Introduction to Creative Studies in the Caring Professions

D e n i s e   L y o n s

SNAPSHOT

▸ Early childhood care, youth work and social care—what they are, what the workers do, how they train.

▸ Creative Studies—what it is and why it is relevant to the caring professions.

▸ Process not product.

▸ Using the creative arts therapeutically, not as therapy.

Introduction

The term 'creative studies' refers to the role of creative activities—art, dance, drama and music—in the education and practice of caring professionals, especially social care, youth work and early childhood care. Engaging in creative activities is fun, but it is also beneficial in helping people to become more comfortable in their own skin while learning to be flexible and adapt to new experiences. Participation in creative activities can help everyone learn more about how they behave in a group, in different roles and when facing new challenges. Creative studies are based on the principle that everyone is creative in their own way and that creativity can be rekindled if people concentrate on the process,

rather than on the end product. Taking part in these sorts of activities encourages playfulness, and adults can relearn how to play and can facilitate child's play through leading by example.

The teaching of 'creative studies' in early childhood education, social care or youth work is varied in presentation, title and duration, depending on the course or college attended. In general, however, this discipline aims to: 1) enable students to rediscover their own creativity and playfulness through participation in art, drama, music or dance and movement workshops; and 2) provide a variety of creative experiences, in the form of ice-breakers, games, sessions and workshops, for the professional 'tool box'. These tools, when combined with facilitation skills and confidence, become a catalyst for relationship development with any age group or ability. It is through this relationship that teaching, demonstrating, modelling and caring can occur. Here, we shall discuss the role of creative studies in the caring professions, examining why the focus of this creative practice is on the process and not on the product; why the activity is therapeutic, but not therapy.

Defining Caring Professions

Sociologists argue that when society moved from agrarianism to industry, the quality of relationships between people deteriorated, leading to increased feelings of loneliness, isolation and mistrust of others (Chriss, 1999; Gibbs and Gambrill, 2009). According to Krueger (1999), this change influenced the emergence of helping or caring professionals, who now fulfilled the support function previously provided by family, the Church or voluntary organisations. Caring professionals are defined by their ability to care for vulnerable others who 'must be maintained by the helping professional throughout the process of helping' (Skovholt, 2005:82). Chriss (1999:3) states that the caring professions include all those who provide 'services to marginal groups and an assortment of distressed individuals'. The caring professionals referred to in this book include social care workers, youth workers and early childcare workers, and one of the key links between them is that they all use creative activities to teach, demonstrate, model, intervene, spend time, have fun with and learn about the other.

Setting the Scene: What is Social Care?

Social care is a generic term that defines the practice of providing physical, emotional and/or psychological support to people with a variety of needs. Throughout the years, social care was defined by the Department of Health and Children (DOH) and the Irish Association of Social Care Educators (IASCE) as including the following tasks: providing a safe environment; meeting the needs of vulnerable people; providing a quality service that is planned and performed by professionals (Task Force on Child Care Services, 1980; Joint Committee on Social Care Professionals, n.d.). This definition evolved to include the ability to work in partnership and an acceptance of the whole person in a holistic and individual approach to practice (Share and McElwee, 2005c; O'Connor and Murphy, 2006). It is through the relationship between the professional and other that acceptance, partnership, safety and care are demonstrated and experienced (Fewster, 1990; Garfat, 1999; Krueger, 1999; Kennefick, 2003; Byrne and McHugh, 2005). Social care, historically a female occupation, has evolved from a low-status 'vocation' of helping people in need to the current professionalism of social care, largely due to the introduction of the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005. Today, social care environments include care for the elderly, care for people with a physical or intellectual disability, community care, family support and residential care for children and adults, to name but a few.

Social care attracts a variety of people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences (Ricks and Charlesworth, 2003). As well as requiring an interest in people, Share and McElwee (2005b:10) identified the personal qualities necessary for social care practice as 'reliability and trustworthiness, altruism; empathy, compassion and maturity'. Byrne and McHugh (2005) outlined other essential personal qualities, which include the ability to listen and the capacity to be honest and open.

What do Social Care Workers do?

Social care practice is exceptionally varied, depending on the type of service and the specific needs of the individual or group in question (Williams and Lalor, 2000). Within the practice of social care, the worker performs 'direct and indirect care', where tasks are carried out with, for and on behalf of others (Ainsworth and Fulcher, 1981; Anglin *et al.*, 1990). In general, 'direct' tasks revolve around meeting the physical, emotional, social, educational and spiritual needs, which for some includes the normal experiences of mealtimes, school, homework, family visits, personal care and activities (Byrne and McHugh, 2005). It is in the doing of normal life experience that the core of social care practice is performed. The key-working role, where one or two workers are named to assist in the promotion of personal and individualised care, encourages this sharing of life experiences between both the worker and other (Byrne and McHugh, 2005).

Indirect care, or 'organisational activities', relates to the organisational design, or the environment in which the individual receives the service. It includes adhering to policies and procedures, filling out forms, writing care plans, programme planning and communicating

with schools, social workers and other related personnel (Ainsworth and Fulcher, 1981; Anglin *et al.*, 1990; Byrne and McHugh, 2005).

What Training do Care Workers Receive?

The current nature of social care training and education was greatly influenced by childcare legislation, in particular the *Tuairim Report* (1966), the *Kennedy Report* (DOH, 1970), the *Task Force Report on Child Care Services* (1980), and the Child Care Act 1991 (Share and McElwee, 2005a). The education of social care workers has evolved from a one-year course in Kilkenny in 1971 (Byrne, 2000; Share and McElwee, 2005a) to a Bachelor of Arts degree in Applied Social Studies in Social Care, available from the Institutes of Technology (Athlone IT, Blanchardstown IT, Carlow IT, Cork IT, Dublin IT, Dundalk IT, Limerick IT, Sligo IT, Tallaght IT, Tralee IT, Waterford IT), from Carlow College and from the Open Training College.

There is a history of collaboration between the social care colleges, beginning with the *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies* (IJASS) and the formation of the Irish Association of Social Care Educators (IASCE) in 1998. In an attempt to encourage this collaborative process, Perry Share (Sligo IT) developed the IASCE website, with a link to the Irish Social Care Gateway (Courtney, 2003). This evolved in 2009 into a social care-specific website: www.*socialstudies.ie*. Along with educational advancements in terms of support, the individual colleges are constantly enhancing their social care programmes, aiming to further meet the needs of the student, the employer and future service users. This book is direct evidence of the collaboration existing between the social care colleges of IASCE, the creative studies lecturers who work in them and the practitioners working on the ground.

Creativity in Social Care Practice and Education

As discussed earlier, direct care includes building attachments, developing a relationship, listening, cooking meals and engaging in play and creative activities together. Using the creative arts within the area of social care is not a new phenomenon. Social care management and staff have long known that art, drama and music are powerful tools for developing and maintaining relationships. Vander Ven (1999) discussed the role activity plays within practice, which she defined as Activity Theory. These activities, or everyday life experiences, may include going for a walk, playing cards or playing a game of football. Through participation in activities, the young person learns new skills, interests and ways of interacting.

Prior to becoming a social care lecturer, I worked as a residential social care practitioner with teenagers. During this period I used creative activities to form relationships with the young people, as an intervention for challenging behaviour (Lyons, 1998) and as a way of sharing life experiences or just to have fun together. I worked this way because it made sense to me. In 2008 I decided to find out, via the social care services, whether I was alone in this approach, or if creative activities had a recognised role to play in current service provision (Lyons, 2008). Thirty-five social care services responded to a postal questionnaire, and all

stated that they used creative activities as part of their service provision (eighteen from disability services, six residential centres for children, three youth work services, two high support units and one each of the following: family support, women's refuge, drug treatment, after-school project, community development group and a school for visually impaired children). These findings are presented in Chapter 3 (page 39).

Workers learn about social care skills in their formal education and training, in which creative studies plays a vital role. The creative activities of art, drama and/or music and movement are taught as a module in the majority of Irish social care colleges. The selection of creative activities depends on the college, with drama and art being the most common; Tralee IT is the only social care programme offering the creative activity of dance. Some colleges combine the creative activities with recreation or sport options. The creative studies module is an experiential course, where students participate in creative activities, supported by lectures on the therapeutic benefits of using the creative arts. For the social care student, participation in the creative arts can provide opportunities for self-awareness, especially when students are encouraged to express themselves in new and often challenging ways. The theoretical framework for the creative module includes, among other elements, the theory of creativity, activity theory, facilitation skills, children's development through art, reflection and self-awareness, and the therapeutic benefits of using the creative arts.

In creative studies training, workshops in art, drama and music are designed to give students practical creative skills and creative facilitation skills and to enhance students' self-awareness through creative expression. The creative studies course is considered an essential component of the overall training of the social care student in terms of their practical skill improvement, personal development and enhanced self-awareness. According to the Higher Education Training Awards Council's (HETAC) *Draft Document for the Award Standards on Social Care Work 2009*, creative and recreation practice is listed as an essential theoretical concept and students are required to demonstrate 'specialised technical, creative or conceptual skills or tools', to respond in a creative way to individual needs, and to perform 'creative and non-routine activities' (HETAC, 2009:5–11).

