). 'The Influence of Neoliberalism on Arts Education: "Creativity" and "Critical Thinking" as Semantics of an Educational Discourse', in B. Jorissen et al. (eds), *Cultural Sustainability and Arts Education.* Germany: Springer.

Denscombe, M. (2007). *The Good Research Guide: For Small-Scale and Social Research Projects.* London. Open University Press.

Department of Education. (2024). *Ireland's Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Strategy 2024-2033: Every Learner from Birth to Young Adulthood.* Government of Ireland Publications: Dublin.

Department of Education and Skills. (2011, 2020). *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020.* Government of Ireland Publications: Dublin.

Department of Education. (2023). *Primary Curriculum Framework, For Primary and Special Schools.* Dublin. Government of Ireland.

Department of Education and Skills. (2019). *Primary Language Curriculum.* Dublin. Government of Ireland.

Department of Education. (2023). *Primary Mathematics Curriculum, For Primary and Special Schools.* Dublin. Government of Ireland.

Department of Education and Science. (1999). *Primary School Curriculum.* Dublin: Government of Ireland.

Department of Education and Skills. (2018). *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-20.* Dublin. Government of Ireland.

De Fraja, G. and Landers, P. (2006). 'Could Do Better: The Effectiveness of Incentives and Competition in Schools'. *Journal of Public Economics.* Vol. 90, pp.189-213.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and Education: An introduction to the philosophy of education.* New York: Macmillan.

Dilthey, W. (1989). *Introduction to the Human Sciences.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dilthey, W. (2002 [1910]). 'The formation of the historical world in the human sciences', in R. Makkreel and F. Rodi (eds.). *The Selected Works of William Dilthey*, Vol. 3. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dowling Long, S. (2015). 'The Arts In and Out of School: Educational Policy, Provision and Practice in Ireland Today'. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education.* Vol. 8, No. 2, pp.267-286.

Eder, D. and Fingerson, L. (2003). Interviewing children and adolescents. In J.A. Holstein and J.F. Gubrium (eds.). *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp.33-53.

Eisner, E.W. (1972). *Educating Artistic Vision.* New York. Macmillan.

Eisner, E.W. (2002). *The Arts and the Creation of Mind.* New Haven and London. Yale University Press.

Eisner, E.W. (1998). *The Enlightened Eye: Qualitative Inquiry and the Enhancement of Educational Practice.* New Jersey. Prentice-Hall.

Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. P. (eds.). (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing.* AltaMira Press.

Epstein, A.S. (2007). *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning.* Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Eun, B. (2010). 'From Learning to Development: A Sociocultural Approach to Instruction'. *Cambridge Journal of Education.* Vol. 40, No. 4, pp.401-418.

European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, European Science Foundation and ALL European Academies, (2017). [Online]. Available from: European Code of Conduct 2017 - ALLEA [Accessed: 18 September 2024].

European Commission. (2008). *Education and training in Europe: Diverse Systems, Shared Goals for 2010.* Brussels: European Commission.

Feist, G. J. (1998). 'A meta-analysis of personality in scientific and artistic creativity'. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 2, pp.290-309.

Florida, R. (2005). *The Flight of the Creative Class.* New York. Harper Business.

Florida, R., Mellander, C., and King, K. *The Global Creativity Index 2015.* University of Toronto: Rotman.

Foucault, M. (1997). *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Woks of Michael Foucault, 1953-1984.* Vol. 1. New York: New Press.

Foucault, M. (1991). 'Governmentality', in Burchell, G., Gordon, C., and Miller, P. (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality.* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp.87-104.

Foucault, M. (1983). 'The Subject of Power'. In h.l. Dreyfus and P. Rainbow (eds.). *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1980) Two lectures, in C. Gordon, *Power / Knowledge*. New York. Pantheon Books.

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving the Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1996). *Pedagogy of The Oppressed.* New York: Penguin Books.

Friedman, M. (1955). 'The Role of Government in Education'. *Economics and Public Interest.* New Jersey. Rutgers University Press.

Friedman, M. (1962, 2020). *Capitalism and Freedom.* Chicago. The University of Chicago Press.

Fullan, M. (2011). *Choosing wrong drivers for whole system reform* (Seminar Series, 204). Centre for Strategic Education.

Gardner, H. (2006). *Five Minds for the Future.* New York: Harvard Business School Press.

Gee, J.P. (2011). *An Introduction of Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method.* USA and Canada. Routledge.

Gibbs, A. (2021). Focus Groups and Group Interviews. In Coe, R., Waring, M., Hedges, L.V. and Ashley, L.D. (2021). *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education* (third edition). Los Angeles: Sage.

Gill, R. (2011). 'Focus on National Tests Robs Children of True Learning'. *The Age.* 9 February 2011, p.15.

Gleeson, J. and Donnabhain, D. A. (2009). 'Strategic Planning and Accountability in Irish Education'. *Irish Educational Studies.* Vol. 28. pp.27-46.

Gleeson, J. (2013). 'The European Credit Transfer System and Curriculum Design: Product Before Process?' *Studies in Higher Education.* Vol. 38. pp.1-18.

Goodson, I.F. and Rudd, T. (2012). 'Developing a Concept of: Exploring Educational Change and Oppositional Practice. *Educational Practice and Theory.* Vol. 34, No.1, pp.5-24.

Goodson, I.F. and Rudd, T. (2016). 'The Limits of Neoliberal Education: Refraction, Reinterpretation and Imagination'. *Negotiating Neo Liberalism: Developing Alternative Educational Visions.* Sense Publishers.

Gottdiener, M. (1994). 'The system of objects and the commodification of everyday life'. In Kellner, D. (ed.). *Baudrillard. A Critical Reader*, pp.25-40. Oxford, Blackwell.

Grey, S. and Morris, P. (2022). 'Capturing the Spark: PISA, Twenty-first Century Skills and the Reconstruction of Creativity'. *Globalisation, Societies and Education.* London: Routledge.

Green, J.L., Camilli, G. and Elmore, P.B. (2009). *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research.* New York: Routledge.

Hall, C. and Thomson, P. (2017). *Inspiring School Change: Transforming Education Through the Creative Arts.* New York: Routledge.

Hammersley, M. Traianou, A. (2012) Ethics and Educational Research, British Educational Research Association on-line resource. [Online]. Available from: http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/ethics-and-educational-research [Accessed: 13 October 2012]

Hargreaves, A., Earl, L., Moore, S., and Manning (2001). *Learning to Change: Teaching Beyond Subjects and Standards.* Jossey-Bass.

Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2009). *The Fourth Way: The inspiring Future of Educational Change.* Corwin.

Hargreaves, A. and Shirley, D. (2022). *Well-Being in Schools. Three Forces that Will Uplift Your Students in a Volatile World.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Hetland, L., E. Winner, S. Veenema and K. Sheridan (2013), Studio Thinking2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education, 2nd Teachers College Press, New York City. First edition: 2007.

