

# **Marino Institute of Education**

An Exploration of the Value of Product in Visual Arts Education in the Irish

Primary School

By: Katherine Keys

Supervisor: Dr Susan Kennedy-Killian

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the degree  
of Master in Education Studies (Visual Arts)

Date: 2 June 2020

### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work.

Wherever contributions from others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly.

This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The work was done under the guidance of Dr Susan Kennedy-Killian at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

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Katherine Keys

Date: 2 June 2020

Word count: 20,817

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### **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Susan Kennedy-Killian, for her knowledge, guidance and support throughout this process. I would like to thank all those involved in the Master's in Education studies (Visual Arts) programme in Marino Institute of Education especially Dr Michael Flannery and Dr Margaret Fitzgibbon. It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to study with you and learn from you. Many thanks to my fellow Visual Arts students, who have been a great support along the way. I wish to thank all the teacher and student participants, your contribution to this study has been invaluable. I would like to especially thank my Principal for facilitating my participation on this course and to all my colleagues for their interest and support. Finally, I wish to thank all my family and particularly my husband, I am so grateful for all your support and encouragement.

**Abstract**

This small-scale study explores the value of art product in visual arts education in the Irish primary school setting. A qualitative research approach was adopted, and the data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven primary school teachers whom had experience teaching across a variety of classes and in different primary schools in Ireland. The three student focus groups were conducted with fifth and sixth class students from one primary school, in order to facilitate the collection of data from a sample of the student population. Following the data collection process, the data was analysed, the subsequent findings reported that art product was of value in the following areas: a form of personal self-expression to be treasured , as a means of integrating art across the curriculum, as a source for assessment, as support for the looking and responding strand unit, as a source of material for exhibitions of students' artwork, as a means of promoting creativity, and as a means of promoting social and emotional development. Other findings included the meaning attributed to product in visual arts and professional development for primary school teachers in visual arts education.

*Keywords:* product, process, curriculum, integration, assessment, teacher, student, education

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**Abbreviations**

AEP	Arts Education Partnership
ATECI	Association of Teacher Education Centres Ireland
CCEA	Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning approach
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Science
DCCI	Design & Crafts Council Ireland
DYCA	Department of Youth and Child Affairs
GoI	Government of Ireland
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
MERC	Marino Institute of Education Ethics Committee
NAEA	National Art Education Association
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Maths
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
TCI	Teaching Council of Ireland

### Introduction

“Visual Arts was spoken about as a calm space in which children could do their own thing and two children mentioned the absence of right or wrong answers. being a significant factor in their enjoyment of the subject.” (NCCA, 2018, p. 37).

The primary aim of this exploratory study is to elucidate the value of art product for primary school teachers and primary school students, albeit within the confines of this small-scale study. While a variety of definitions of the term product or art product, as it is referred to in this study have been suggested, I will use the definition suggested by Spendlove (2007) who defined it not only as an “outcome or artefact” that was produced through the creative process but who stated that product could represent “new thinking, skill, concept or knowledge”(Spendlove, 2007, p. 161).

In this chapter I will outline the background to this research study: Researcher Positionality and Research Rationale, the Aim of the Research, the Research Questions, the Research Approach adopted, and the Layout of the Study.

#### **Researcher Positionality and Research Rationale**

**Researcher positionality.** “Just as the artist is the primary instrument in painting, the researcher is the primary research instrument in qualitative investigation” (McCaslin, & Scott, 2003, p.453). Given the participatory role of the researcher as highlighted by McCaslin & Scott (2003) a clear understanding and awareness of my positionality is important to note, not only for the researcher but also for the reader. The initial impetus for conducting a study on this topic was personal interest, originating principally from my own experiences as a

primary school teacher and as someone who enjoys craft activities outside the classroom. I acknowledge the importance of process in visual arts education though I believe that the product cannot be completely overlooked, as it is an integral element of the visual arts curriculum.

**Research rationale.** Much emphasis has been placed on the process in making art, as the visual arts teacher guidelines states that this is where the skills are acquired and much of the learning takes place (Gol, 1999c). It also notes that in art production, “the process of making is as valuable as the final product.” (Gol, 1999c, p.11). The need for further research is based on the idea that, in primary visual arts education there is an emphasis on the process as stated by (Hickey, 2005) and visual arts education in Ireland has become more process orientated. The value attributed to the product may subsequently have been devalued, or, at best, deemed to be of lesser significance than the process in visual arts education as reflected in *Heads Up: A Journey in Creative Reuse* (Connolly, Rogers, O’Sullivan & Ridge, 2016). The study which focussed on professional artists working in partnership with educators in a range of educational settings, refers to the use of “Process-orientated approaches with less emphasis on art product” (Connolly et al., 2016, p. 49).