The following is an example of the content of a creative studies course taught over three years and incorporating the creative arts of art, drama and music.

1   Creative Studies, Year One: students learn about the various creative arts through participating in experiential workshops. The workshops are designed to encourage the development of interpersonal skills, communication and the skill of reflecting on practice. The drama element focuses on assertiveness, confidence and self-awareness, enabling students to practise standing up for themselves and leading others.

2   Creative Studies, Year Two: students learn to facilitate a creative experience with different groups, for example disabled people, young people or elderly participants. Each student is encouraged to draw on the experiences of year one, especially in how to design his/her programme plan.

3 Creative Studies, Year Three: the aim of this final year is to facilitate self-learning through participation in experiential workshops. The creative arts programme also aims to encourage students to become comfortable in their own skin in all situations, whether engaging with others on the first day of placement or facilitating a group experience. Learning to become comfortable requires self-learning through reflection, thus the student is asked to explore his/her personal journey through the creative process.

Setting the Scene: What is Early Childhood Care?

Early childhood refers to the development of children from 0 to 6 years of age, cared for in services that include: day care crèches (0–3 years+); nursery/Montessori schools (3–5 years); preschool, i.e. home playgroups and community play groups (3–5 years); Early Start programmes (3–5 years); and primary schools, both junior and senior infants (4–6 years) (Douglas and Horgan, 2000). Early Start was a government initiative set up to support early learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and the Citizens' Information Bureau (2009) records that there are approximately 1,400 children attending Early Start programmes in forty primary schools across Ireland. According to the 2007 Quarterly National Household Survey, the percentage of pre-school children attending childcare increased from 42 per cent to 48 per cent. The most popular facilities include crèches, Montessori and playgroups, followed by relatives, a nanny or childminder (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2009).

The discussion papers by Horgan and Douglas (1998) and by Douglas and Horgan (2000) gave recommendations for the development and recognition of early childhood, stressing the importance of early childhood education for young children's development. However, it appears that the sector is still 'at the crossroads' (Douglas and Horgan, 2000:192), with the proposed closure of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE) in November 2009. The centre, established in 2002, was a joint project between the Dublin Institute of Technology and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, for the development and structuring of essential early education services. This proposed scaling back of services is taking place against a background whereby Ireland recently appeared in joint last place in UNICEF's *Report Card 8* (2008), a league table outlining which of the top twenty-five OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries have implemented the ten early childhood education 'benchmarks' (Adamson, 2008). Ireland met only one standard on UNICEF's league table: 50 per cent of staff in accredited facilities are being trained to an approved standard. Early childhood care and education is a real experience for 48 per cent of Irish children, or 82,000 families, who are cared for and educated by early childhood workers (CSO, 2009). These workers carry out a multitude of tasks and deal with the range of experiences that arise when working with young children and their families.

What do Early Childhood Workers do?

Early childhood workers are employed in day care facilities, in Montessori schools, in play groups or in primary schools, either as teachers or as Early Start leaders. Caring for children

between the ages of nought and six years is a very demanding role, one that requires a variety of skills and qualities, irrespective of the service. Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003:206) state that the relationship formed between the child and the worker, or between the worker and the family, which they define as a 'sound relationship based on open communication, trust and confidentiality', is crucial for successful practice. It is through this relationship that the worker performs the many tasks of early childhood care, including teaching academic skills, language development, learning how children learn, dealing with challenging behaviour, working in stressful situations and developing solid relationships with children and parents. Encouraging the child's social and emotional development is also an essential task for the worker, and is achieved through social play, social skills training and direct one-to-one activities. Effective early childhood workers have an understanding of child development and anti-discriminatory practice, and can identify when a child needs extra assistance for their social, emotional or cognitive development.

Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2003:30) state that the essential qualities of early childhood workers include being 'kind, warm, friendly, nurturing, sympathetic, patient, self-aware, rational, logical, goal orientated, proactive, assertive, professional, confident, visionary and influential', because to the young people in their care they are a model, a guide and a mentor. Some of these qualities are intrinsic to the person, but others can be enhanced through quality education programmes that include supervised and appropriate placement experiences.

What Training do They Receive?

As well as a variety of early care facilities on offer in Ireland, there are also variables in the types of course and qualification open to workers in this field. The training courses 'are a mixture of care and education—the emphasis reflecting the philosophy of the core providers' (Douglas and Horgan, 2000:196). As a result, many different types of qualification are held by workers in crèches and playgroups, although primary schools and Montessoris require more specific training. Below is a sample of the types of training available, and the institutions where various courses are offered (see Table 1.1), to give some idea of the diversity and range of relevant programmes available.

- Primary-school teachers: BA in Education (Primary).

- Montessori schools: Nursery programme (for children aged 0–6 yrs); Junior Course (for children aged 6–9 years); Primary Teaching Course (for children aged 9–12 years).

- Early Childhood Education: HETAC, Levels 7 and 8; Further Education Training Awards Council (FETAC), Levels 5 and 6. There is a selection of programmes with similar titles to those offered at Levels 7 and 8, which are available in further education facilities all over Ireland. Athlone IT, for example, offers a Higher Certificate in Childcare Supervisory Management at Level 6, which is designed specifically for the

managers of crèches and playgroups.

● Nursery Nursing: Diploma in Nursery Nursing from the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE).

Title of Course	University or Institute of Technology
Early Childhood Studies	University College Cork
	Waterford IT
	Dundalk IT
	Sligo IT
Early Childhood Care and Education	Blanchardstown IT
	Tralee IT
	Mary Immaculate College
	Cork IT
Early Childhood Education	Dublin IT
Early Childhood Education and Care	Carlow IT
BSc in Early Childhood Care, Health and Education	Letterkenny IT

Table 1.1: Early childhood care courses offered by third-level institutions.

As well as differences in awarding body, level of qualification and title of course, there are also discrepancies between the course durations, which modules are covered and to what depth, and how much placement experience is required (Douglas and Horgan, 2000). Despite the wide range of programmes on offer, one common theme that connects them is a recognition of the role of play and/or activity in the development of the early learner.

Creativity in Early Childhood Practice and Education

Children of all ages, and especially those under six years, engage in all kinds of creative activities as a way of exploring the world. According to Staples New and Cochran (2007:164), creativity is used in early childhood education as a 'vehicle for learning' and to help children 'develop social competence'. Curtis and O'Hagan (2003:viii) state that in modern early childhood education there is a move away from process learning towards 'end product' curricula for young learners, which is possibly due to a perceived requirement of showing the parent what the child has produced during the day. However, the authors stress that being creative through free play is essential for the child's verbal, social and intellectual development.

Before the age of two years, on average, children engage in solitary play. After reaching their second birthday they begin to socialise through play with other children, and by three years they can 'engage in dramatic play sequences' through role play, whereby 'they take on a whole range of characters both real and fictional' (Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003:119).

According to Smilansky and Shefataya (1990:22), this socio-dramatic play occurs when a child engages in the following six stages: 'child takes on a role, they make believe with toys, they verbally make believe on actions and situations, they stay in role for at least 10 minutes, interaction occurs with another child, and there is verbal interaction related to the play'. This socio-dramatic play is beneficial for children because it helps them to improve and enhance their concentration, communication, self-esteem, self-awareness, empathy, creativity and flexibility (Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003). It is also essential for emotional problem-solving and development, as it allows children to explore and resolve their issues and worries through play. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) refers to the importance of activity and play in a child's life:

> 'Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

> 'Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.'

The essential role of creativity is recognised in the education of students on the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) course in Early Childhood Education. Using the Dublin Institute of Technology as an example, in their first year students complete two creative modules: Art 1 and Drama 1. They then choose either Art 2 or Drama 2 for their second year, which they complete in year three: Art 3 or Drama 3. In this way the creative role is sustained throughout the training period as an important central concept and tool.

Task

Can you remember any creative experience you had during your early years? What did you make or do?

Setting the Scene: What is Youth Work?

Youth work is the practice of working predominantly with teenagers in services designed specifically to meet their needs. The Youth Work Act 2001 defined this practice as 'a planned programme of education for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation' (Department of Education and Science, 2001b:7). Central to this definition is the educational emphasis,

which aims to support existing education programmes in a 'non-formal or informal' way (Devlin, 2009), and the fact that the young people participate voluntarily. The Act defines young people as anyone under the age of twenty-five years; however, youth work focuses primarily on young people between the ages of ten and twenty years. The voluntary nature of participation is relevant to both the young people attending and to those running the service. According to the Youth Work Ireland *Annual Report* (2008), 75,000 young people are enrolled in 550 youth clubs, facilitated by 7,000 volunteer workers and 1,000 paid workers.