Higher Education Authority. (2017). *National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland.* [Online]. Available from: National-Policy-Statement-on Ensuring-Research-Integrity-in-Ireland-2014.pdf (hea.ie) [Accessed: 18 September 2024]

Hope, S. (2010). 'Creativity, Content and Policy'. *Arts Educational Policy Review.* Vol. 111, pp.39-47. Virginia. Routledge.

Howe, K. and Moses, M. (1999). 'Ethics in educational research'. *Review of Research in Education.* Vol. 24, pp.21-60.

Hui, A. and S. Lau (2006), "Drama education: A touch of the creative mind and communicative expressive ability of elementary school children in Hong Kong", Thinking Skills and Creativity. Vol. 1, No.1, pp.34-40.

Hunter, M.A. (2005) *Education and the Arts Research Overview.* Strawberry Hills: Australia Council for the Arts.

Inglus, T. (1998). *Moral Monopoly; The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland.* Dublin. Gill and Macmillen Ltd.

Johnson, P. (2006). *Creators.* New York: Harper Perennial.

Jones, P.W. (1992). *World Bank Financing of Education: Lending, Learning and Development.* London. Routledge.

Junemann, C., Ball, S.J., Santori, D. (2018). 'On Network(ed) Ethnography in the Global Education Policyscape', in Beach, D., Bagley, C. and Marques Da Silva, S. (eds). (2018). *The Wiley Handbook of Ethnography of Education*. USA: John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Koel, S., Fritz, T., Schulze, K. Alsop, D. and Schlaug, G. (2005). 'Adults and Children Processing Music: An fMRI Study'. *NeuroImage.* Vol. 25, 1068-76.

Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolutions.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing.* Sage Publications: United Kingdom.

Lancaster, J. (1990). *Art in the Primary School.* London; New York. Routledge.

Lave, J., and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

LeCompte, M. and Preissle, J. (1993). *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research* (second edition). London: Academic Press.

Lee, J.J. (1989). *Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levitin, D.J. and Tirovolas, A.K. (2009). 'Current Advances in the Cognitive Neuroscience of Music'. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.* Vol. 1156.

Levin, H.M. (2001). *Privatizing Education; Can the Marketplace Deliver Choice, Efficiency, Equity and Social Cohesion?* USA. Westview Press.

Levinson, M., Norlund, A., Beach, D. (2020). 'Teacher Educators in Neoliberal Times: A Phenomenological Self-Study'. Phenomenology and Practice. Vol. 14, No. 1, pp.7-23

Lowenfeld, V. Brittain, W.L. (1982). *Creative and Mental Growth: 7th Edition.* New York. Macmillan.

Lowenfeld, V. (1982). *The Lowenfeld Lectures: Viktor Lowenfeld on Art Education and Therapy.* USA. The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Lynch, K. and Moran, M. (2006). 'Markets, Schools and the Convertibility of Economic Capital: The Complex Dynamics of Class Choice'. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. Vol. 27, No. 2: pp.221-235.

Lynch, K. (2012). 'On the Market: Neoliberalism and New Managerialism in Irish Education'. *Social Justice Series.* Vol. 12, No. 5, pp.88-102.

Macmillan, R., Arvidson, A., Edwards, S., Soteri-Proctor, A., Taylor, R. and Teasdale, S. (20211). *First Impressions: Introducing the 'Real Times' Third Sector Case Studies.* Third Sector Research Centre Working Paper No. 67. Birmingham: University of Birmingham Third Sector Research Centre.

Malinowski, B. (1922). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Malone, S. (2003). 'Ethics at home: informed consent in your own backyard'. *Qualitative Studies in Education.* Vol. 16, No. 6, pp.797-815. Taylor and Francis.

Marsh, D. and Smith, M. (2000). 'Understanding Policy Networks: towards a Dialectical Approach'. *Political Studies.* Vol. 48, No. 1, pp.4-21.

Martins, C.S. (2014). 'Disrupting the Consensus: Creativity in European Educational Discourses as a Technology of Government'. *Knowledge and Cultures.* Vol. 2, No. 3, pp.118-135.

Martins, C.S. and Popkewitz, T.S. (2015). 'The Eventualising of Arts Education'. *Sisyphus Journal of Education.* Vol. 3, No. 1, pp.7-17. Lisbon: Universidade de Lisboa.

Martens, C.S. (2014). 'Disrupting the Consensus: Creativity in European Educational Discourses as a Technology of the Government', in *Knowledge and Cultures,* Vol. 2, No. 3, pp.118-135.

Mason, J.H. (2003). 'The value of creativity: The origins and emergence of a modern belief'. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Mazurek, K. Winzer, M.A. Majorek, C. (2000). *Education in a Global Society; A Comparative Perspective.* USA. Allyn and Bacon; A Pearson Education Company.

McDuffie, K. A. and Scruggs, T.E. (2008). The contributions of qualitative research to discussions of evidence-based practice in special education'. *Intervention in School and Clinic.* Vol. 44, pp.91-97.

McLellan, R., Galton, M., Steward, S., and Page, C. (2012a). *The Impact of Creative Partnerships on the Wellbeing of Children and Young People: Final Report to Creativity, Culture and Education.* Newcastle: Creativity, Culture and Education.

McLellan, R., Galton, M., Steward, S., and Page, C. (2012b). *The Impact of Creative Initiatives on the Wellbeing: A Literature Review.* Newcastle: Creativity, Culture and Education.

Mertens, D. (2010). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods.* San Francisco/London: Sage Publications.

Muench, R., Wieczorek, O., Gerl, R. (2022). 'Education regime and creativity: the Eastern Confucian and the Western Enlightenment types of learning in the PISA test'. *Congent Education.* Vol. 9.

Mulcahy, D.G. O' Sullivan, D. (1989). *Irish Educational Policy; Process and Substance.* Dublin. Institute of Public Administration.

National Centre for Education and Statistics (NCES). (1988). *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.* The Handbook of Survey Methods. Available at: National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) [Accessed: 16 November 2023].

NCCA. (2024). 'Child's Voice: Consulting with children as part of the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum'. Available at: consultation_with_children_report.pdf [Accessed: 24 June 2025].

Neale, B. (2021). *The Craft of Qualitative Longitudinal Research.* Los Angeles. Sage.

Nisbet, J. (2005). 'What is educational research? Changing perspectives through the 20th century', *Research Papers in Education,* Vol. 20, No. 1, pp.25-44.

Noddings, N. (2003): *Happiness and Education.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Noddings, Nel (2005): *The Challenge to Care in Schools* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

OECD. (2023). *PISA 2022 Assessment and Analytical Framework.* Paris: PISA. OECD Publishing.

