

## **'Working with Children and Young People' - Kids' Own Professional Development Session in association with Visual Artists Ireland**

Temple bar studios, Dublin, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2008

### **A report by Caroline Walshe (participant)**

As a freelance artist working with both children and adults I find myself increasingly keen to make contact with others working in this way for many reasons – to share information on how to get work; as a creative well for ideas; to understand what it is I can offer; to develop my work and to improve what I do. Working freelance means I don't necessarily come into contact with other artists on a day-to-day basis, which was why I was happy to see the formation of [practice.ie](http://practice.ie) and delighted to read about Kids' Own's professional development workshops.

The theme of the day was motivation, and Yvonne Cullivan and Orla Kenny put together an inspiring day for debate on that topic as well as other issues relating to artists working with children and young people. Participants ranged widely in their backgrounds from those working with particular art centres – The Ark and The Linenhall Arts Centre in Mayo for example, to those teaching with V.E.C.'s, or organising their own classes.

In the morning there were a few talks from different artists registered on the [practice.ie](http://practice.ie) website:

Helene Hugel gave a fun and motivational talk on her work of transforming hospital spaces through puppetry and performance. Her animated personality shone through in her talk and she gave us a little taster of puppeteering using just our fingers. Helene works with children in hospitals to bring an element of fun in to a stressful environment. She animates hospital equipment chosen by the children, creating characters out of stethoscopes and sphygmometers, resulting for the children in an increased ownership of their environment and association with the equipment around them.

Liz Smith and Laura De Burca gave a talk next on their work with The Ark doing workshops with various groups of children. They presented images of a book project based on fairy tales, and images of masks made in three different level workshops carried out this summer in The Ark. Liz talked of how working with children on an ongoing basis rather than a once-off workshop was more rewarding for her and for the children. Laura presented photos of a printing workshop she had done based on work from an exhibition. Their workshop themes were sensitive and well developed, and there was an emphasis on quality in the materials used.

Finally Ruby Williams gave a talk on her own practice and her work with Flannain Naofa National School in Tipperary where she is taking a residency with Kids' Own. Ruby's work with the children is more process-led than product led, and she has started the project by working on family trees in a very open way with the children. Her own work explores identity, family and personal history and this is what she was exploring with the children, getting them to bring in objects of personal and family interest to work with.

The afternoon saw a practical session on delivery of workshops, and brought up interesting points on how people can respond to positive feedback in a negative way. There were discussions on interference and on the balance between positive engagement with workshop participants and sitting back and letting participants work. The day ended with a chaired discussion on the issues raised during the day and the issues people had written down for themselves to work on – these included how to become more confident in workshops, how much to relate of your own practice in workshops and how to do that, how much to be involved in the artistic process in a positive or a negative way, and how to work in a process-led rather than product-led way.

The day was a great opportunity for artists to meet, to network and make contacts for future work and to explore and debate on issues relating to their work. The workshop was well presented, sensitively facilitated and there was a good range of artists chosen to talk about their work. As artists working with children there is a responsibility to understand the importance of what you do and the impact it has on the lives of those children and their own attitudes towards themselves. There was a very strong

emphasis on this responsibility throughout the day from both the participants and the facilitators. In light of the fact that there is little training for artists working in this way and that much of what is learned is experience-based, having a forum like this is very important. Even providing a space for artists to come together and discuss their own experiences is a valuable thing. Keep up the good work!