The literature reviewed for this study, from an Irish and international standpoint appears to be weighted towards the importance of process (DES, 2005; McLennan, 2010; Penketh, 2017). As there appears to be a dearth of literature focusing on the value of the outcomes of the process or art product, as it is referred to in this study, this seems to vindicate my choice to conduct this exploratory study on the value of art product.

### **Aim of the Research**



The overall aim of this research is to explore perspectives on the value of art product in visual arts education in the Irish primary school. The views of the primary school teachers are an essential component of this study as they are the facilitators and instructors of the visual arts curriculum within the primary school setting. As the recipients and participants in visual arts education, the views of the primary school students are indispensable. The decision to include them in this study is supported by the research of (Kincheloe, 2002), who advocated that teacher researchers should listen to the voices of students in order to inform their research and practice. For the purposes of this study, listening to the views and experiences of the individuals at the interface of the Irish primary school was considered the most effective means of sourcing answers to the following research questions.

### **Research Questions**

For the purposes of this study I will address the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?
2. What are students' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?

Throughout this research study I have endeavoured to remain open-minded in order to learn from the literature and the findings of other researchers. Following on from, and informed by the literature review, I embarked on the data collection element of the study gathering information from the semi-structured interviews with the primary school teachers and the focus-groups with primary school children.

### **Research Approach**

A qualitative approach is used in this exploratory study which is informed by constructivist thinking. Semi-structured interviews have been utilised to collect the teacher

participant's data. Prior to participating in student focus group interviews, all of the students participated in art making activities incorporating all of the strands of the visual arts curriculum namely; Drawing, Printing, Paint and colour, Clay, Construction and Fabric and fibre.

### **Layout of the Study**

The overall layout of this study comprises five chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion of findings and, conclusion and recommendations. They are outlined below and a brief description of each is provided:

**Chapter 1** is the introduction to this study and serves to introduce the background to the study, the aims and objectives of the research, the research questions, the methodology approach adopted, and the layout of the study.

**Chapter 2** is the literature review which commences by presenting the theoretical dimensions of the research and undertakes a review of relevant literature under the following headings: Visual Arts Primary Curriculum in Ireland, Process and Product in Visual Arts Education, Making Art in Visual Arts Education, Looking and Responding in Visual Arts Education, Assessment in Visual Arts Education, Curriculum Integration in Visual Arts Education, The Role of the Teacher in Visual Arts Education and Visual Arts Education and Teacher Professional Development.

**Chapter 3** is the methodology chapter. It presents an outline of the qualitative research approach undertaken and seeks to provide justification for the chosen research method. An overview of the methodology is given, which details the main aspects of the qualitative study, data collection and analysis methods employed taking into consideration ethics, validity, triangulation and reliability.

**Chapter 4** is the analysis and discussion of findings chapter. It analyses the findings from the interviews and focus group discussions undertaken during the data collection process, presents the findings of the research, and focuses on the key themes that emerged regarding the value of art product.

**Chapter 5** is the final chapter of this study. It highlights the findings, discusses the implications of these findings, identifies the limitations of the study, makes recommendations for further research, and finally, provides a summary of the chapter.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have outlined Researcher Positionality and the Research Rationale, the Aim of the Research, the Research Questions, the Research Approach adopted, and the Layout of the Study. I have discussed the reasons why I have chosen this area of research, the questions I hope to answer, and the methodology employed in the study. Finally, I have provided an outline of the study, giving a brief synopsis of the focus of each chapter. The next chapter will provide a review of the relevant literature.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The following review of the literature focuses on the visual arts curriculum in the Irish primary school setting and seeks to deliberate on the importance of product. This study involves a review of the literature on visual arts education with a focus on the value of art product. This chapter explores the literature in the following areas: Visual Arts Primary Curriculum in Ireland, Process and Product in Visual Arts Education, Making Art in Visual Arts Education, Looking and Responding in Visual Arts Education, Assessment in Visual Arts Education, Curriculum Integration in Visual Arts Education, The Role of the Teacher in Visual Arts Education and Visual Arts Education and Teacher Professional Development.

### **Visual Arts Curriculum in the Irish Primary School**

The Irish primary school curriculum considers the child's own life and experience as the starting point in their learning journey for children from junior infants to sixth class (Government of Ireland, 1999a). The arts in the primary school curriculum comprises of three subjects; visual arts, music and drama (Gol, 1999a). The visual arts curriculum is divided into six strands which are Drawing, Paint and colour, Printing Clay, Construction and Fabric and fibre (Gol, 1999a). Each of the strands of the visual arts curriculum is respectively divided into an additional two interrelated strand units which are making art, and looking and responding to art. The strand unit making art describes the process of skills development whilst engaging in the creation of art, and the strand unit looking at and responding to art refers to attentive looking at and responding to one's own work and the works of others (Gol, 1999b). Both of these strand units will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

The design of the primary visual arts curriculum adopts an incremental approach to teaching and learning in each strand, by increasing the complexity of concepts the child experiences at each stage (Gol, 1999c). There are four different stages of the primary curriculum, with two class levels at each stage; Junior and Senior Infants, First and Second class, Third and Fourth class, and finally Fifth and Sixth classes. This is an incremental process where the skills acquired at each stage and strand level are subsequently used as a foundation to refer back to and hone further skills, as the child progresses through the primary school (Gol, 1999c).