OECD. (2023). 'PISA 2022 Creative Thinking'. Available at: Creative Thinking – PISA (oecd.org). [Accessed: 02 October 2023].

O'Brien, S. (2012). 'Cultural Regulation and the Reshaping of the University'. *Globalisation, Societies and Education.*

O'Brien, S. and Brancaleone, D. (2011). 'Evaluating Learning Outcomes: in Search of Lost Knowledge'. *Irish Educational Studies.* Vol. 30, No. 1, pp.5-21.

O'Brien, S. (2016). *Inside Education: Exploring the art of good learning.* New York. Routledge.

O'Brien, S. and Ó' Fathaigh, M. (2005). 'Bringing in Bourdieu's Theory of Social Capital: Renewing Leaning Partnership Approaches to Social Inclusion'. *Irish Educational Studies.* Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.65-76.

O'Brien, S. (2013). 'Re-representing Education's Image and Status: In the 'Interest' of Pedagogical Innovation'. In: Zarifis, G.K and Gravani, M. (2013). *Challenging the 'European Area of Lifelong Learning': A Critical Response.* London: Springer Publication.

O'Brien, S. (2017). 'Resisting Neoliberal Education: For Freedom's sake'. In Rudd, T. and Goodson, I.F. (eds.). *Negotiating Neoliberalism: Developing Alternative Educational Visions*, pp.149-166. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

O'Brien, S. and Rudd, T, (2020). 'Making Narrative Connections to Renew our Professional Identities and 'Life Politics': Ivor Goodson's Role in Challenging the Neoliberal Consensus'. In Novakovic', Y. and Sikes, P. (eds). *Storying the Public Intellectual: Commentaries on the Impact and Influence of the Work of Ivor Goodson.* London and New York: Routledge.

Olssen, M. Codd, J. O'Neill, A-M. (2004). *Education Policy; Globalization, Citizenship and Democracy.* London. Sage Publications Ltd.

Olssen, M. and Peters, M. A. (2005). 'Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism'. *Journal of Education Policy.* Vol. 20. pp.349-373.

Oreck, B., Baum, S. and McCartney, H. (1999). 'Artistic Talent Development for Urban Youth'. E.B. Fiske (ed) *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning.* The Arts Education Partnership, The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.

O'Sullivan, C., Clotworthy, E., Nugent, M., Colleary, S., Keane, E., Piazzoli, E., Gubbins, E., Krakaur, L., Kerin, M., McCormick, S., and Heeran Flynn, L. (2023). Arts Alive: A literature review to support curriculum specification development for the area of Arts Education. NCCA.

O' Sullivan, D. (2005). *Cultural Politics and Irish Education Since the 1950s; Policy Paradigms and Power.* Dublin. Institute of Public Administration.

Parsons, L.M. (2001). 'Exploring the Functional Neuroanatomy of Music Performance, Perception and Comprehension'. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.* 930:211-31.

Patrick, F. (2013). 'Neoliberalism, the Knowledge Economy and the Learner: Challenging the Inevitability of the Commodified Self as an Outcome of Education'. ISRN Education. Vol. 2013.

Penuel, W.R. and Wertsch, V. (1995). 'Vygotsky and identity formation: A sociocultural approach'. *Educational Psychologist.* (1995). Vol, 30, No. 2, pp.82-92. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Pettigrew, A. (1995). 'Longitudinal field research on change: Theory and practice', in G. Huber and A. Van de Van (eds) *Longitudinal Field Research Methods.* London: Sage, pp.91-125. Pollard, A. (2002). *Readings for Reflective Teaching.* London. Continuum.

Perkins, R., Morgan, G., Cosgrove, J. and Sheil, G. (2010). *The Performance and Progress of 15 Year Olds in Ireland.* Dublin: Educational Research Centre.

Pink, S. (2021). Doing Visual Ethnography. London: Sage.

Pollard, A. (2002). *Readings for Reflective Teaching.* London. Continuum.

Ravitch, D. (2010). *The Death and Life of the Great American School System – How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education.* USA: Basic Books.

Ravitch, D. (2019). *The Wisdom and Wit of Diane Ravitch.* New York. Garn Press.

Ravitch, D. (2013). *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools.* USA. Vintage Books.

Ravitch, D. (2020). *Slaying Goliath: The Passionate Resistance to Privatization and the Fight to Save America's Public Schools.* Alfred A. Knopf.

Rhodes, R.A.W. (1997). *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity and Accountability.* Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Richardson, L., and St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry'. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). pp.959-978). Sage Publications Ltd

Robinson, K. and Aronica, L. (2015). *Creative Schools.* USA. Penguin Publications.

Robinson, K. and Robinson, K. (2022). *Imagine If ... Creating a Future for Us All.* UK. Penguin Books.

Robinson, K. (2011). *Out of Our Minds. Learning to be Creative.* (2nd edition). UK. Capstone Publishing Ltd.

Rose, N. (1989). *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self.* London: Routledge.

Rose, N., O'Malley, P., Valverde, M. (2006). 'Governmentality'. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science.* Vol. 2, pp.83-104. Sydney: Sydney Law School.

Rudd, T. and Goodson, I.F. (2017). 'Negotiating Neoliberal Education: A Positional Issue and an Oppositional Stance'. In Rudd, T., and Goodson, I.F. (eds), *Negotiating*

Neoliberalism. Studies in Professional Life and Work. Vol. 3. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Sacks, O. (2007). *Musicophilla: Tales of Music and the Brain.* New York: Random House.

Sahlberg, P. (2006). 'Education Reform for Raising Economic Competitiveness'. *Journal of Educational Change.* Vol. 7, No. 4, pp.259-287.

Sahlberg, P. (2021). *Finnish Lessons 3: What can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* New York. Teachers College Press.

Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish Lessons 2: What can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* New York. Teachers College Press.

Sahlberg, P. (2011). *Finnish Lessons: What can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* New York. Teachers College Press.

Sahlberg, P., and Boce, E. (2010). 'Are Teachers Teaching for a Knowledge Society?' *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice.* Vol. 16, No. 1, p.31-48.

Sahlberg, P. (2009). 'The Role of Education in Promoting Creativity: Potential Barriers and Enabling Factors', in Villalba, E. (ed.). *Measuring Creativity: Proceedings for the Conference, Can Creativity be Measured?*, Brussels, 28th-29th May, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p.337-344.

Sahlberg, P. (2007). 'Education Policies for Raising Student Learning: The Finnish Approach'. *Journal of Educational Policy.* Vol. 22, No. 2, pp.147-171.

Sahlberg, P., and Doyle, W. (2019). *Let the Children Play. How More Play will Save Our Schools and Help Children Thrive.* USA: Oxford University Press.

Seidman, I.E., (2019). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences, 5th edition.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Schlaug, G., Jancke, L., Huang, Y. and Steinmetz, H. (1995a). 'In Vivo Evidence of Structural Brain Asymmetry in Musicians'. *Science.* Vol. 267, pp.699-700.

