

BEAG PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE CONTINUED

PROPOSAL 3:

To devise a programme of engagement with childcare workers which would:

- Explore different ways of communicating to find common understanding
- Facilitate workshops exploring creativity as part of the preparation phase
- Designate a childcare worker within each setting who assumes a creative/ artistic role as well as a direct liaison with the team. The proposed title for this role is Creative Partner.

PROPOSAL 4.

To build into the project the capacity for the development of further artistic encounters. For example, within the pilot project, the team discovered various activities which had potential for development into performative as well as participatory arts and ideas for more public engagement and profiling of early arts were discussed:

- The development of a shadow-theatre piece
- A music performance
- Create a designated space for early arts in partnership with local festivals
- Investigating interactive installations
- Exploring opportunities for pop-up exhibitions and events

PROPOSAL 5:

To devise ways to encourage parents to participate in the early-arts encounters with their children, to allow adults to see that arts for children have just as much beauty as arts for adults.

PROPOSAL 6:

To create an on-line resource for an extended BEAG Programme which:

- Includes filmed workshops, documented activities and reference links which could offer childcare workers and parents the possibility of distance learning about shared activities
- Creates the possibility of working remotely with children in out-lying area through live internet link-ups

PROPOSAL 7:

To experimentally extend the project into the Naíonraí (Irish Language Pre-schools) embracing and celebrating the different languages of speech through the different languages of the arts. This would:

- Allow children who are being educated through Irish the capacity to engage with the programme
- Allow the artists to explore the influence of language and its specific connotations on the artistic encounter.

The full **BEAG** report is available in pdf on the following websites:

www.graffiti.ie

<http://www.corkcity.ie/services/corporateaffairs/arts/>

www.corkcoco.ie Arts Office

www.hse.ie Arts & Health Programme

How we as a society care for and educate our children is a measure of our humanity and vision for our future society. It is the responsibility of all parents, carers, teachers and public bodies to ensure that our children have the best quality of life from the very start of their lives and are nurtured through each stage of their development. It is a collective effort. The BEAG project is an example of this collective effort with three public bodies coming together with a creative team of artists and childcare workers to deliver and support a project that focuses on the arts for the very young. It is an example of collective interest, will, commitment and responsibility to ensuring that children have equal access to the arts and therefore all the advantages that that opportunity and experience presents.

It gives me great pleasure to present this report with our partners Cork County Council, the HSE and Graffiti Theatre Company. Cork City Council is committed to ensuring access to the arts for all its citizens today and into the future.

Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr Terry Shannon

BEAG creates an imaginative child-centred environment where the very young can engage positively in creative exploration and expression. Cork County Council welcomes this initiative for the Arts in the Cork region

Cllr. Tim Lombard, Mayor of the County of Cork

Cork Arts and Health Programme – HSE South is delighted to have been involved with the BEAG project both as a co-funder and in terms of the opportunity it provided to work effectively with Cork City and Cork County Arts Offices and Graffiti Theatre Company.

The BEAG project allowed Graffiti Theatre Company, the three artists involved and the staff and management of the twelve early years settings develop a better understanding of the challenging issues involved in the delivery of an arts project to the birth to three age group. Most significantly, however, BEAG is contributing to the discussion on ways in which we can work creatively with very young children to enhance their overall health, wellbeing and development.

The HSE wishes to acknowledge the effective documentation of the project. The BEAG report can be a basis for developing further arts initiatives with the birth to three age group not just locally but throughout the country. It will also add to the developing national discourse on arts and health.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants – Graffiti Theatre Company, participating artists, childcare staff and managements and most especially the young children who took part in this very important innovative and worthwhile project.

Cork Arts and Health Programme –HSE South

BEAG

The BEAG Team:

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BEAG is supported by



Cork City Council Arts Office



Health Service Executive



Cork County Council

BEAG

BEAG is an initiative of the Local Authority Arts Offices of Cork City and County Councils and the Health Services Executive Southern Region (HSE South) Arts and Health programme, with organising partner Graffiti Theatre Company.

BEAG is a Practice-based Research (PbR) project involving an integrated arts team of three artists working with twelve early childhood settings over nine months from October 2010 to May 2011.

The BEAG pilot project rolled out in a series of five sequential visits to these settings, thus facilitating the development of artistic encounters between children, artists and childcare workers.

Combining joint funding resources, Cork City and County Councils and the HSE formed a steering committee in 2010, which included membership from childcare training and education (Cork College of Commerce) and the arts community (Graffiti Theatre Company) with a view to a strategic investment in an early years arts research initiative in Cork city and county.

WORKING WITH BEAG

A Statement from Graffiti Theatre Company
BEAG Organising Partner

*'... a chance to leave a trace
on the child's evolving imagination.'*

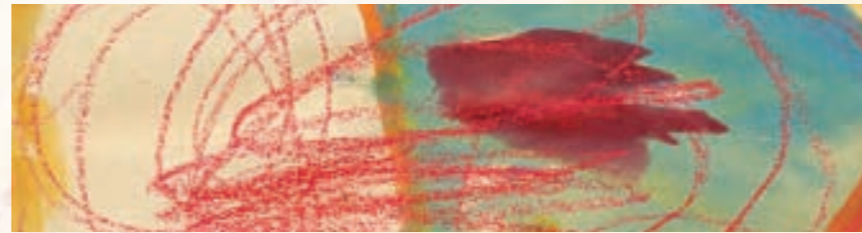
Charlotte Fallon, *Theatre de la Guimbarde, Belgium*

Engaging with the BEAG Research Project has been an exciting, challenging and, literally, delight-full project for all the team based in Graffiti. We have engaged for many years with communities of committed practitioners in arts, community, youth, children and research in various settings and circumstances and approached this particular development with the same rigour and enthusiasm that we apply to all projects. BEAG brought to us a fresh community of enquiry between artists, children and childcare workers. This enquiry framed by research questions and shaped by guiding principles has allowed the development of a skillful, dedicated and accomplished team of artists, a practical structure for serving the projects' needs, a methodology and an aesthetic which have the capacity to develop into the future.