The visual arts curriculum in Ireland includes two and three-dimensional media, the two-dimensional are Drawing, Painting, Print including collage, the three-dimensional are “Clay, Construction and work in Fabric and fibre, some of which have traditionally been referred to as craft activities and are now further developed as a creative process” (Gol, 1999c, p. 13). On introduction, the new primary visual arts curriculum was the title given to what was previously known as arts and crafts in the primary school, this new domain encompassed art, craft and design (Gol, 1999a). Adopting the ‘new curriculum’, as it was referred to on its introduction, brought challenges for teachers and schools as the visual arts curriculum replaced arts and crafts as a subject, and heralded significant change in both content and pedagogy for the educator (Hickey, 2005). Hickey (2005) conducted a research project in a junior primary school in Dublin to examine the issues and challenges to the implementation of the 1999 visual arts curriculum experienced by primary school teachers. Hickey (2005) reported that, although all the teachers who participated were engaged with the revised curriculum, they professed time constraints, a lack of training, and the dearth of actual available resources made it difficult to fully implement. According to Hickey’s (2005)

study, on a whole school basis there were many perceived obstacles to the successful implementation of the new curriculum including the culture of the school and a reluctance or unwillingness of some staff members to adopt the changes. The Inspectorate from the Department of Education and Science (DES, 2005) conducted a review of the implementation of three subjects; English, Irish, and visual arts. Overall, the Inspectorate (DES, 2005) deemed the implementation of all three subjects to be successful as teachers had actively immersed themselves in the curriculum and had an excellent understanding of the curriculum, providing stimulating classroom environments and a wide range of materials for their students to engage with. However, the Inspectorate (DES, 2005) reported an overemphasis on making art, therefore they recommended that an equal emphasis should be given to both of the strand units; making art and looking and responding.

### **Process and Product in Visual Arts Education**

**Process.** The definition of the word process is given as involving a series of actions that are taken in order to achieve a result (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2019). The 'process' in art refers to the art making process from the preliminary actions of collecting, organising, collating and, moreover, exploring and experimenting to initiate creative production (Gol, 1999c). As highlighted in the curriculum, “[t]he creative process children go through in making art is emphasised because a significant part of learning in art occurs in their approaches to the task in hand, and this may not be evident in the finished product” (Gol, 1999c, p.18). Similarly, Lyons (2010) places a greater emphasis on the creative process, which he deems to be of significant benefit to children from disadvantaged backgrounds as it offers them the opportunity to learn from a visual perspective rather than an academic one. Lyons (2010) explains that he considers creativity to be unique to the individual, giving them

the opportunity to explore and experiment through making art with the assurance that there is no right or wrong. A research study conducted by Tarr (1996) identified six specific areas in the making process namely “free exploration with materials or concepts or ideas; stimulation from external sources; specific skills and techniques; a conducive work environment or context; reflection on the process and presentation” (Tarr, 1996, p.293). In a follow up study Tarr (1996) investigated a model for professional development based on her framework of these six key areas, which involved teachers and artists worked together once a week for ten weeks; the findings concluded that all the participating teachers agreed that the framework and working with the artists in their own classroom provided a better understanding of the creative process, informing and improving their practice. The artists participants in Tarr’s (1996) study recommended that more time should be allocated as part of the lesson for free exploration. Teachers and professional development specifically related to the teaching of visual arts will be addressed at a later stage in this chapter.

**Product.** The definition of product in relation to visual arts education could be perceived as any outcome of a process, for example, a creative outcome may be an novel idea, an innovative system, or an original product (Jesson, 2012), all of which have a contribution to make to visual art and to the student’s development. According to the INTO (2009), creative production may not be completed in one session, therefore there may be a number of stages to achieve the ultimate outcome, each of these stages could potentially produce an outcome or art product which will finally result in a completed object or artefact.

In the Irish primary school curriculum it is highlighted that “in making art, the process of making is as valuable as the final product.” (Gol, 1999c, p. 11). Students are afforded the opportunity, through the use of a variety of materials, of exploring and experimenting to

discover the creative possibilities of different materials, media and tools. The art class should offer a challenging and supportive environment; where children are given the freedom and motivation to be creative using a structured approach, indeed it is the teacher who facilitates the process of art making by allowing the students the time and space to do so, offering timely intervention and active encouragement and positive reinforcement as required (Gol, 1999a).