Schlaug, G., Jancke, L., Huang, Y., Staiger, J.F. and Steinmetz, H. (1995b). 'Increased Corpus Collosum Size in Musicians'. *Neuropsychologia.* Vol. 33, pp.1047-55.

Schlaug, G., Norton, A., Overy, K., and Winner, E. (2005). 'Effects of Music Training on the Child's Brain and Cognitive Development'. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences.* Vol. 1060, pp.219-30.

Schneider, M. (2001). *Information and Choice in Educational Privatization.* USA. Westview Press.

Schutz, A. (1972). *The phenomenology of the social world.* London: Heinemann.

Schwandt, T. A. (2000). Three epistemological stances for qualitative enquiry: Interpretivism, hermeneutics, and social constructionism. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). pp.189-214. Thousand Oaks,CA: Sage.

Sefton, G. (2011). *Creative Agents: A Review and Research Project.* Available online: Creative Agents: A Review and Research Project - Creativity, Culture and Education (creativityculture education.org). [Accessed: 19 November 2023].

Sheil, G. (2006). 'The PISA Assessment of Reading Literacy'. *The Irish Journal of Education.* Vol. 37, pp.79-100.

Sluming, V., Brooks, B., Howard, M., Downes, J.J. and Roberts, N. (2007). 'Broca's Area Supports Enhanced Visuospatial Cognition in Orchestral Musicians'. *The Journal of Neuroscience.* Vol. 27, pp.3799-806.

Spillane. D. (2009). 'Boys in a Small Rural School: Developing a Culture of Confidence and Success', in S.D. Harrison (ed.). *Male Voices, Stories of Boys Learning Through Making Music.* Melbourne: ACER Press.

Spindler, G. and Spindler, L. (1992) Cultural process and ethnography: an anthropological perspective. In M. LeCompte, W.L. Millroy and J. Preissle (eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education.* London: Academic Press, pp.53-92.

Stone, L. (2006). 'Drawing Parts Together: The Philosophy of Education of Nel Noddings'. *Utbildning and Demokrati.* Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.13-32. USA: Stanford.

Strike, K.A. (2009), The Ethics of Educational Research. In Green, J.L., Camilli, G. and Elmore, P.B. (2009). *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research.* New York: Routledge.

Tanggaard, L. (2011). 'Stories about creative teaching and productive learning'. *European Journal of Teacher Education.* Vol. 34, No.2, pp.219-232.

Thash, T.M., Maruskin, L.A., Cassidy, S.E., Fryer, J.W. and Ryan, R.M. (2010). 'Mediating between the muse and the masses: inspiration and the actualization of creative ideas'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.* Vol. 93 (3). pp.469-487.

Thomas, J. (1993). Doing Critical Ethnography: Qualitative Research Methods Series 26. California: Sage.

Trondman, M. (2015). 'Taking Normative Sense Seriously: Ethnography in the Light of a Utopian Referent'. *Ethnography.* Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.10-23.

Trondman, M., Willis, P. and Lund, A. (2018). 'Lived Forms of Schooling: Bringing the Elementary Forms of Ethnography to the Science of Education', in Beach, D., Bagley, C. and Marques Da Silva, S. (eds). (2018). *The Wiley Handbook of Ethnography of Education*. USA: John Wiley and Sons Inc.

UNESCO. (2006). 'Road Map for Arts Education'. *The World Conference on Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century, 6-9. March 2006.* Available online: Road Map for Arts Education - UNESCO Digital Library [Accessed: 28 October 2023].

UNESCO. (2010). *Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education.* Available online at: Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education (fau.de). [Accessed: 28 October 2023].

University College Cork (2021). *Code of Research Conduct Version 2.4 at UCC.* [Online]. Available from: UCCCodeofResearchConductV2.4-approved14thSeptember2021.pdf. [Accessed: 4 May 2023].

University College Cork (2012). *An Introduction to Research Ethics at UCC.* [Online]. Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/research/rio/pdf/ethics.pdf [Accessed 13 October 2012].

University College Cork (2021). *Code of Research Conduct. Version 2.4.* [Online]. Available from: CodeofResearchConduct.pdf (ucc.ie) [Accessed: 18 September 2024].

University College Cork (2010). *Code of Research Conduct.* [Online]. Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/research/rio/documents/CodeofGoodConductinResearch_000.pdf [Accessed: 13 October 2012].

University College Cork (2012). Research at UCC, Support Services. *Ethics.* [Online]. Available from: http://www.ucc.ie/research/rio/ethics.html. [Accessed: 13 October 2012].

Uptis, R. and Smithrim, K. (2003). *Learning Through the Arts: National Assessment: 1999 2000.* Final Report to the Royal Conservatory of Music. Toronto: Royal Conservatory of Music.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1981). 'The instrumental method in psychology'. In J.V. Wertsch (ed.), *The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology* (pp.134-143). Armonk. NY: Sharpe.

White, L. H., (2027). 'Human Capital and its Critics: Gary Becker, Institutionalism, and Anti Neoliberalism'. *GMU Working Paper in Economics*. No. 17-02.

Winner, E.,T. Goldstein and S. Vincent-Lancrin (2013), Art for Art's Sake?: The Impact of Arts Education, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing.

Vargas, L.A. and Montoya, M.E. (2009). 'Involving minors in research: Ethics and law within multicultural settings'. In Mertens D.M. and Ginsberg, P.E. (eds.), *Handbook of Social Research Ethics.* pp.489-506. Oaks, CA: Sage.

Vincent-Lancrin, S. et al. (2019). *Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking: What it Means in School.* Educational Research and Innovation. OECD Publishing. Paris. Available at: FosteringStudents' Creativity and Critical Thinking: What it Means in School | READ online (oecd-ilibrary.org). [Accessed: 12 October 2023].

Walford, G. (2018) 'Recognizable Continuity', in Beach, D., Bagley, C. and Marques Da Silva, S. (eds). (2018). *The Wiley Handbook of Ethnography of Education*. USA: John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Walsh, J. (2009). *The Politics of Expansion: The Transformation of Educational Policy in the Republic of Ireland, 1957-72.* USA. Macmillan.

Warger, C.L. and D. Kleman (1986), "Developing positive self-concepts in institutionalized children with severe behaviour disorders", Child Welfare, Vol. 65, No. 2, pp.165-176.

Wegerif, R. (2010). *Mind Expanding: Teaching for Thinking and Creativity in Primary Education.* New York. Open University Press.

Wetter, O.E., Koerner, F. and Schwaniger, A. (2009). 'Does Musical Training Improve School Performance?' *Journal of Instructional Science.* Vol. 37, pp.365-74.

Willis, P. (2007). The Ethnographic Imagination. MA, USA: Polity Press.