Before the BEAG Project began we identified as our guiding principles the three intertwined threads of the work: the creative experience of the children, the aesthetic quality of artist-led work, the creative engagement of the childcare worker. In the research we wished to identify: the absorption, focus, engagement and delight of the children; the development of the artists' own practice by action, reflection and analysis; the development of a productive and enriching relationship with the childcare workers which allowed them the growth of their own creativity and their engagement with the children's creative play. We also needed to look at the practicalities of managing this particular team and its relationships with its settings. As a company committed to documenting and interrogating its work and with an existing theoretical framework of analysis, we felt competent to undertake both the research and the practical management.

The positive findings from the research exceeded our expectations. Analysis of photos and videos indicated the absorption, focus and engagement of the children and their exploratory delight in new aesthetic and sensory experiences and this was corroborated by interviews with childcare staff and the artists' journals of practice. The development of the practice of the three artists is evident not only from observation of the growing confidence and daring they showed as the sequences developed but also from their statements of response to the project. They all write eloquently of the inspiration of the work and the children and of their initial surprise at the depth of engagement children brought to the work. The statements clearly acknowledge the generosity of response and the artistic inspiration the children brought to them.

Growing confidence was also clear from both photo analysis and commentaries by the childcare workers. Audio responses track the growth of their comfort levels from - understandably - tentative to commitment to full engagement with the activity. The growth in understanding of the potential for their own practice in engaging with and advising the artists



seemed in many cases to trigger a reflection and analysis of their own practice and methods. In a reciprocal way, the practice of the BEAG team artists, management and advisors benefitted hugely from contact with childcare workers and from engagement with different childcare settings, philosophies, methods and personnel.

The image of an interwoven skein of threads is very apposite: the success of the project arising from the twists, turns and contacts of three threads, each beautiful, combining and separating to create new and enriched combinations.

AND THE FUTURE?

There now exists in the greater Cork area:

- a team of artists who can deliver quality early years practice;
- a range of twelve childcare settings which have embraced and contributed to the development of that practice and are ready to engage and develop further;
- a desire on the part of many of the childcare workers to find mechanisms to explore their own creativity in practice;
- a structural capacity both to manage what now exists and to strategically plan its development;
- a cultural strategy from Cork City Council which underpins the city's commitment to arts for the very early years;
- the imagination of the funders of this research project, the HSE, Cork City and County Councils, all of whom see the cultural, aesthetic, social and developmental value of early exposure to creativity;
- access to many local, national and international practitioners, educationalists and researchers who have both advised and are interested in where the project goes from here.

There is a unique potential for development of BEAG and we recommend that the potential for its development be investigated.

We cannot conclude without drawing readers' attention once more to the extraordinary statistics on the child population in Cork City.

- Young people constitute 34.7% of Cork's population base.
- 8,163 children aged 0 - 5 live in Cork city
- Of those 3,889 - 48% - live in RAPID areas

Creativity of all kinds is at the heart of the healthy development of a child. It is a challenge to all of us to provide it.

*'I have so few seconds to capture a child's attention.
I will not waste the chance.'*

from *Marina in The Winter Vaults* by Anne Michaels



Graffiti Theatre Company is supported by
the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon
Cork City Council and Foras na Gaeilge.

BEAG

IN ACCORDANCE WITH ITS TERMS OF REFERENCE:

- BEAG investigated the feasibility and sustainability of an early years arts initiative in Cork through a range of research objectives
- BEAG investigated the potential development of a model for early years arts delivery
- BEAG focused on children from birth to three years in a diverse range of early childhood settings
- BEAG actively engaged with early childhood settings in Cork City and County
- BEAG developed the potential for networking at local, national and international levels within the early years arts sector
- BEAG developed capacity in this area of work, including artistic and creative exploration, skills development and structural growth
- BEAG operated within the budget and timeframe allocated to the pilot project

BEAG

PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

The core proposal of the BEAG report is that this successful model of inter-agency funding and support for early years arts should be continued and developed under the aegis of key stakeholders.

In its consideration of the strategic development of BEAG, in terms of:

- A. the number of children directly engaging with artist-led experiences
- B. the number of skilled artists for delivery and further exploration of work in this area
- C. the engagement of creatively active childcare workers
- D. increasing the range of arts practices involved
- E. building a culture of creativity within early childhood care and education

The BEAG Project team and its advisors offer the following proposals:

PROPOSAL 1:

To build in the greater Cork area a more extended team of artists with the capacity to deliver, train and develop early years arts work. Envisaged, in association with this, is a longer term aim to develop a panel of associated artists who would be engaged for once-off or specialist strands of work.

PROPOSAL 2:

To create a programme with various strands of engagement such as:

- Sessional work as part of the already proven sequential pattern
 - Residential/Intensives within a shorter timeframe
- For example, a full week in a single setting or one day a week over an extended period.