*Creativity and the Arts in the Primary School* (INTO, 2009) states that creativity is made up of two processes, an idea which originates from one's imagination and the innovation which eventually culminates as a product. The visual arts teacher guidelines state that the importance of "the creative process children go through in making art is emphasised because a significant part of learning in art occurs in their approaches to the task in hand, and this may not be evident in the finished product" (Gol, 1999c, p. 17).

**Product art.** McLennan (2010) considers the difference between an art making process that focuses on the process, or one where the emphasis is on the outcome or end result. Product art is, as the name suggests, a process orientated towards an outcome that is predetermined, producing something similar to your peers, or replicating the sample provided by the teacher (McLennan, 2010). There are questions regarding the benefits of this type of art practice as there is little or no opportunity for the individual to explore the creative process or generate something that is authentic and meaningful (Golc, 1999, p. 55). A report on the implementation of the visual arts curriculum by the Inspectorate addressed this in "some classrooms 'template' art (where the pupils produce the same artefact, drawing, or painting) was a common feature of the Visual Arts programme" (DES, 2005, p. 50) and this practice was discouraged by the subsequent evaluation report.



In all art making activities there has to be a process, which involves thinking, making, and assessing, and, logically, there will always be an outcome, but what differentiates “process art” from “product art” is the student’s experience of exploring an opportunity to create, problem-solve, use their imagination and entirely submerge themselves in the process, as the focus is on participation rather than the predetermined outcome (Penketh, 2017).

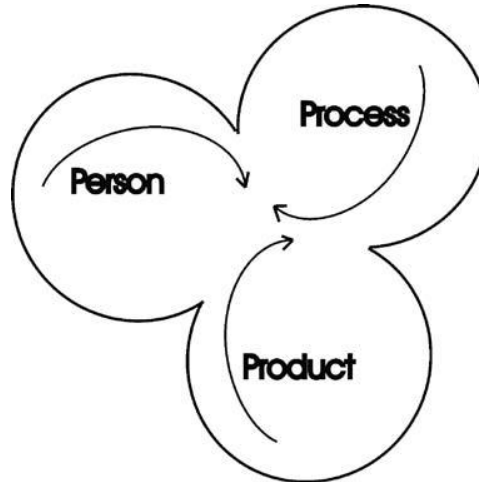
A study by Corcoran & Sim (2009) which set out to examine teaching a process-product approach to improve learning whilst engaging in reflective practice, found co-operative learning to be a more productive means of learning, placing the students at the centre of the creative process. The findings from this action research study found that a co-operative learning environment facilitated by the reflective practitioner resulted in increased student engagement and enhanced creativity (Corcoran & Sim, 2009).

**Display.** The findings from research carried out among primary school teachers interestingly determined that there was a perception among teachers that, in some schools, the board of management, or the Principal, may value the end product more than the process (INTO, 2009). This would suggest, if not infer, that art is produced on occasion for the purposes of creating a display, rather than the process of creating art for art’s sake. LaJevic (2013) in her study found that emphasising art for the purposes of decoration diminishes the importance of the process by focussing on the final product. This also devalues the experience of the students as it hinders their own unique individual expression and could also have a detrimental impact on their motivation to participate and their overall learning experience (LaJevic, 2013).

This contrasts with the findings of Tischler (2015) who determines that the appealing qualities of art may have more than an immediate positive impact on the observer and environment but could lead to more long-term improvement on the setting (Tischer, 2015). Although the use of art product for display purposes may have a place in the primary school, Hickman (2005) states that it is fundamental that students should have an opportunity through creative activity to express themselves, not only imaginatively but in an truly original outcome. The assessment as to the perceived worth or value of their outcomes, is made by the individual artist (Hickman, 2005). This view is supported by Tarr who emphasises that exhibiting or “presentation of artifacts provides an important aspect of feedback for the creators of the work” (Tarr, 1996, p.305). A study by Douglas and Jaquith (2009) considers the importance of exhibiting students work and states that through careful consideration and participation of the children in the selection, this exhibition of the work and the feedback that ensues ultimately adds to the value of the artwork.

This may further ameliorate the learner’s confidence and the opportunity to experience success and it is an example of how the finished product may be used to develop self-esteem and consequently boost morale, thereby giving the child an opportunity to take ownership of their art production in a joyful way (Douglas and Jaquith, 2009). As noted in the literature, “visual arts education” that “focuses on creating original visual art products” (van de Kamp, Admiraal, & Rijlaarsdam, 2016, p. 1) would certainly be something for teachers and students to aspire to and although their research project was based on secondary school education, the statement could easily transfer to the primary curriculum which also incorporates a design element.