Youth work originally evolved from society's need to 'save' or 'rescue' troubled young people (Devlin, 2009). The focus on young people in particular was inspired by the desire to promote a 'way of thinking' into the future, which in the case of Ireland was a Roman Catholic ethos: 'Historically, the Churches set up most of the' youth associations ... including 'the various scouting and guiding organisations' (Devlin, 2009:367). The State played a secondary role to the Church, serving primarily as a funding agent. Examples of youth work organisations and representative bodies include Catholic Youth Care, Foróige, Youth Work Ireland, Ógra Chorcaí, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI). These youth services are funded by the Department of Education and Science, although some organisations also apply for National Lottery funding or charity donations to subsidise the implementation of specific programmes. Youth workers may be found in youth clubs, youth information centres, drug services, Scouts and Guides and after-school projects.

What do Youth Workers do?

According to Devlin (2009:371), youth workers 'are primarily concerned with the education and development, personal and social, of young people'. As the young person's participation in the service is voluntary, the youth workers are reliant on the attractiveness and appropriateness of the programmes and activities on offer. The learning and development of young people is enhanced through planned activities, where the message is learned through participation in a relevant programme that is of interest to the young person. The relationship between the young person and the youth worker is central to the retention of voluntary participants. Youth workers develop programmes with the full involvement of the young people, which enhances the potential success of the programme and completion of the set outcomes. Youth workers focus on the process of encouraging young people to learn to work together, to communicate effectively and to develop empathy and self-awareness.

Possible programmes include health and nutrition, sexual heath, information technology skills, personal hygiene, parenting skills, art and craft activities and social outings. The programmes have an educational purpose, but also include social and emotional aims such as confidence-building, team work, self-esteem, self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-empowerment, social skills and communication skills. There is also a community and social dimension to youth work in that an awareness of society, pro-social attitudes and a sense of belonging to a community are all promoted (Devlin, 2009).

What Training do They Receive?

As discussed, the majority of youth workers are unpaid volunteers, which means the minimum training for youth work may be limited to in-house training programmes. In June 2009 the Ballymun Regional Youth Resource advertised for a youth worker to work through drama and specified a qualification in youth and community work or equivalent, or three years' experience. This shows that a recognised youth work qualification is desired, but not required, at this point. However, third-level qualifications in youth work can be obtained from various institutions, for example: BA in Youth and Community Studies from National University of Ireland (NUI), Maynooth; BA in Youth and Community Work Practice from Tralee IT; BA in Social and Community Development from Blanchardstown IT; BA in Community Youth Work from Dundalk IT; and BA in Youth and Community Studies from University College Cork. Youth work education is also provided at post-Leaving Certificate level and at FETAC Levels 5 and 6 throughout Ireland.

Creativity in Youth Work Practice and Education

The creative arts are very prevalent in youth work and are supported by government initiatives and funding. One such initiative was the setting up of the Arts Council in 1981, a national agency for the promotion, support and funding of the arts. The Arts Council is the vehicle through which community groups can apply for Irish and European funding for the arts. The NYCI Arts Programme was established as a result of the recommendations of a report published in 1993, *Making Youth Arts Work*. The Council acts as an advocate for youth arts in Ireland and has developed programmes to support the arts in non-formal settings, for example the Artist in Youth Work Scheme. Support for the arts in youth work was also ratified in the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007, which stated that youth services should include 'creative, artistic, and cultural or language-based programmes and activities' (Department of Education and Science, 2003:21).

The extensive role of creativity and the arts in youth work practice is also reflected in the training of youth workers. In the Liberties College, Dublin, a student can study the Community Arts module as part of a FETAC Level 5 in Youth and Community Work. In NUI Maynooth, students of the BA (Hons) in Youth and Community Work study Community and Youth Arts in their first year. Students studying for a BA in Youth and Community Work Practice at Tralee IT undertake Creative Practice in each of the three years of their training.

The NYCI Certificate in Youth Arts is a one-year programme delivered in NUI Maynooth and is the first of its kind in Ireland. This training programme is a follow-on from the Youth Arts Programme, a collaboration between the NYCI, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Arts Council. The course is designed to provide youth workers with specific training in the arts in order to facilitate the development of creativity and appreciation of the arts in youth work practice. According to the course prospectus, students learn how to facilitate creative activities, how to plan, design and deliver programmes, to understand the role of youth arts in the development of young people and to become more self-aware and reflective.

Task

Can you remember any creative activity you were involved in as a youth? Was it within a youth project? What did you make and what was the programme aiming to achieve?

Creativity and the Placement Experience

Social Care, Early Childhood Care and Youth Work are all applied courses, thus the students must leave the structured environment of the college to apply their knowledge and practice their skills within an approved service. The practice placement gives students the opportunity to observe practitioners in their working environment, to perform supervised tasks and to learn the skill of reflecting on their experiences. Throughout the placement process the college tutor, student and placement supervisor 'are central to the student's placement experience and form a triad in practical and academic communication' (Lalor and Doyle, 2005:145). Learning is enhanced through the ongoing supervision provided by the supervisor/practice teacher (Batchelor and Boutland, 1996; Hanlon *et al.*, 2006).

While on placement, the amount of time spent working within the agency varies depending on which year the student is in, which course he/she is doing and which college he/she attends. As well as variations in the structure and length of placements, there are also inconsistencies in terms of what constitutes an appropriate placement, the level of supervision provided and the support provided to the student by the college (Byrne, 2000). Douglas and Horgan (2000) compared the placement hours of early childhood workers and outlined a vast difference in student placement hours, from zero hours on the Irish Preschool Playgroup Association's twenty-hour introductory training programme, to six to twelve hours per week for three years on the BA in Early Childhood Education, to 840 hours for the CACHE Diploma in Nursery Nursing. In the youth work sector placements range from 'observation visits' to youth and community settings, up to the two twelve-week, supervised placements in approved youth and community settings required for the BA in Community and Youth Work from NUI Maynooth. In social care, each of the Institutes of Technology has supervised placements, which consist of an average of thirty hours per week for twenty-five weeks during the course of training.

Doyle and Lalor (2009) state that the role of placements is to enhance a student's ability to relate, observe, communicate, understand needs, keep records and make decisions. One past pupil of DIT, Danielle, recalled her experience of placement (featured in Doyle and Lalor, 2009:175): 'I could not do certain aspects of the work, I could spend quality time listening and doing art and drama activities with the children.' Danielle's experience is not unique: the creative arts provide students on placement with an opportunity to develop relationships while sharing a creative experience. This is especially relevant in the first few weeks of placement, when students often feel unsure of their role. Engaging in creative activities encourages a 'getting to know you' phase without the pressure of asking questions. Being

creative is potentially a fun and relaxing experience for both the student and the participant, which helps students to feel more at home and self-confident in this new environment.

Creative Problem-solvers

According to Carl Rogers (1961), the modern education system encourages conformity and undervalues creative and original thinkers. Furthermore, informal learning environments and recreation activities are becoming more passive, rather than active; therefore students are doing and thinking less than ever before (Rogers, 1961; Sternberg, 1999; Malchiodi, 2006). Working with people in any of the three caring professions is predominantly about problem-solving while working with individual needs in diverse situations. It requires that the worker be a creative thinker and problem-solver, with the ability to 'think outside' the situation, drawing on theory, a reflection on past learning and an understanding of self in the given situation, all while maintaining eye contact, displaying appropriate body language and remaining both physically and mentally present in the situation. Since a vast number of skills are required for this type of work, creative expression and creative activities are an essential part of the education of caring professionals in Ireland.

Process Versus End Product

In order to produce art, a process must be followed before an end is reached, which is referred to as the 'end product'. Creative activities can be process-based, product-based or both. Process-based refers to the practice of encouraging participants to explore the materials and to make decisions about the structure, content and finish of the art activity. Product-based activities are described in early childhood education as fixed activities, for example colouring in pages or using shaped cutting tools on clay or pastry. The participant does not make decisions regarding the stages of engagement in the activity and there is conformity in the finish. Product-based activities can be beneficial for some participants, especially those who require consistency or routine. They can also be used as an 'ice-breaker', affording the participant the time needed to gain the confidence needed for them to be able to engage in their own creative piece. In the caring professions, however, creativity is more about the process that the participant engages in than the product that is produced at the end.
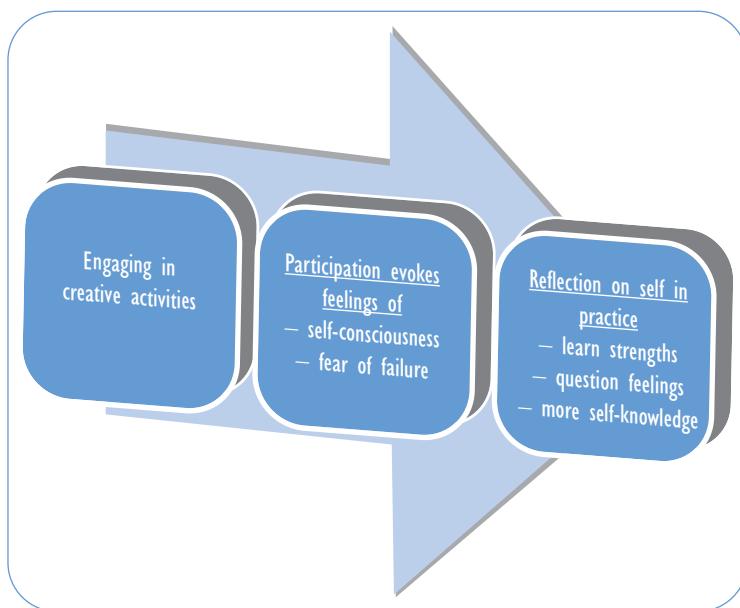
According to Mayesky (2004), the main focus of all creative activities should be the process, which means the worker stays back and does not intervene with the image in order to make a 'pretty end product'. Caring professionals use creative activities purposefully, where the focus is not on the end product but on the potential benefits of engaging in the activity. The end product, if anything is produced, is the bonus, not the intention.