Yang, Z. (2023). 'Viewing the Marketisation of Education in the Framework of Marxist Theory and Bourdieu's Theory'. *European Journal of Teaching and Education.* England. University of Cambridge.

Yates, L. (2003). 'Interpretative claims and methodological warrant in small-number qualitative longitudinal research', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6(3): 223-32.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Pilot Study Letter to Principal



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Eimear Conran,
[Address omitted here]
Tel: [omitted here]
E-mail: [omitted here]
Date: _____

Dear _____,

As you know, I am currently undertaking a PhD in Education, at the School of Education, University College Cork. I am writing to you seeking permission to undertake a pilot study within ****** N.S. The purpose of undertaking a pilot study is to enable me as a researcher to refine my research focus and methodologies used to undertake the research. I wish to undertake an independent research study, whereby I will be interested in looking at the emerging education system at primary level. As a researcher, I wish to examine education as product, emanating from increased market forces which are shaping education. I wish to explore the impact of the educational market on creative teaching and learning, whereby I would be interested in eliciting educators' insights and opinions regarding the research topic and practices within the primary school setting. I would be extremely grateful to be given the opportunity to undertake the pilot study in your school. This letter outlines the pilot study's research design; participant recruitment processes; details on participant burden; confidentiality/anonymity principles and practices; risks/benefits; and the uses of the data.

I would hope to undertake a pilot study in ******** N.S. to enable me as a researcher to refine my research focus and research design. This pilot study is planned over a week-long period and aims to be non-intrusive. It is envisaged that three willing mainstream teachers will be informally interviewed. Also, I would wish to undertake a focus group with these participants, as an opportunity for further discussion and insights. All participants in this study will be voluntarily recruited, whereby their active consent will be sought. I, as the researcher, will be responsible for inviting staff to engage in this pilot study. It is important to emphasise that voluntary participants involved in the pilot study may decide to withdraw from the study at any time and without consequence. I do not wish to inconvenience any participants, therefore I will only ask for a maximum of 1 hour from each of them throughout the entire pilot study – at a time and place of their choosing for interview/focus group conversations.

Although I hope to interview individual participants, it is important to note that the identities of individuals will be kept completely confidential. Anonymity will also be preserved. All data from interviews, focus groups and written observations are kept completely confidential by the researcher. Furthermore, the data gathered will be electronically encrypted and hard copies securely stored. The findings from this pilot study may be published in my final thesis for my PhD in Education (if permission is granted at a later stage by the Board of Management of ******* N.S.). Any participants that wish will be afforded the opportunity to read their individual transcripts if they so desire and may offer further clarification regarding personal statements if they feel the need.

The risks to participants may include the possibility that the researcher may learn of elements of practice that may not be perceived as 'good' practice. Alternatively, there may also be many benefits for the school and participants from engaging in this research study. Benefits may include opportunities for participants' expression of their ideas and opinions through interviews and the creation of opportunities to share, discuss and debate ideas and opinions through group conversations. I would hope also that the undertaking of this pilot study may offer the participants involved an opportunity to critically reflect on current changes within the education system which impact on theory, policy and practice.

I hope that the above details are to your satisfaction. If you seek any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope that I will get the opportunity to work together with members of staff on this valuable pilot study.

I am extremely grateful to you for taking the time to consider this letter of consent. I would ask you now, if you so wish, to complete this form below and return it with this letter attached, as soon as is convenient for you. Thank you most sincerely and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With very best wishes,

_____

Eimear Conran.



Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Emerging Research Focus:

A critique of the educational market: Exploring its impact on creative education

I _____, having full capacity to consent, do herby give permission for the undertaking of this pilot study in ******* N.S..

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Principal)

Appendix 2

Pilot Study Letter to Participants



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Eimear Conran,
[Address omitted here]
Tel: [omitted here]
E-mail: [omitted here]

Date: _____

Dear _____,

As you know, I am currently undertaking a PhD in Education, at the School of Education, University College Cork. I am writing to you to invite you to partake in a pilot study regarding my research. The purpose of undertaking a pilot study is to enable me as a researcher to refine my research focus and methods used to undertake the research. I wish to undertake an independent research study, whereby I will be interested in looking at the emerging education system at primary level. As a researcher, I wish to examine education as product, emanating from increased market forces which are shaping education. I wish to explore the impact of the educational market on creative teaching and learning, whereby I would be interested in eliciting educators' insights and opinions regarding the research topic and practices within the primary school setting. I would be extremely grateful to you if you would consider participating in this pilot study which will inform my research for my thesis. This letter outlines the pilot study's research design; participant recruitment processes; details on participant burden; confidentiality/anonymity principles and practices; risks/benefits; and uses of the data.

I would hope to undertake a pilot study in ********** N.S. to enable me as a researcher to refine my research focus and research design. This pilot study is planned over a week-long period and aims to be non-intrusive. It is envisaged that three willing mainstream teachers will be informally interviewed. Also, I would wish to undertake a focus group with these participants, as an opportunity for further discussion and insights. All participants in this study will be voluntarily recruited, whereby their active consent will be sought. I, as researcher, will be responsible for inviting staff to engage in this pilot study. It is important to emphasise that voluntary participants involved in the pilot study may decide to withdraw from the study at any time and without consequence. I do not wish to inconvenience any participants, therefore I will only ask for a maximum of 1 hour from each of them throughout the entire pilot study – at a time and place of their choosing for interview/focus group conversations.

Although I hope to interview individual participants, it is important to note that the identities of individuals will be kept completely confidential. Anonymity will also be preserved. All data from interviews, focus groups and written observations are kept completely confidential by the researcher. Furthermore, the data gathered will be electronically encrypted and hard copies securely stored. The findings from this pilot study may be published in my final thesis for my PhD in Education (if permission is granted at a later stage by the Board of Management of ********* N.S.). Any participants that wish will be afforded the opportunity to read their individual transcripts if they so desire and may offer further clarification regarding personal statements if they feel the need.

The risks to participants may include the possibility that the researcher may learn of elements of practice that may not be perceived as 'good' practice. Alternatively, there may also be many benefits for the participants from engaging in this research study. Benefits may include opportunities for participants' expression of their ideas and opinions through interviews and the creation of opportunities to share, discuss and debate ideas and opinions through group conversations. I would hope also that the undertaking of this pilot study may offer the participants involved an opportunity to critically reflect on current changes within the education system which impact on theory, policy and practice.

I hope that the above details are to your satisfaction. If you seek any further information please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope that I will get the opportunity to work together with you on this valuable pilot study.

I am extremely grateful to you for taking the time to consider this letter of invitation. I would ask you now, if you so wish, to complete this form below and return it with this letter attached, as soon as is convenient for you. Thank you most sincerely and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With very best wishes,

_____

Eimear Conran.