Spendlove developed a triadic scheme in his study on emotion as a theme in a creative educational experience and the importance and influence it has on the three domains of person, process and product.



*Figure 2.1: Triadic Scheme (Spendlove, 2007, p. 158)*

Spendlove states that within each domain there is an emotional influence, the person domain requires emotional resilience, as embarking on an original creative endeavour involves risk taking, a degree of uncertainty and the process involves an emotional investment by the learner with no guarantee of a successful outcome (Spendlove, 2007). The product domain considers the output of both person and process domain although it may not always result in a physical product it could result “in new thinking, feeling or the development of a new skill, attitude, concept or knowledge” (Spendlove, 2007, p. 161).

The next section will discuss the strand unit making art which includes art, craft and design.

### **Making Art in Visual Arts Education**

The making art strand unit of the visual arts curriculum highlighted in Figure 2.2. incorporates all six strands of the visual arts curriculum. An extensive study by Winner, Goldstein, & Vincent-Lancrin (2013), on the benefits of art education relating to making art specifically,

indicated there was evidence that those who participated in visual arts were found to have increased geometrical reasoning, observational skills and reflection when compared to those who did not. It concluded that whilst there is evidence that it is “a different way of understanding than the sciences and other academic subjects” and this is “an arena without right and wrong answers, they free students to explore and experiment” (Winner et al., 2013, p. 265).

Visual Arts Curriculum		
Strands	Strand unit: Making art	Strand unit: Looking and responding
Drawing	Making drawings	Looking and responding
Paint and Colour	Painting	Looking and responding
Print	Making Prints	Looking and responding
Clay	Developing form in clay	Looking and responding
Construction	Making constructions	Looking and responding
Fabric and Fibre	Creating in fabric and fibre	Looking and responding

Figure 2.2. Layout of the visual arts curriculum (Gol, 1999b)

Another major study commissioned by the Arts Council on the *Growing Up In Ireland* study provided an insight into access to arts and cultural experiences of children; the study found that those who were engaged in drawing or painting at a younger age presented with fewer socio-emotional difficulties, helping them to form and maintain better relationships with others (Smyth, 2016). This report by Smyth (2016) found that participation across the arts contributed to many benefits ranging from improved attitude towards school, enhanced self-esteem, reduced anxiety, happier dispositions, better academic outcomes and children who engaged in art activities in school were more likely to partake in outside school art

activities. ReCreates' *Heads Up* project examined the use of recycled materials as a media for visual arts, artists and educators worked collaboratively in a variety of educational settings (Connolly et al., 2016). The study findings from the process-focussed approaches adopted were; an increased awareness of environmental care, more inclusive interactions between students, promoted creativity and integration of learning across different fields (Connolly et al., 2016).

**Design.** Design is an important element of the visual arts curriculum (Gol, 1999b) which promotes reflexion, innovation, artistic expression, and originality, it may be defined as active planning, inventing, making and relating parts to a whole in either two- or three-dimensional media. It is not an isolated discipline but underlies every art and craft activity, whether the end in view is expressive communication or the creation of a useful object" (Gol, 1999c, p. 15).

It is interesting that, according to the research study conducted by the *Creativity and the Arts in the Primary School*, children today have less occasion to experience processes from beginning to end, and their only knowledge of product may be observing marketed objects on supermarket shelves (INTO, 2009). This, in itself, would denote that there is a requirement within visual arts education in the primary classroom, not only for ideation, but for the promotion of the design element and the further development into an actual product. According to the INTO (2009), it is not enough to observe the finished product, children should be given the opportunity to experience the product to develop the skills, discipline and resolve that are essential for achievement. Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan (2007) investigated the link from process to product by asking students to observe their final product as an outcome, the connection between their thought process and the physical act

of making art, then they reviewed the choices taken by the artist and the impact this had on the product. This investigation found that “[c]ritiques often employ a reverse engineering technique in which students and teachers try to understand how something was made; identify the effects of different decisions, marks, and techniques; and imagine how the work could have been made differently” (Hetland et al., 2007, p. 28). The value of the product in this instance is not based solely on the final outcome, indeed regardless of the success or failure of the art product, it represents a strategy for reviewing the process taken thereby informing future decisions and future artistic endeavours (Hetland et al., 2007).

**Craft.** The Visual Arts Primary Curriculum describes craft as noteworthy, stating that children should be introduced to a wide range of craft processes, which in turn aids them develop an appreciation of the aesthetic and workmanship involved (GoI, 1999c). It is imperative that children should also become familiar with traditional Irish crafts, especially with existing local crafts: visits to craft workshops or from craftspeople to the school, could inspire young artists to experiment with and develop their own craft skills (GoI, 1999c).