Assessment of Creative Studies

Creative Studies is assessed in different ways depending on the college and the year of study. The various tools of assessment include essays, reflective journals and exams. The reflective

learning described within the 'reflective journal', often referred to as the 'creative journal', involves the process of contemplation, reflective skills and an understanding of the role of experiential learning (Jarvis, 1997). The role of this learning experience evolved through the work of Shulman (1988), Schon (1983) and Boud *et al*., (1995). Reflective learning acknowledges that the worker will need to respond to unique situations and thus needs to understand how theory underpins practice (Schon, 1987).

In the reflective journal students are assessed on their ability to accurately reflect on the creative experiences in class as a prerequisite for completion of this learning module. According to Croton (2000:92), the journal provides evidence of the student's ability to transfer theoretical and personal knowledge to practice, but 'there must be clarity as to whether it is content or the ability to write that is being tested'. The ability to write competently about practice encompasses an ability to be self-aware in relation to reflecting on experiences. In order to participate fully in the Creative Studies module, students may need to undo some of the lessons from their previous creative experiences in order to learn to accept that they are creative and that engaging in creative activities will help them learn about themselves.

Engaging in creative activities

Participation evokes feelings of
— self-consciousness
— fear of failure

Reflection on self in practice
— learn strengths
— question feelings
— more self-knowledge

You are Not Art Therapists!

As a social care lecturer I often visit students on placement, only to hear how they 'performed art therapy' on some unsuspecting and vulnerable individuals. Fortunately, in the majority of cases the student was merely trying to describe how he/she used art as an intervention, rather than actual art therapy, while on placement. So, to ensure that everyone is clear on the distinction between the two practices, they are discussed here in greater detail.

Social care, youth work and early childhood students and practitioners use the creative arts therapeutically in practice, which differs greatly from the practice of doing creative arts therapy, for example art therapy, music therapy or drama therapy. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the definition of 'therapeutic' is 'connected with healing … having a good general effect on the body or the mind' (Crowther, 1995:1238) and the definition of 'therapy'

is 'Any treatment designed to improve a health problem or disability or to cure an illness' (Crowther, 1995:1238).

Caring professionals who are using creative activities in practice need to know what aspects of art-making can be used without straying into 'therapy'. Central to this understanding is the 'intention' behind the activity. Caring professionals intend for the participant to have a therapeutic experience, where they feel happy, have fun, express themselves, learn a new skill and gain confidence. In contrast, the 'intention' for creative arts therapists is to use the art materials as part of a specific treatment designed to address a set of symptoms or to deliver prescribed positive outcomes for the person. The intention of therapy is also for the participant to use the images created to learn more about themselves, in other words as a language to decipher their own psychosis. The differences between the two modes of practice are outlined in Table 1.2, below, under the following subheadings: aims/purpose; methods/interventions; outcomes/change; role of relationship; training.

	Aims/ Purpose	Methods/ Interventions	Outcomes/ Change	Role of Relationship	Training
Creative Arts Therapy	— Better understanding and awareness of self. — Exploring unconscious thoughts and feelings.	— Uses all art materials, dance, drama, movement and music. — Can be direct (with clear instructions given) or indirect (no instructions—free expression).	— New awareness of self. — Greater understanding of issues, feelings and thoughts. — New coping mechanisms emerge to deal with issues.	— Triangular relationship (therapist helps client to develop a relationship with his/her own images).	— Postgraduate training in art, drama or music therapy. — Training includes experience of personal therapy, theory on psychotherapy and use of creative material.
Therapeutic Use of Creative Arts	— Share life space while doing an activity together. — Purposeful use of creative materials as an intervention. — Have fun.	— Uses all art material, dance, drama, movement and music.	— Based on purpose of intervention. — Could include increased motor skills, relationships development with staff and peers, increased confidence, increased self-esteem.	— Activities used for relationship development between worker and participant. —Encourages communication, establishes rapport.	— Undergraduate courses in social care, community studies or early childhood care. — Courses that include modules in creative studies.

Table 1.2: Comparing creative arts therapy with the therapeutic use of creative arts.

Although caring professionals use the same materials as creative arts therapists, the aims, purpose, intent and outcomes are different. A caring professional and a young person in his/her care may spend the afternoon drawing pictures together. In this example scenario the aims of the activity are: a) to spend quality time together; b) to further develop their

relationship; c) to explore how the young person is getting on at school and at home. The intervention (drawing pictures) directs the attention of the participant away from the one-to-one closeness of the situation. The two can sit together in silence, or chat away, but importantly the focus does not feel like 'information-gathering'.

The essential traits needed in order to engage in creative activities as part of your practice include patience, a sense of humour, confidence, problem-solving skills, facilitation skills, creative skills (i.e. knowledge of games and activities), flexibility and an interest in being creative. Creative training should provide the practitioner with creative skills and with a knowledge of the benefits of using these skills and also, and most important, with a clear definition of the difference between using the creative arts as a caring professional and using the creative arts as a therapist. The following chapters will provide information on creative facilitation skills and creative activities, but you, the reader, will have to provide the patience, confidence and sense of humour that are also needed yourself.

Chapter Summary

▶ The caring professions of social care, youth work and early childhood care are similar because they all use the relationship as a catalyst for practice, they are applied and hands-on in practice and they use creative activities to teach, share, have fun, relate, communicate and benefit those in their care.

▶ Creative Studies (art, dance, drama and music) is a module in social care, early childhood education and youth work courses.

▶ Creative studies teaches students to accept their creative expression without judgment, to facilitate creative experiences with others and to feel comfortable when faced with new people, varied experiences and challenging tasks and decisions.

▶ The 'Creative Studies' module is assessed through the reflective journal, which requires students to have the ability to reflect on their experiences and understand how these experiences have impacted on the self.

▶ Placement is an important component in the education of caring professionals because it allows students to practise how to engage creatively with others.

▶ To engage in the creative studies class students must understand and accept that the process is more important than the end product.

▶ Finally, on completion of the creative studies course the student will be a worker in a caring profession who has the skills to encourage creative expression in others. The student will *not* be a creative arts therapist, which is a separate and distinct type of practice.

Creative Group Facilitation

Paul Timoney

SNAPSHOT

▶ Introduction to creative group facilitation.

▶ Choosing a suitable activity.

▶ Preparation and planning.

▶ Presenting the activity.

▶ Reflection and personal evaluation.

Introduction

Art activities promote exploratory and experiential types of learning that encourage a diverse range of individualistic approaches to problem-solving. By engaging with materials in an effort to create visually expressive two- and three-dimensional objects, participants are afforded a forum for the attainment of knowledge through personal discovery. It is important that facilitators appreciate the value of processes that do not necessarily lead to 'finished pieces' and that they try to encourage the people in their care to do the same. The aspirations that ought to be most prevalent in the art activity are the development of participants' curiosity, visual awareness, open-mindedness, physical and psychological well-being and self-esteem.

Good facilitators should be enthusiastic about the creative arts and have the ability to introduce activities within a context that is relevant to the group with whom they are working. The skill that is most integral to this process is communication, in particular the ability to assimilate information presented by participants both in their artwork and during
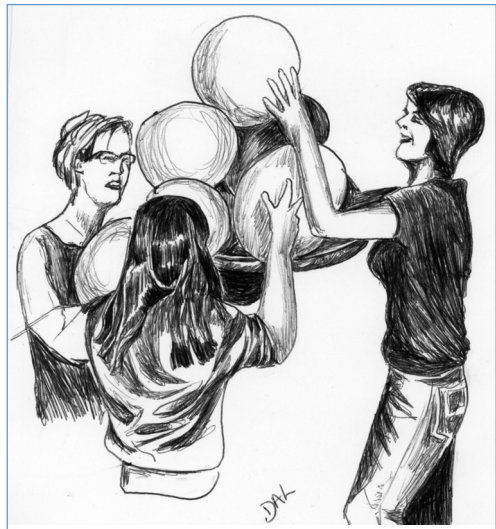
discussion. Through recognition of the abilities and interests of one's 'clients', the caring professional can seek to devise projects that are both stimulating and challenging for those involved. This is why it is generally most effective to try to generate an atmosphere that is informal, industrious and calm. This kind of environment tends to be conducive to openness and creativity. Evaluation and reflection play important roles in creative group facilitation and can be utilised to reiterate learning objectives, to influence the direction of artwork and to explore any personal issues that may arise.