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Teacher Consent Form for Interviews and Focus Groups Regarding Pilot Study

Emerging Research Focus:

A critique of the educational market: Exploring its impact on creative education

I _____, having full capacity to consent, do herby volunteer to participate in this pilot study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Research Participant)

Appendix 3

Letter to Principal and Board of Management



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Eimear Conran,

[Address omitted here]
Tel: [omitted here]
E-mail: [omitted here]
Date: _____

Dear _____ and the Board of Management,

As you know, I am currently undertaking a PhD in Education, at the School of Education, University College Cork. As a researcher, I am interested in examining recent changes in education, motivated by increased market forces, in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement. The marketisation of education promotes a drive towards the development of 'key' curricular areas such as literacy and numeracy, as well as placing increased emphasis on productivity and performativity in education, learning outcomes, standardisation, testing, data-driven improvement, school competition and choice, and accountability. I am interested as to whether these educational shifts towards a market driven entity will impact on creative education within the school context. I wish to explore the impact of the educational market on creative teaching and learning in our school by undertaking a case study in ******* N.S., whereby I would be interested in observing some of the work and daily practices that occur in the school. Also, I am interested in eliciting educators' insights and opinions regarding the research focus and practices within ******** N.S. Furthermore, I would be interested in listening to a selection of children's thoughts regarding some of the creative work that they undertake in school. I would be extremely grateful to be given the opportunity to undertake research in your school. I would like you to know also, that this research has been approved by the Social Research Ethics Committee at University College Cork. This letter outlines the study's research design/methodology; participant recruitment processes; details on participant burden; confidentiality/anonymity principles and practices; risks/benefits; and uses of the data.

Last year, you kindly gave written consent to allow me to undertake the pilot study in your school, which was greatly appreciated and helped me to refine my research focus. I would hope to continue research which would involve undertaking an ethnographic based study in ******** N.S. i.e. a study that enables the researcher to get some 'lived' accounts of practices within the school. The research as always aims to be non-intrusive. It is envisaged that a number (approximately 10 members) of teaching staff (including the principal and managerial staff) will be informally interviewed. Also, I would wish to undertake some focus groups with some willing staff members, as an opportunity for further discussion and insights. In addition, I would like to undertake a focus group with a small representative sample of students to ascertain their conceptions of creativity and to discuss opportunities for expression of creativity

within the school context. Furthermore, I would hope to undertake some classroom observations (in approximately 4 classrooms) of teachers and pupils engaging in curricular work with a creative focus. All participants and children involved in this study will be voluntarily recruited, whereby their active consent will be sought directly and from the participants and parents/guardians. I, as researcher, will be responsible for inviting staff and children to engage in this study. It is important to emphasise that voluntary participants involved in the study may decide to withdraw from the study at any time and without consequence. I do not wish to inconvenience any participants; therefore I will only ask for a maximum of 2 hours throughout the entire study – at a time and place of their choosing for interview/focus group conversations. With exception of the classroom observations and the student focus groups, it is expected that these times will be arranged to take place after school hours. In addition to individual and group discussions, I hope to capture 'lived' school accounts, primarily through general observations and descriptions of school activities. As a researcher I will aim to passively take note of observations within the school over the period of research, without intruding on 'normal' school life.

Although I hope to interview individual participants, it is important to note that the identities of individuals will be kept completely confidential. Anonymity will also be preserved. All data from interviews, focus groups and written observations are kept completely confidential by the researcher. Furthermore, the data gathered will be electronically encrypted and hard copies securely stored. The findings from this study will be published in my final thesis for submission to University College Cork for the award of PhD in Education. The principal and any participants that wish to be given the opportunity to read the final publication of this research project will be afforded the opportunity.

In considering possible risks/benefits to the school from participating in this research, I have come to the conclusion that I cannot identify any *true* risks to the school at present. Alternatively, there may be many benefits for the school and participants from engaging in this research study. Benefits may include opportunities for participants' expression of their ideas and opinions through discussions and interviews and the creation of opportunities to share, discuss and debate ideas and opinions through group conversations. I would also hope that the undertaking of this research study within ****** N.S. would offer teachers and staff an opportunity to critically reflect on current issues within the education system which impact on theory, policy and practice.

This study encourages the use of *active* consent, in which failure to respond to this invitation constitutes a negative response regarding your consent for the school to participate in this research. I would appreciate it therefore, if you could sign the attached consent form, if you so wish, and return this letter to me, at your convenience. I hope that the above details are to your satisfaction. If you have any queries or seek any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope that we will get the opportunity to work together on this worthwhile research project. I am extremely grateful to you for taking the time to consider this letter and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With very best wishes,

Eimear Conran

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Emerging Research Focus

A critique of the educational market: Exploring its impacts on creative education –

A case study of one urban primary school

I _____, on behalf of the Board of Management of ******* N.S., having full capacity to consent, do herby give permission for the undertaking of Ms. Eimear Conran's PhD research study in ******** N.S.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Principal on behalf of the Board of Management)

Appendix 4

Letter to Participants: *Regarding Interviews and Classroom Observations*



Eimear Conran,

[Address omitted here]
Tel: [omitted here]
E-mail: [omitted here]
Date: _____

Dear _____,

As you know, I am currently undertaking a PhD in Education, at the School of Education, University College Cork. I am writing to you to invite you to partake in my research study. As a researcher, I am interested in examining recent changes in education motivated by increased market forces in the context of the Global Education Reform Movement. The marketisation of education promotes a drive towards the development of 'key' curricular areas such as literacy and numeracy, as well as placing increased emphasis on productivity and performativity in education, learning outcomes, standardisation, assessment, testing, data-driven improvement, school competition and choice, and accountability. I am interested as to whether these shifts in education towards a market driven entity will impact on creative education within the school context. I wish to explore the impact of the educational market on creative teaching and learning in our school by undertaking a case study in ********** N.S., whereby I would be interested in observing the some of the work and daily practices that go on in the school. Also, I am interested in eliciting educators' insights and opinions regarding the research focus and practices within ********** N.S. I would like you to know also that this research has been approved by the Social Research Ethics Committee at University College Cork. This letter outlines the study's research design/methodology; participant recruitment processes; details on participant burden; confidentiality/anonymity principles and practices; risks/benefits; and uses of the data.

In relation to this research, I would like to informally interview you at a time of your convenience. It is expected that the interview will last no longer than 40 minutes. All information will remain anonymous and confidential, and your participation is *entirely voluntary.* To this effect, you may withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence. It is important to note that the identities of individuals will be kept completely confidential. While I have every intention to secure anonymity, one might recognise oneself in the final publication, e.g. in words/sentiments that may be attributable to you. While this may present as a potential personal/professional risk, it is stressed that the work focuses on the *school in*

general and does not centre on any one individual's attitudes and behaviour. Alternatively, there may be many benefits for participants from engaging in this research study. Benefits may include opportunities for participants' expression of their ideas and opinions through discussions and interviews and the creation of opportunities to share, discuss and debate ideas and opinions through interview conversations. I would hope also that the undertaking of this research study within ********** N.S. would offer teachers and staff an opportunity to critically reflect on current issues within the education system which impact on theory, policy and practice.