A primary school initiative promoting creativity entitled *CRAFTed: Learning skills for life* (Design & Crafts Council Ireland, 2019), where artists or craftspeople work with teacher and primary school children in a classroom environment, “facilitates teachers and children in exploring their creativity, introducing the dynamic world of craft, design and making techniques into the classroom” (p. 3). This initiative has received positive feedback in terms of skills and concepts development and was developed by the Design & Craft Council of Ireland (DCCI, 2019) in partnership with the Association of Teacher Education Centres Ireland (ATECI). Each participating class works collaboratively on a creative project that introduces them to the world of craft and design which facilitates the development of the important

skills of thinking creatively and problem solving (DCCI, 2019). This culminates in an exhibition by all participating schools, thereby facilitating the strand unit looking and responding, reflecting on their own work and that of other schools. The next section will examine the look and responding strand unit of the visual arts curriculum in more detail.

### **Looking and Responding in Visual Arts Education**

The Irish primary visual arts curriculum prescribes that at least half of the time dedicated to visual arts should be dedicated to looking and responding; this may be an observation of one's own art production or that of others, be they fellow students, or artwork by artists (GoI, 1999c). The Northern Ireland Curriculum guidelines in contrast refer only to looking at or responding to a variety of artworks produced by artists, illustrators, designers or craftspeople, limiting the artworks to professional artists. It states that a piece of work could be a stimulus for an art lesson where children respond by talking about, making personal responses or their interpretations on a piece of work (Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, 2020). Looking and responding to art work is described in the literature as an instrument that is developed over time by the educator who promotes the use of the language of art and the skill of discussion as a mode of responding to art and it requires patience, practice and time (Burnham & Kai-Kee, 2011). This encourages skills development of not only talk and discussion but critical thinking skills, ability to problem solve, and new ways of thinking which contribute to the overall development of the student (Hickman, 2005).

The strand unit, looking and responding was reported by the Inspectorate as being under-utilised in primary classrooms following an evaluation the Inspectorate conducted on the implementation of visual arts (NCCA, 2005). An extensive study by Flannery (2010)

concluded with recommendations that the current visual arts curriculum should be revised elevating the importance of the looking and responding strand unit, drawing our attention to the visual representation of looking and responding as outlined in Figure 2.3., this visual guide serves to explicate how the looking and responding strand unit which he states works in tandem with art production, may be utilised in the visual arts curriculum as a stimulus, for development and evaluation purposes (Flannery, 2010).

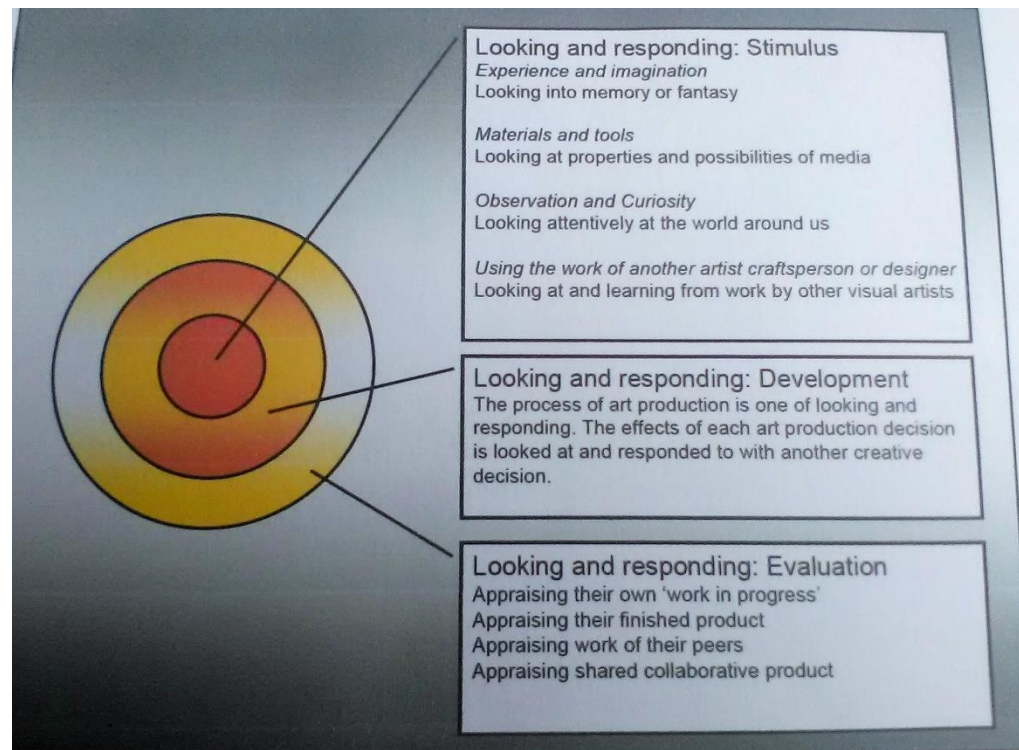


Figure 2.3: *Re-presenting the lesson structure (Flannery, p.343, 2010).*

A recent curriculum evaluation on visual arts also recommended that self-reflection and peer to peer discussion be utilised to augment students' learning in visual arts (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). These two strategies may be engaged in looking and responding strand unit, thereby providing opportunities for children to assess their own work and the work of other artists through observation skills (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). This is supported by the literature of Freedman & Stuhr (2004) who state that "creative production and critical reflection are not separate in art they are mutually