How to Prepare

Before you can create a space where those in your care can feel comfortable expressing themselves through the medium of art, it is important to prepare. You can begin 'getting to know' the people who will be participating in your activity before you meet them. Here are some questions that can help you to gather useful information about their interests and abilities. The answers to these questions will direct you towards the types of activity that will seem most suitable and enticing.

- How many people are in the group?
- What are their ages?
- What is their gender?
- Have they experienced art activities before?
- What have they enjoyed/not enjoyed?
- What sort of materials have they worked with?
- Can you see some of their artwork?
- Do they like music?
- Do they like sports?
- Do they like animals and nature?
- Do they have favourite books, magazines, TV shows or video games?
- Are they verbal and/or do they understand the language that you speak?
- Do they have intellectual, physical or psychological needs that you should consider?
- Do the group members know each other and get along well?
- Do they prefer to work individually or in small groups?

What do You Hope to Achieve?

Art activities can be used to achieve a variety of objectives. Try to identify the 'needs' of the people you are working with and then choose and adapt an activity accordingly. Would the group benefit from an activity that helps to promote team building, for example? Would it be useful to engage with something that would help to develop participants' fine motor skills or memory? Are there issues that they could explore, such as bullying, sexuality, grief, romance, health, safety, through the medium of art? Would it be advantageous to do something imaginative and fun? How about learning a new skill or technique and answering a creative

challenge that could boost confidence and self-esteem?

It is important to set realistic goals for yourself and for the people you work with. Facilitating in care situations requires sensitivity and patience. Tasks that may seem relatively simple to many can require a great deal of effort and practice for others. To pour one's own paint, or to choose a particular coloured pencil, or to touch an unfamiliar material can be extremely difficult and worthwhile aspirations for some individuals.

When you have completed an activity with a group, you should evaluate your level of success in achieving your objectives. Reflecting upon your experiences in a focused way is key both to planning your next activity and your development as a practitioner.

Making an activity relevant

Imagine that you been invited to facilitate an art activity with a group whom you have not yet met. You are directed to explore the theme of 'personal identity'. You discover upon reading the answers to your 'questionnaire' that the participants are five children (three boys and two girls) aged between nine and eleven. They all indicate that they are fans of soccer. You could use this information to help you to begin a discussion around the topic of 'identity' by showing them examples of various soccer team logos and badges. You could talk with them about the images and colours that these designs utilise and consider what they suggest about the 'personality' or identity' of the clubs they represent. This kind of conversation could act as a starting point for an activity where the participants make a badge or a logo about 'themselves'.

If the group were apathetic towards soccer, they would hardly find that particular avenue of exploration stimulating. However, you could easily apply a similar formula to something else that they did like. So, if you discovered instead that they were interested in things to do with animals and nature, you could make 'animals and nature' your starting point. You could chat about various animals and their associated characteristics. For instance, lions are considered to be 'powerful' and 'majestic', while donkeys are supposedly 'stubborn' and monkeys 'playful' and 'cheeky'. This discussion could be an early step towards drawing, painting or sculpting an animal that represents some of each participant's personality traits. It could be a lot of fun to make up new animals using an amalgamation of already existing animal parts.

Both approaches lead to an exploration of the theme of 'personal identity'. Though they have different

starting points that relate to the contrasting interests of the respective groups, they can manage to satisfy the same objective.

Activities to Avoid or to be Wary of

Information you gather via the questionnaire or through working with a group may suggest that there are certain themes you might best avoid or activities you should alter. If you find out that a member of your group is dealing with difficulties in their home life or is coping with grief over the loss of a relative, you have to be very cautious about introducing an activity with a family-related theme. If the group you are

working with have issues with mobility, you might need to adapt an activity in order to make it workable. For example, Body Islands usually entails having individuals lie down on large sheets of paper while their partners trace around them. An alternative method of achieving a similar body shape, but which requires less physical dexterity, is to draw the outlines of shadows cast when people move in front of a strong light source. If you discovered that the people in a group did not get along very well, you should be wary of projects that emphasise working together. You could certainly try to address their issues through the medium of art and even try to progress towards activities that require ever-increasing levels of co-operation, but it would be important that you do so in a way that is careful and sensitive.

Working from your Strengths

One of the best ways to ensure that you facilitate effectively is to choose activities that genuinely excite you. Good, creative group facilitators should constantly aim to expand their repertoires and expose themselves to new activities by thinking, reading, learning, taking part in workshops and talking to other facilitators about their experiences. There will always be certain activities that appeal to you more than others. These are the activities that you should use. Convincing participants to embrace an activity that you like to do is much easier than trying to get them involved in something that you don't believe in. Also, when you know an activity well there is little chance of somebody asking you a question that you will not be able to answer.

Pitching your Activity

Learning to 'pitch' activities correctly so they are neither too easy nor too difficult is also important. If a task is overly simplistic, participants may feel bored, patronised and uninterested. If a task seems too difficult, they may be intimidated, self-conscious and disengaged.

Many artists and creative people describe their creative development as a journey. To a large extent your function as a creative group facilitator is to help those who participate in your activities to gain greater freedom to move along on their own 'creative journeys'. You can assist them to do so by offering skills, techniques and experiences that will develop their abilities and confidence to be expressive. For example, if somebody has only a little familiarity with painting and you teach them how to mix blue and yellow to make green, you have helped to broaden their 'artistic vocabulary' slightly because where before they may have had access to only two colours, now they have three. If, for some reason, they need the colour green in order to describe the appearance of a landscape or to express a feeling or emotion, they will now have it more readily and so they are freer to move along on their 'creative journey'.
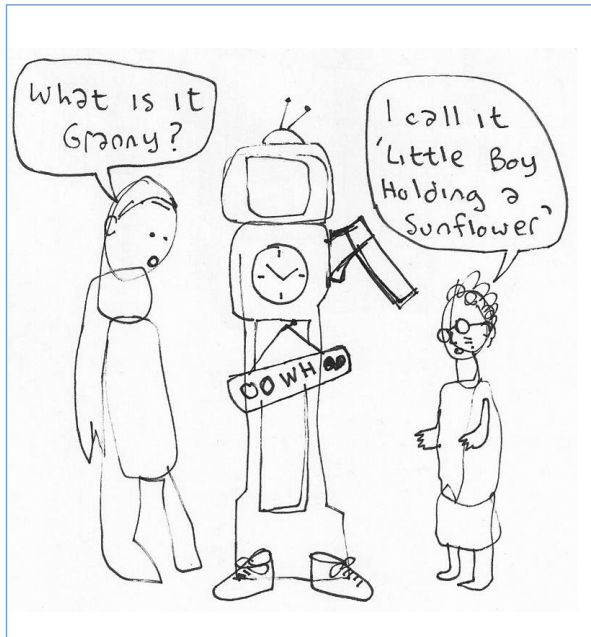

The reason that correctly 'pitching' your activity is integral to the facilitation process is that it accounts for progress that a person has already made. If you were to try to show a very experienced painter something as basic as how to mix colours, he/she would probably not have very much interest in listening to you.

It is often the case, however, that the same activity can be approached in a variety of more or less sophisticated ways. It is important to note here that the term 'sophisticated' does not

imply 'better', 'more beautiful' or 'more praiseworthy'. Some of the world's greatest art masterpieces are utterly unsophisticated. It simply means that there are countless creative approaches to most art activities and they may all be equally valid.

For example, if the task involved drawing a teacup, some people might enjoy using lines, perspective and shading to represent its shapes, forms, textures and proportions as accurately as they possibly could. Others might prefer to use expressive marks and random or imagined colours to create an image that may be exciting and full of energy … but bear only scant resemblance to the teacup.

They Would Never do That!

Gathering information about the group with whom you are working does not mean that you should fall prey to stereotypical assumptions about what they would or would not enjoy and benefit from doing. As you develop a trusting relationship with the people that you work with, they will be more likely to try things that might seem outside the bounds of usual age/gender/cultural expectations. A group of boys might love learning to knit or weave, for example. A group of elderly people might really appreciate an introduction to abstract found-object sculpture. It is essential to keep an open mind throughout.

Deciding on an activity—summary

The things to consider most carefully when coming to a decision about which activity or activities to choose are the group's interests and abilities, physical and psychological issues and your personal strengths and interests.

In fact, you can usually choose from any number of activities and they can all work well in an atmosphere where people feel secure and permitted to explore their own approach.

Here is an example an of an activity that I have used with groups (both children and adults) when meeting them for the very first time.