This study encourages the use of *active* consent, in which failure to respond to this invitation constitutes a negative response regarding your participation. I would appreciate it therefore, if you could sign the consent form below, if you so wish, and return it to me at your own convenience, prior to your participation in the interview. I will retain this consent form in a secure location. Should you wish to ask any questions to elicit a better understanding of the research, please feel free to speak to me at any time throughout the study. I am very happy to discuss any questions pertaining to the research study. It is important to reiterate that you may discontinue participation at any time without consequence. All data from interviews are kept completely confidential by the researcher. Anonymity too will be guaranteed, where feasible (one may recognise oneself in words/sentiments for example) and you will *not* be personally/professionally identified in this study. Only I (the researcher) have access to your interview data, and this data is exclusively for this study's attention. Furthermore, the data gathered will be electronically encrypted and hard copies securely stored. The findings from this research study may be published in my final thesis and submitted to University College Cork for the award of PhD in Education. Any participants that wish will be afforded the opportunity to read their individual transcripts if they so desire. The principal and any participants that wish to be given the opportunity to read the final publication of this research project will be afforded the opportunity.

I hope that the above details are to your satisfaction. If you seek any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. I hope that I will get the opportunity to work together with you on this valuable study.

I am extremely grateful to you for taking the time to consider this letter of invitation. I would ask you now, if you so wish, to complete the consent form below and return it with this letter attached, as soon as is convenient for you. Thank you most sincerely and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With very best wishes,

_____

Eimear Conran.



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Teacher Consent Form for Interviews Regarding Ms. Eimear Conran's PhD Study

Research Focus

A critique of the educational market: Exploring its impacts on creative education –

A case study of one urban primary school

I _____, having full capacity to consent, do herby volunteer to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Research Participant)

Appendix 5

Letter to Parents and Guardians: *Regarding Classroom Observations*



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Eimear Conran

Eimear Conran,
[Address omitted here]
Tel: [omitted here]
E-mail: [omitted here]
Date: _____

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is Eimear Conran and I am a teacher at ******** N.S. where I have been working for the last six years. I am currently undertaking research for a PhD in Education, at the School of Education, University College Cork. As part of my research I am interested in gaining insights into some of the creative work that goes on in ******* N.S. With the principal's and teachers' permission I will be going into a number of classrooms to observe some of the creative work that goes on in our school. This will allow me to form a picture of how creativity is understood and practised, from a teacher and student perspective. Your child's class is one of the classes that I will be observing as part of this research, which aims to capture the 'lived experience' of daily school life, through general observations and descriptions of classroom activities, without intruding on 'normal' school life. I greatly appreciate teachers' and pupils' participation and insights regarding this project.

It is important to note that I will be observing the class activities as a whole whereby there will be no particular focus placed on any one child. I intend to make general notes and descriptions of classroom observations. It is important to note that the identities of individuals will be kept completely confidential. Anonymity will also be preserved. All data from written observations are kept completely confidential by me as a researcher. Furthermore, the data gathered will be

electronically encrypted and hard copies securely stored. The observations and interpretations that I will make from this research will be discussed in the thesis that I will submit to University College Cork for the award of PhD in Education.

There may be many benefits for the school and participants from engaging in this research study. Benefits may include opportunities for participants to express their ideas and opinions through classroom activities and discussions and the creation of opportunities to share and discuss ideas and opinions through group conversations and activities. I would hope also that the undertaking of this research study within ******** N.S. would offer teachers and staff an opportunity to critically reflect on current issues and themes within the education system relating to theory, policy and practice.

I hope that the above details are to your satisfaction. If you seek any further information please do not hesitate to contact me through the above email address provided. If you do not wish your child to participate in the creative lessons that I will be observing, you may wish your child to opt out of this study whereby she will be withdrawn from the classroom observations. If you do not wish your child to participate, please sign the attached sheet provided below and your child can return it to me.

I am extremely grateful to you for taking the time to consider this letter.

With very best wishes,

Ms. Eimear Conran

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Observing Creative Work in Classrooms

I _____, wish to withdraw my child _____ from classroom observations by Ms. Eimear Conran relating to her PhD study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Parent/Guardian)

Appendix 6

Letter to Parents and Guardians: *Regarding Focus Groups*



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Eimear Conran
********* N.S.
[Address omitted here]
Tel: [omitted here]
E-mail: [omitted here]
Date: _____

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is Eimear Conran and I am a teacher at ******** N.S., where I have been working for the last six years. I am currently undertaking research for a PhD in Education, at the School of Education, University College Cork. As part of my research I am interested in gaining insights into some of the creative work that goes on in ******* N.S. As part of this study, I am interested in gaining students' opinions and ideas relating to how creativity is understood and practised. I would like to elicit children's understandings of what they think creativity is. Furthermore, I am interested in eliciting children's views on possible opportunities and barriers to creativity within our school. I greatly appreciate pupils' participation and insights regarding this project.

In relation to this research, I would like to informally interview a representative group of students. In this regard, I am looking for volunteers and would greatly appreciate your child's participation in a proposed student focus group meeting. I appreciate that time is both precious and scarce, and I would most like to meet students at a time of mutual convenience. It is likely, therefore, that the proposed student group will meet at a time that does not intrude on valuable class time. Instead, the meeting may take place during lunch time (with lunch provided) and will last no longer than this interval. All information will remain anonymous and confidential, and your child's participation is *entirely voluntary*. To this effect, she may withdraw from the study at any time, with no consequences. It is stressed that the work focuses on the *school in general* and does not centre on any one individual's attitudes or behaviours. It is likely that this *representative* group of students may not necessarily characterise the school's student body. However, the research benefits of speaking with this student group are clear. Their contribution to a focus group inquiry will serve to articulate a key 'voice' that, in turn, will enable a more complete story of the school to be told.

There may be many benefits for the school and participants from engaging in this research study. Benefits may include opportunities for participants to express their ideas and opinions and the creation of opportunities to share and discuss ideas and opinions through group

conversations and interviews. I would hope also that the undertaking of this research study within ****** N.S. would offer teachers and staff an opportunity to critically reflect on current issues and themes within the education system relating to theory, policy and practice.