dependent” (Freedman & Stuhr, 2004, p.825) and indeed when we look at any object or picture, it is the viewer who makes sense of it and adds meaning to it, confirming that art appreciation is a very individual and personal response. The evaluation element of the looking and responding strand unit may also facilitate assessment, which is reviewed in the next section.

### **Assessment in Visual Arts Education**

The visual arts teacher guidelines state that “assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning processes in visual arts education” (Gol, 1999, p. 20). Assessment is essential to teaching and learning and this is as important in the visual arts curriculum, as with any other subject. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate a student’s progress and achievement to ensure the acquisition of the skills being taught and also to assess that the teaching methods implemented are successful. This ongoing review where “teachers continuously assess children’s learning and their own teaching strategies, informally, as they observe, discuss and make judgements on work (Gol, 1999b, p. 20)” assists in planning for future lessons and helps to promote successful outcomes for all students.

Based in the United States, the National Endowment for the Arts, (2005) investigated the assessment practice in the United States and acknowledged that respondents indicated a need for certified arts educators or teaching artists, rather than general education teachers, to be charged with instructing and assessing student learning in the arts. It is also important to note that this review determined that visual art encompasses both process and final product, and that both may be assessed, thus acknowledging the equal importance of both in visual arts education (NEA, 2005).

Creativity may be enhanced by the formative approach to assessment which involves the active participation on the part of both teachers and students through questions and answers, peer and self-assessment, project work rather than the summative assessment approach where the emphasis is on the end result rather than the learning they have acquired through active participation with the creative process: Formative assessment may be utilised by the educator as a means of promoting creative teaching and learning, contrasting with summative assessment which may detract from it (Craft, Jeffrey & Liebling, 2007). Jesson (2012) argues the case for self-assessment in visual arts, advocating that children should be assisted in developing critical skills and enabled to view the positives of any outcome of making art whether it is based on the creative idea, the process or the artefact. Therefore, any value attributed to this work should not be based solely on the end product as this reflects part of the creative process and could be the starting point or inspiration for their next creative endeavour (Jesson, 2012). However, a study by Keane & Griffin (2015) states that although research promotes self-assessment as a motivational tool, promoting learner participation and responsibility, the accurate reflection of performance is dependent on the student and factors such as age and gender may impact the validity of any results. A triangulation of self, peer and teacher assessment could therefore facilitate a more realistic appraisal (Keane & Griffin, 2015) and help to overcome any limitations that exist. Assessment at its most essential level provides us with information on what is working and not working (O'Sullivan & Rogers, 2016).

Assessment Guidelines for schools by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) recommends the use of portfolios as an assessment tool, to include work samples in visual arts although this provides a picture of an outcome rather than considering the entire

endeavour from beginning to end (NCCA, 2007). Hard copy portfolios or e-portfolios were both acceptable although e-portfolios were considered to be in line with the NCCA's guidelines for ICT in the classroom promoting the use of technology for learning (NCCA, 2004), allowing the student to actively engage in the self-assessment process whilst reviewing their own work orally through talk and discussion with the teacher, thereby giving an insight into the thought process of the student (NCCA, 2007).

Avci (2012) found that in a world that is rapidly changing, digital technologies may provide educators with a solution to our need to assess and evaluate the learning process in visual arts, and recommended e-portfolios as a potential tool in this process (Avci, 2012), E-portfolios were reported as being user friendly, convenient, and as providing storage for a vast amount and array of information e.g. images, sounds and video. This view is supported by a recent curriculum evaluation on visual arts which recommended the use of digital portfolios for assessment as they provide a permanent record of students' work and are easily accessible (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a).

Teacher observation is one of the most effective forms of assessment utilised in the primary classroom, helping to evaluate our students and our teaching, thus enabling and providing appropriate and timely intervention if required (GoI, 1999a). This constitutes a more effective method to appraise a process given the constraints of time and class size, however In order to attain the most accurate picture, a number of different types of assessment techniques may be employed; teacher observation is primarily used to assess the process, how the student develops the skills being taught, and their active engagement in the activity. (GoI, 1999c)

A comparatively recent study called *Aligning Assessment, Learning and Teaching in Curricular Reform and Implementation* reviewed current assessment practices and noted that teacher observation was a valuable assessment practice that was integrated into the teaching and learning of both students and teachers, this form of assessment is an invaluable insight that helps support the learners and the learning that takes place in the classroom and is a valuable source of information that can be passed on to other stakeholders (Lysaght, Scully, Murchan, O'Leary, & Shiel, 2019).