Activity example

CARS, ROADS AND SCRIBBLES (PLUS BUILDINGS AND BIRDS)

This is an activity in which participants make drawings and/or paintings that are attached together using glue and strong tape to make one large 'group landscape'. It is presented in language that one might use to address a group.

There are five separate tasks that each group member can choose from …

1. 'We need roads. You can make any type of road you wish—motorways, dirt tracks … straight, bendy, thin, wide … based on real roads or completely imaginary. The only stipulation is that they need to be drawn or painted from above. They will be cut out using scissors when you are finished, so there is no need to work on a background. Focus on the road itself.'

2. (I show an example of a pre-made car which is created using cut-out pieces of coloured card.) 'We also need plenty of cars and other vehicles. Again, they can be based on cars, trucks, vans, etc. that you have seen before … or you can invent some new and weird forms of transport if you wish. We will be gluing the cars onto the roads when they are finished.'

3. 'We also need scribbles. Lots of scribbles. These will be the background to the mural that we are hoping to make. Choose any colours that you like and use whatever materials you wish, but cover all the paper that you are scribbling on in scribbles. Leave no trace of the colour of the page.'

4. 'Buildings—again, these can be any type of building you wish. Schools, churches, hospitals, hotels, houses or huts. Can anyone think of any others? And they can be real or pretend.'

5. 'Finally—birds. The birds are also going to be cut out, so again there is no need for any background. As you have probably guessed, you can have any type of bird you like … except magpies … I really don't like magpies … I'm just kidding. You can make any type of real or made-up bird that you feel like making.'

The reason that this activity tends to work well is that it offers a wide range of options. People who feel reasonably confident in their creative abilities can begin by making 'roads', 'birds' or 'buildings'. 'Cars' can be done by participants who feel fairly secure, but who prefer to start with a task that is a bit more directed and therefore allows less scope for personal interpretation and self-criticism. Scribbles can be done by almost

anybody and so offer a very safe initiation into the process of making art. This activity also tends to be a lot of fun and involves a symbolic bringing together of the people as their work is combined. As the activity progresses and 'scribblers' become more comfortable, they usually take on one of the other tasks. Also, people often introduce their own elements, such as roundabouts, traffic lights, animals, insects, spaceships, etc., and they can all become part of one large collaborative mural.

More on Preparation

Setting up the art room

If you are choosing a room in which to facilitate art activities, aim for a space that is sufficiently large, quiet and well lit. The presence of one or more sinks is a distinct advantage so that you have access to water for painting and cleaning. Non-absorbent floor coverings and tabletops are also desirable. If you are not sharing the room with any other facilitators, you may choose to allow the space to become a little bit messy. This can actually be conducive to the creative process. If the work area is pristine, participants may feel restricted by the implied expectation to keep it that way, but a few paint splashes here and there suggest that they do not have to be 'too' careful.

Useful things to have in the room are: plenty of materials; a large box containing odds and ends, such as scrap cloth, buttons, corks, bottle tops and other sundry stuff; a first aid kit; aprons or large shirts; disposable gloves; kitchen towels; baby wipes; hand soap; old magazines; newspapers and calendars; and a music-playing device of some sort.

The way you set up the workspace is significant. Placing tables or easels in a somewhat circular arrangement can help to convey an open, friendly and communicative atmosphere. It also provides a central focal point where you can set up a model or objects for a still-life. However, the centre of a circle is usually not a very useful place for you to deliver a demonstration or present visual aids (i.e. images or objects that can help participants to better understand an activity) because you can only face a few people at any one time. For demos and group discussions it is more advantageous for you to keep a space for yourself on the circle to ensure that everybody can see what you are doing.

Some activities work most effectively when people can operate together in separate, smaller groups, so you can re-jig the workstations accordingly for different projects.

A number of people make art most comfortably when they feel that they have privacy and so might prefer to segregate themselves somewhat. This is particularly true for those who are very sensitive to issues regarding personal space. It is not uncommon to meet such people whilst facilitating in social care situations. Some may even tend to react aggressively when others enter or linger within their close vicinity. It is very important to concern yourself with the safety and comfort of those who participate in your activities. If you feel restricted by the limitations of your designated art room, consider finding a more suitable alternative, including floor and wall spaces as potential work surfaces, or splitting up the group and

seeing individuals or sub-groups at separate times.

Safety in the art room

Always keep a first aid kit in the art room. If you are facilitating with a group in a day care centre, hospital or certain other institutions, there will be medically trained staff nearby, so be aware of what procedure you should take in order to contact them quickly if you need to. Always keep potentially dangerous sharp or toxic materials out of reach on a high shelf or in a locked press, if necessary.

If you are working with people who have a lot of difficulty using scissors, prepare any 'cutting out' *before* the activity begins.

Working with other staff

In many 'care situations' you will have the opportunity to work alongside other staff who may be very familiar with the people with whom you are conducting your art activities. This can be extremely helpful, particularly if some of the clients require one-to-one assistance and encouragement in order to get the most from the activity. It is useful to explain to staff in advance what you hope to achieve and to indicate clearly what they can do in order to help you to meet your objectives. It is also important to listen attentively to any information that they have for you.

Sometimes well-meaning caregivers can end up doing the activity 'for' the people they are working with. This can be frustrating both for you and for the participants who are supposed to be taking part in the activity. You will be less likely to encounter this problem if you make your needs clear from the outset. The issue will also be easier to address if you do encounter it because you will be able to simply reiterate what you said before in a respectful and non-critical manner.

It can be great to invite willing staff to take part in art activities together with their clients. This process can be very enjoyable and beneficial for both parties and can also help to cultivate new, worthwhile and unexpected dynamics within their relationships.

Making a plan

Once you have decided upon the activity or activities that you are going to present to your group and you have a space to work in, it is very useful to write a plan. The process of writing can help you to really clarify both your objectives and the methods through which you intend to realise them. Having a strong sense of what, how and when you are going to do things will help you to facilitate with relative confidence and ease.

Here is an 'Activity Record Sheet' that will help you to plan your activity.

Title:

Aims and objectives:

Materials:

Visual aids:

Task:

Introduction/demonstration:

Timing:

Conclusion and Reflection:

Now, here is an example of a plan for the 'Cars, Roads and Scribbles' activity:

Title: Cars, Roads and Scribbles

Aims and objectives:
- To develop participants' confidence in working with several art materials by offering them a wide range of tasks to choose from.

- To develop participants' appreciation for working co-operatively in a creative, supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere by emphasising principles of effective teamwork during introduction and bringing everyone's art together to form a group mural.

Materials: poster paints, brushes, palettes, water containers, markers, crayons, coloured pencils, scissors, paper, coloured card, glue stick and duct tape.

Visual aids: after my 'car-making' demonstration I will show everybody three different examples of vehicles that were made using shapes cut from coloured card.

Introduction: introduce myself to the group. Ask everybody his or her name. Ask if they have done art activities before. Emphasise that our time together should be enjoyable. They do not have to think in terms of their work being 'good' or 'bad'. Their contributions through the art they make and the things they say are all welcome and valid. That we all agree to try to support and encourage one another.

Task: 'Cars, Roads and Scribbles'.

Roads—any type, drawn from above, to be cut out using scissors, so don't do background.

Cars—show visual aids.

Scribbles—emphasise importance of this task, scribbles must fill entire page.

Buildings—any kind.

Birds—any kind, also to be cut out, so no background.

Demonstration: quick demo on cutting out front headlight shape and sticking it on to car.

Timing: initial intro, 5–7 mins; task intro, 5 mins; demonstration, 3 mins; task time, 45 mins; tidy up, 5 mins; conclusion & reflection, 10 mins.

Conclusion and Reflection: did participants enjoy the activity? How did their feelings change throughout the activity? Was anyone nervous before we began? Has that changed? How do people feel about having their work incorporated into a large group mural?

More on Planning

Title

Sometimes a title exists simply to remind you of the content of an activity, but one that is interesting or catchy can be used during your introduction to stimulate interest and set the tone for what the group are about to do.

Title examples: Celebrity Costume Capers, Play With Clay, Moody-Judy.

Older more mature groups may (or may not) prefer titles that are less quirky.

Aims and objectives

The more specific you are when articulating your aims and objectives, the more likely it is that you will achieve them. When writing an aim or objective, clearly indicate how you hope to accomplish it. For example, 'To develop participants' self-esteem' or 'To develop participants' ability to express themselves' are worthy aims, but they are vague. Include words such as *by* and *through* to lead you towards the way that your intentions might be realised.

Example 1: To develop participants' self-esteem by teaching them techniques that will help them to overcome a series of creative challenges, from cutting the clay to making a pot, and acknowledging and praising their achievements.

Example 2: To develop participants' ability to express themselves visually through engaging with them in a group discussion on the relationship between colour and mood and offering them the opportunity to choose from a variety of different pieces of coloured paper to build a collage that describes a chosen mood.