This study encourages the use of *active consent* in which failure to respond to this invitation constitutes a negative response regarding your child's participation. I would appreciate it if you could speak to your child concerning her willingness to participate. If you are both happy with arrangements, I would also appreciate it if you could sign the consent form below and your child can return it to me, with this letter. I will retain this consent form in a secure location. Should you wish to ask questions to gain a better understanding of the research, please feel free to contact me via the email address that I have provided above. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times and data collected in the focus group interview will be securely protected (via encrypted software and hard copy safe storage). Furthermore, the data gathered will be electronically encrypted and hard copies securely stored. Anonymity too will be guaranteed, where feasible, and your child will not be personally identified in the study. Only I (the researcher) will have access to focus group interview data and this data is exclusively for this study's attention. The observations and interpretations that I make from data obtained from this research will be discussed in the thesis that I will submit to University College Cork for the award of PhD in Education.

I hope that the above details are to your satisfaction. If you seek any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me through the above email address provided. May I take this opportunity to thank you for your kind consideration of this invitation. I would ask you now, if you so wish, to complete the form below and your child may kindly return it to me with this letter attached.

Thank you most sincerely and I greatly look forward to engaging students' views on opportunities for creativity in this school.

With very best wishes,

Ms. Eimear Conran.

Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Parent/Guardian Permission Form (Student Focus Group Interview)

I _____, having full capacity to consent, do hereby give permission to _____ to participate in Ms. Eimear Conran's PhD study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

(Parent/Guardian)

Appendix 7



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Interview Questions for Principal

- What are your thoughts on the increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes in primary education, specifically regarding literacy and numeracy? [As outlined in the Department of Education's '*Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People'* (DES, 2011)]

- With increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing, learning outcomes and school improvement and evaluation, do you feel that your role as principal has or will change in any way? Please explain.

- How do you think that these changes impact on daily school life within our school?

- What challenges do you face as a principal?

- With recent changes in education do you feel that performativity is becoming increasingly important? If so, in what ways?

- Do you think that performance is important in our school? If so, in what ways?

- With increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes, do you feel that there is enough time to also meaningfully foster creative development *across the curriculum*?

- In your opinion, how would you define creativity? (What *is* creativity and how does one know when one is being creative?)

- In your opinion, what are the opportunities and limitations for creative teaching and learning in our school?

- Can you please tell me about the school's mission statement and ethos?

- How would you define "an excellent academic education" as outlined in the school's mission statement?

- What personal and professional values do you hold with regard to education?

- Do you think that marketing the school and maintaining a good image of our school is important? If so, what strategies does the school use to promote itself?

- Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you would like to discuss?

Appendix 8



Interview Questions for Assistant Principal

- What are your thoughts on the increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes in primary education, specifically regarding literacy and numeracy? [As outlined in the Department of Education's '*Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People'* (DES, 2011)]

- With increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing, learning outcomes and school improvement, do you feel that your role as assistant principal has or will change in any way? Please explain.

- Do you feel that your approach to teaching has or will change in any way? Please explain.

- What are your thoughts on the establishment of the School Self-Improvement Plan?

- Do you think that performance is important in our school? If so, in what ways?

- With recent changes in education do you feel that performativity is becoming increasingly important? If so, in what ways?

- With increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes, do you feel that there is enough time to also meaningfully foster creative development *across the curriculum*?

- In your opinion, how would you define creativity? (What *is* creativity and how does one know when one is being creative?)

- In your opinion, what are the opportunities and limitations for creative teaching and learning in our school?

- How did the school's management come to the decision to eliminate the drama section from the monthly plan and report?

- Because of the omission of drama from the monthly plan and report, do you think that this may impact on provision for the teaching of drama in classrooms?

- Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you would like to discuss?

Appendix 9



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Interview Questions for Teacher Interviews

- What are your thoughts on the increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes in primary education, specifically regarding literacy and numeracy? [As outlined in the Department of Education's '*Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People'* (DES, 2011)]

- With increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes, do you feel that your approach to teaching has or will change in any way? Please explain.

- With increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes, do you feel that there is enough time to also meaningfully foster creative development *across the curriculum*?

- Do you think that performance is important in our school? If so, in what ways?

- In your opinion, how would you define creativity? (What *is* creativity and how does one know when one is being creative?)

- Do you think that there is adequate time *provision* allowed for creative teaching and learning, including *(but not limited to)* arts education? Why?

- In your opinion, what opportunities for creative teaching and learning are there in our school?

- In your opinion, what barriers may limit opportunities for creative teaching and learning in our school?

- How do you feel about the elimination of the drama section from the monthly plan and report?

- Because of the omission of drama from the monthly plan and report, do you think that this impacts on your provision for the teaching of drama in the classroom?

- What would you say are your personal and professional values regarding education?

- Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you would like to discuss?

Appendix 10



Interview Questions for Child Focus Groups

- Thank you for volunteering to participate in our focus group conversation. Why did you decide to participate in our group discussion today?

- What is creativity in your opinion and how can you tell when someone is being creative?

- Can you think of any examples of when you can express your creativity (or be creative) in school?

- Do you think that there are any times in school that creativity is limited (or when you can be less creative)? Explain.

- Do you think that there is enough time in school to be creative? Why?

- Do you think that you can be as creative as you would like in school? Explain.

- Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you would like to discuss?

Appendix 11



Interview Questions for Pilot Study

- What are your thoughts on the increased emphasis being placed on standardised testing and learning outcomes in primary education, specifically regarding literacy and numeracy? [As outlined in the Department of Education's '*Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People'* (DES, 2011)]

- With the increased emphasis on standardised testing and learning outcomes, do you feel that your approach to teaching has or will change in any way? Please explain.

- With the increased emphasis on standardised testing and learning outcomes, do you feel that there is enough time to also meaningfully foster creative development across the curriculum?

- Do you think that there is adequate time provision allowed for creative teaching and learning, including arts education? Why?

- What are your thoughts regarding our school's new monthly plan and report template that has replaced the previous template? How do you feel about the elimination of the drama section from the monthly plan and report?

- Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you would like to discuss?

Appendix 12

Ethical Approval

ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Oifig an Leas - Uachtaráin Taighde agus Nuálaíochta
Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation

Urlár 4, Bloc E,
Áras na hEolaíochta Bia,
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh,
Bóthar an Choláiste,
Corcaigh, Éire.

4th Floor, Block E,
Food Science Building,
University College Cork,
College Road, Cork, Ireland.

T +353 (0)21 4903500
E vpresearch@ucc.ie
www.ucc.ie

Eimear Conran,
School of Education

10th June 2013

Dear Eimear,

Thank you for submitting your research (project entitled A critique of the educational market: Exploring its impact on creative work within one urban Irish primary school #159) to SREC for ethical perusal. I am pleased to say that we see no ethical impediment to your research as proposed and we are happy to grant approval.

We wish you every success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

S Hammond

Sean Hammond
Chair of Social Research Ethics Committee

Professor Anita R. Maguire BSc PhD CChem MRSC
Vice President for Research and Innovation

Ollscoil na hÉireann, Corcaigh
National University of Ireland, Cork