Materials

It is important that you become familiar with the characteristics and qualities of many different art materials. The materials that you make available to your clients can greatly impact on the appearance of their work and so can mean the difference between more and less successful outcomes. For instance, in 'Cars, Roads and Scribbles' it is important that participants have access to a glue stick for the car-making element. If one were to use a liquid glue, such as PVA, it would moisten the card and cause the vehicles to appear crumpled. This would be a less pleasing result for the participant and would therefore leave him/her feeling relatively dissatisfied and unconfident.

You should personally try out any activity that you intend to introduce to a group using the materials that will be available to ensure that it will work properly. Poster paint is water-based and so will not stick to a plastic surface. As it dries it tends to peel away and flake. It is too late to make this kind of discovery when an activity has already started, so in order to avoid creating disappointment for participants and embarrassment for yourself, be sure that the materials on offer are suitable for what is required.

You can create a buzz of mystery and excitement in the art room by arranging materials in readiness for the appearance of your participants. It can be really appealing to the group to arrive at a space where something unexpected, such as blocks of clay or large sheets of paper taped to the ground with brightly coloured markers, crayons and brushes, lie in wait for them. It is wonderful when people enter and say, 'Oh wow! What are we doing today? What is this stuff called?' If you can instil that level of curiosity and enthusiasm from the outset, it will generate an energy that can really help to make the activity tremendous.

Visual aids

Visual aids are any images or objects that you show to participants in order to deepen their understanding of what an activity entails. You can use work that was made by a previous group that took part in a similar process, photographs, things you have made yourself or source material from books, magazines or the Internet.

Visual aids are particularly useful for showing people how a process that entails several stages (e.g. lino printing, ceramic glazing, puppet-making) might conclude.

Some individuals have a tendency to simply copy visual aids, particularly if they see only one, so show two or more if possible. Also consider how you pitch your visual aids. If they look too intricate and fancy, participants may feel as though they have 'failed' if their work compares unfavourably. If your visual aids are unattractive, on the other hand, then participants may feel uninspired.

Introduction

If you have met the group before, you can simply say 'hello' and engage in a little chat while everyone finds their place. If you are meeting a group for the first time, try to be extra welcoming. When everyone gets settled, introduce yourself and ask them to tell you their names. You may also ask people a couple of questions about themselves—particularly if the group is small—as this can help to ease awkwardness. Simple enquiries that allow individuals the option to give short or even yes/no answers are best.

At this point you may want to inform the group that you are there to *facilitate*. Your role is to help them to explore different ways to express themselves through their artwork. It is not like school, where their creative endeavours may have been judged and categorised as 'good' or 'bad'. They do not have to worry about 'being able to draw' and their verbal and artistic contributions will be welcomed and are valid. You may ask everyone if they are willing to respect this ethos.

If you are working with a group that could benefit from having very clear and explicit rules and boundaries, you could develop that conversation into an activity where you collaborate with the participants to draw up an 'art activity group contract' outlining an acceptable code of behaviour and some appropriate consequences for those who attempt to operate outside it.

In your plan you can indicate key points that you want to include in your introduction. Be aware of any details that might affect the success of the outcome for the participants. Some relatively simple interventions and instructions can make a huge difference. For example, in 'Cars, Roads and Scribbles' the scribblers are directed to 'fill the page with scribbles and leave no trace of the colour of the paper'. Although this doesn't make the task much more difficult, completely covering the page adds greatly to the aesthetic quality of the finished mural and also to the satisfaction experienced by the participants.

This is another reason why it is such an advantage for you to have already done the activity yourself. You will be sensitised to the nuances and fine points of the task and will

therefore be in a position of some expertise when you explain it to your group.

If you are afraid that you might forget an important point, it is a good idea to keep your plan in front of you during your introduction. It is better not to 'read out' or even 'learn off' what you are going to say, though, because it might prevent you from interacting with the participants. If you memorise what you want to say word for word and then somebody interrupts you with a question or comment, you may find it difficult to reply or resume.

If you do feel yourself becoming nervous or excited at the prospect of facilitating, you can practise your introduction alone or with companions. Sometimes you can learn a lot from viewing a recording of yourself made using a video camera. However, the potential difficulty with doing so is that looking at the same footage of oneself several times can tend to make for an overly critical self-assessment. It is much more advantageous to watch once or twice before deleting because re-watching several times and deconstructing every detail of your delivery, gestures, appearance, etc. will only make you feel more apprehensive than you were to begin with.

Anxious facilitators have a tendency to rush through their introduction, perhaps in an effort to get it over with. If this is an issue for you, try to be aware of it, and even write a note in your plan reminding yourself to speak slowly. Also, take some time in the room by yourself before the participants arrive so that you can breathe in and out gently and be as calm as possible. Also, be aware that most people are nervous at first and you are going to be fantastic!

Demonstration

Indicate on your Activity Record Sheet whether or not you intend to conduct a demonstration. Demonstrations should be quite short and succinct. If you are teaching somebody a new skill, it is best to do so in manageable fragments that they will be able to follow and remember. It is okay to perform several separate demonstrations throughout the course of an activity if needs be.

Be sure that everyone can see you properly and invite people to move closer if they need a better view. It can be fun to involve a client in a demonstration and doing so can generate more interest from the rest of the participants, while giving you the chance to see if a member of the group can manage to perform the procedure that you are trying to teach.

Timing

Work out a schedule for your activity. Practise your introduction and demonstration alone or with friends to get a realistic sense of how many minutes they will take. It is important to communicate information clearly to your group without rushing, but remember that the art activity is foremost about 'doing', so ensure that there is plenty of time allotted to the task itself. Allocate space in your schedule for tidying so that you have a sufficient period for reflection before the end.

Finally, while you are facilitating be sure to tell people how long they will have with

particular tasks and update them on the time there is left at appropriate intervals. Say when there are ten, five and two minutes to go so that participants are not forced to finish their work abruptly.

The tidy-up

Clearing the workspaces and cleaning art materials is very important, especially when you are working with different groups in quick succession. There can be few worse beginnings to an activity than having to deal with a barrage of complaints because the new group has arrived to find wet paint on their chairs and desks or that the paintbrush bristles have become hard because they were not cleaned properly.

Paintbrushes should be cleaned one at a time. It is not sufficient to merely rinse a bunch of them together under running water. Rub the bristles back and forth to be sure that the inner ones do not have paint/glue on them.

If you are using acrylic paint, it is vital to wash brushes immediately after use. It is essential to be thorough in this because acrylic paint will not dissolve in water after it has dried, so brushes cannot be rescued. If water-based poster paints dry on brushes there is still hope, so do not discard them. Simply soak them for a few hours in water and when the bristles soften, give them a good wash. When brushes are wet, place them bristle side up in a container so that the hairs do not become bent. It might be necessary to conduct demonstrations to ensure that your group learns how to clean items properly.

You can make the tidy-up much easier by planning ahead. If you are using a material such as clay, do not work directly on a table surface. Instead use wooden or plastic boards on top of the tables … and keep the boards solely for clay activities. If you are doing other 'messy' activities, you could lay down newspaper or plastic sheets, which can simply be recycled or discarded when the activity is over.

When organising the tidy-up, try to delegate tasks fairly. With some groups it may be helpful to draw up a roster so that participants take it in turns to sweep the floor, wipe the tables, put materials back into the presses, etc. after each activity.

It is best to make the tidy-up a feature of your activity the first time you meet with a new group because developing the habit of reorganising the room will make your facilitation much easier. It is also generally good for participants to learn to take responsibility for the upkeep of the art space, the materials in it and the experience that they share with all other groups that use the room. Be sure to show your appreciation for people's efforts.

Conclusion and reflection

Leave time after the task and tidy-up for participants to reflect upon and discuss their experiences during the activity. Some people might like to talk about what they enjoyed most or least. Others might want to mention something about what they learned about art or their own creative process. Sometimes personal issues can arise that individuals might wish to share.

It is useful to write some questions in your plan that could help to open a forum where people can talk freely. It is important that you do not ask intrusive questions or make individuals feel obliged to say something if they do not want to. The initial questions can be quite simple: 'Can anyone tell me what we did today?' or 'What materials did we work with?' or 'How would you describe the material?' You will quickly get a sense of how comfortable the group is to engage with you in conversation. It is important to be attentive, calm and also patient.

If these questions are met with enthusiastic answers, you might sense that it is okay to probe a little deeper. You could ask how people felt during the task. Did they find it relaxing or frustrating? Did their work bring up any memories? Are there any stories that they would like to tell about their work? Did they pick up any new skills? Would they be more confident if they had to approach this kind of task again in the future?

Of course, in real-life situations your questions can be less generalised and based more specifically on the things that the group has made: 'Can you tell me why the man in the picture is smiling? What might he be thinking about?' 'Is this dog you made out of papier-mâché based on your own dog at home? What is he called?' etc.

Conclusion and reflection can also be structured in unusual and fun ways. For instance, if you have done a puppet-making activity, you could conclude by doing a mock television interview with each person's puppet, asking it questions such as: 'What is your name?' 'Where do you come from?' 'What are you made of?' 'What is your favourite food?' etc.

Really good reflections can be therapeutic because they give participants the chance to consider and share what they have learned—about their art and about themselves—during the activity. A person's artwork is a piece of evidence that is a record of their creative process and their ability to express themselves in a visual and tactile way. When clients assimilate and articulate their experience through discussion and reflection, they can become more aware of their ability to face challenges and meet objectives in creative ways, which in turn can boost their confidence and self-esteem.

You can also use art activities as a starting point for all sorts of conversations. An activity such as making a pinch pot from clay, which is done in a few simple steps—roll the clay into a ball, make an impression in the ball using your thumb, pinch the clay between finger and thumb to form a bowl shape—can be used to start a meaningful chat about 'individuality'. You can point out that although everybody has followed the same procedure whilst making their pot, all the pots are quite different. Sometimes having a thing or things to look at and refer to can really help people to understand a concept.

One-to-one interactions

The art class offers an excellent opportunity to talk to people on an individual basis about their work. One-to-one interactions give participants a chance to discuss their ideas, to enlist your expertise as they try to master the fine points of particular skills, to tell 'stories' relating to their art and to reflect on personal issues that they might like to share.

Effective one-to-one interactions are largely dependent on the level of rapport that you

have with the people in your group. Rapport tends to happen when people feel connected to you, and people tend to feel connected to you when you behave and communicate in a manner that demonstrates that you care for them.

The effort that you put into planning your activity, the manner in which you prepare the art room, the way you interact during your introduction and the level at which you engage with their artwork will impact on how 'cared for' your participants feel, and the extent to which they trust and speak to you.

Your relationship with the people you work with will evolve over time and it is important to allow that to happen organically. If you attempt to rush participants into 'deep and meaningful' conversations, they are likely to respond by either becoming silent or acting out.

Incorporating one-to-one interactions

When you have completed your introduction/demonstration, you should allow your participants time and space to 'psych themselves up' and decide how they wish to begin the activity. Be available to answer any questions, but do not initiate interactions unless you strongly sense that it is necessary to do so.

After a little while, you can walk around the room and have a look at what everyone is doing. At this juncture you may notice that there are individuals who might require some assistance or encouragement. It is better not to assume that this is always the case, however. Just because somebody appears to be struggling, it does not mean that they are. Some people simply like to work slowly, methodically and almost gingerly. You can ask individuals how they are doing, or enquire from the group generally if anyone needs your help, but do so in a way that is unobtrusive.

If participants seem content and busy, then let them be for another spell. Continue to be available and observant in case your input is required, but remain apart if it is not. After another few minutes you should wander around again to see how people's artwork is developing.

What to say

It is best to begin with questions that are easy to answer and are not too personal. You could ask about how they mixed a particular colour of paint, or what method they used to create an effect. These kinds of questions are good because they indicate to the participant that you have engaged with their artwork and they can give you a factual answer.

If you started by saying something like, 'tell me about this picture…', that would be a far more difficult thing to respond to (unless, of course, you had already established a strong rapport, in which case it could be a good way to begin an interaction). 'Tell me about your picture…' is too vague a request for somebody that you are only getting to know because it puts pressure on them to interpret and to try to gauge what you mean. This may make them feel awkward and wary in case they say the 'wrong' thing and sound stupid.

A question to avoid is: 'What is that?' Even if an image seems hard for you to decipher,

its meaning may be perfectly clear to its creator and he/she may be insulted by your inability to discern it. It is also possible that the maker of the image wants its meaning to remain a secret or that they do not know its meaning or that it does not have a meaning. All these possibilities are perfectly valid and it is important that you do not say anything to imply that that is not the case.

As mentioned in the 'Conclusion and Reflection' section above, many of the most effective questions arise from your engagement with the artwork itself. If somebody has drawn a car, for example, you might ask them to tell you if they know who owns the car, where the car is heading to and so on.

Be sensitive in your approach. Sometimes people reveal more about themselves through their artwork than they may realise, but it is not your place to try to interpret their creations and explain the meanings back to them. Your one-to-one interactions should draw more from your ability to listen than to speak and your focus should remain on the development of participants' curiosity, visual awareness, open-mindedness, physical/psychological well-being and self-esteem.

If an issue does arise during the art activity that concerns you, then you should share it with a colleague or supervisor. Remember what you learned in Chapter 1 and ensure that you are using the creative arts therapeutically and not trying to deliver an art therapy session.

Personal evaluations

When you have completed your activity, take the time to reflect upon and examine how successful you were in meeting your objectives. It is very helpful to write a personal evaluation because doing so will really help to clarify your thoughts.

Consider the areas of the activity that you think went well and those that didn't. Bear in mind the feedback that you received from the group during the conclusion and reflection on the activity.

Any areas that you identify for consideration should be developed. It is not enough to say that the participants didn't understand the introduction. You have to identify reasons why this was the case. Perhaps they could not hear you properly, or the language that you used was too sophisticated? How could you possibly address these problems? It might mean that you need to speak more clearly, or more simply, or ask the group some questions during the introduction to ensure that they are understanding you.

Pay attention to any practical matters. If you were doing an activity that involved the use of clay and some people said they did not want to touch it because they thought it was dirty, you could consider ways to respond to this issue in future. You could offer participants disposable gloves and ensure that you have soap at the sink, or you could spend more time allowing participants to 'get to know' the material gradually.

You should also take note of factors that helped the activity to go well. If the participants were very excited as they entered the room because you had the materials set up in an interesting way, then you need to acknowledge that. Perhaps you could also imagine ways you could use this knowledge to help with planning future activities.

Every time you do an activity you will have the opportunity to learn something new that will give you the chance to develop as a practitioner.

Here is an example of a personal evaluation written by a student who facilitated the 'Cars, Roads and Scribbles' activity with a group of people in their early twenties.

Personal evaluation

I was generally very pleased with how the activity went. Everyone got really into it and the feedback during the reflection was very positive … people said that they really enjoyed drawing and painting and that they liked the variety of things they had to do … so I do feel that I met with my first objective, which was to encourage participants to work with a range of materials.

I probably spent too long on the introduction. I intended to just ask everybody their names and get a quick sense of whether or not they had experienced art activities before … but my interactions with some individuals went on for too long and I noticed some of the other participants becoming fidgety … which probably made me rush my demonstration. I think that I let myself get involved in 'chat' because I was nervous. I think that is fair enough because this was my first time facilitating by myself. In future I don't think that I will get that nervous … but if I do, then I will try to do some slow breathing exercises before the group arrives.

Everything got a lot better as soon as the task started and it was great to hear everyone laughing, enjoying themselves and encouraging one another. I let everybody get on with their work for about seven minutes … because they seemed engrossed. Then I reminded them that they could switch tasks if they had finished their first thing. I think that I chose a good time to do that because some of the 'scribblers' were finished and wanted to make space on their desks so that they could try doing roads, birds, buildings, etc.

I then collected some of the participants' pictures and started to lay them down on a big space on the ground. It was amazing how quickly the mural seemed to be coming together and I could hear people saying 'wow' and 'that's brilliant', which I personally found very encouraging … and the group did too … which relates to my second objective, which was to develop participants' appreciation for working co-operatively in a creative, supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere by emphasising principles of effective teamwork.

I went around to people and asked them how they were getting along. One of the women said to me that she was enjoying herself, but that she was embarrassed because she thought her work looked like something a child would make. I told her that I think children's artwork is often very beautiful and that lots of artists focus on trying to recapture the freedom and expressive quality of a child. I told her I would bring in a book about the painter Matisse next

week so I had better remember to do that, because she seemed really interested. In fact, I think I will probably keep a little library of art-related books in the art room.

The reflection was really great. Lots of people said that they were quite nervous before the activity began because they felt they 'could not draw' and it had been many years since they did anything like this … but they said they really enjoyed the activity and that they were really excited about the prospect of coming back next week. A couple of people said that they were going to make some pictures at home because 'they had gotten the bug'.

I was really pleased with how the activity turned out. I have stuck the mural together using strong glue and duct tape at the back. I have pinned it to the wall and it does look very impressive. Looking at it now, I think it could be really good to continue to build on it next week so I am thinking about inviting the group to build the mural 'up' towards outer space, or 'down' into the ocean.

Chapter Summary

▶   Creative group facilitation is concerned with helping people to develop their abilities to express themselves through the medium of art.

▶   Choose an appropriate activity that takes into account the interests and abilities of the group.

▶   Know and plan the activity thoroughly and be very clear about your objectives.

▶   Your confidence in speaking in front of a group and delivering demonstrations will grow as you become more experienced.

▶   Be attentive to the needs of your group and engage with them through their artwork and in discussion.

▶   Always be encouraging and caring.

▶   Try to incorporate some reflection at the end of an activity. This will help to deepen participants' understanding of what they have been doing.

▶   Evaluate each activity, identifying things that went well and things that could be improved.

▶   Each time you facilitate you will have an opportunity to learn something new, which will give you the chance to develop as a practitioner.

Good Luck!