In the following section integration and the use of thematic planning incorporating the visual arts and the potential for the inclusion of art product will be discussed.

### **Curriculum Integration in Visual Arts Education**

Visual arts and the integration of learning across other subjects in the curriculum and the transfer of learning are considered core principles of learning in the primary curriculum (Gol, 1999a, p. 16). There are infinite opportunities for integration in visual arts especially in the early years' classroom where Aistear, The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework has been introduced in recent years (NCCA, 2009) providing a thematic approach through play-based learning. Teaching children the skills to "express themselves creatively and imaginatively" is one of the expressed aims of *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009, p. 35) facilitating students' education through a range of integrative approaches leading to a more profound type of learning. Bacon in her report *Curriculum Integration*, counsels that for effective outcomes the teacher must be skilled not only in terms of their knowledge of the curricula subjects but also in their pedagogical knowledge, if these prerequisites are met, then the learning outcomes should be meaningful and profound (Bacon, 2018).

One of the benefits attributed to visual arts integration in a study by Donovan & Pascale (2004) is the variety of strategies it offers the educator, thus enabling the engagement of the student regardless of learning styles, ability, ethnicity, or linguistic background (Donovan & Pascale, 2004) and visual arts may on occasion serve as an additional teaching methodology (Machado & Stoltz, 2016), helping to reach students who may find it difficult to communicate linguistically. Thematic teaching cultivates the imagination where ideas for art occur naturally, given the freedom, children develop these ideas and produce their own individual artistic responses, creating the most rewarding results (Barnes, 2015).

Fox & Lee (2013) conducted a research project investigating the impact of observational drawing on information retention was conducted on forty-two kindergarten children in an urban school in southwestern United States. Children in this setting were encouraged to draw to communicate a response to something or express their feelings, however, specifically in observational drawing in Science based on what they saw the findings confirmed that children who drew, retained the information for longer than those who did not (Fox & Lee, 2013). This is also supported by Hardiman who advocates that arts-integrated learning activities provide a structure that engages students whilst allowing them to be creative, but with a focus and a purpose and with the additional benefit of retaining what they learned because they have experienced it (Hardiman, 2016).

One of the recommendations made during the implementation of the new Primary Language Curriculum is that to promote language learning, teachers should teach another subject or aspects of it through Irish in schools where English is the medium of instruction. This is described as the Content and Language Integrated Learning approach (CLIL), visual arts

was one subject that was proposed as suitable for teaching through Irish; the NCCA (2019b) advises that whatever the chosen subject for CLIL, it should be agreed upon as a whole-school initiative.

Visual arts was utilised as a behaviour management strategy by Kennedy (2017) in a study to examine staff perceptions on their experiences of trialling knitting beside pupils who have proved to be resistant to more routine behaviour support strategies. Kennedy noted that this small study indicated that the benefits included lower stress levels, improved communication between staff and students and an overall calming effect on students whilst engaged in either observing or participating in the process. An unexpected outcome reported that an interest and curiosity in the end product increased the level of motivation and engagement in the process (Kennedy, 2017). In contrast another study by Dominick (2014) to explore the impact of knitting on at risk students as an expressive art therapy reported findings that students were focussed on the end product rather than the process of knitting. The researcher reported that not enough time had been spent on developing the skills, which on reflection should have been taught on an individual basis prior to joining the group (Dominick, 2014).

A recent report on Curriculum Integration in New Zealand detailed the benefits to students, observed by educators, which included increased levels of engagement and attainment through play, project and inquiry based learning, although the teachers felt additional teacher training was required in the areas of planning and assessment to facilitate implementation and delivery of curriculum integration (McDowall & Hipkins, 2019). Whilst the case for the inclusion of visual arts into the integrated subjects of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) was explored by Bequette & Bequette, there were perceived

benefits given the design element and problem based learning that exists across all the disciplines. The authors recommended that further research would be warranted prior to any introduction of Science, Technology, Art, Engineering, and Maths(STEAM). Although integration has many positives if implemented correctly, Bequette & Bequette(2012) consider the negative implications of curriculum integration, “Any time subject areas are integrated, there is a serious risk that one area will be paid lip service, counted as being covered, but in fact not honoured” (Bequette & Bequette, 2012, p46).

A study carried out over a twenty year period highlighted the relationship that teachers have with art, Smith-Shank (2014) identified that not all primary school teachers are at ease teaching visual arts, this presents additional challenges when it comes to integration, using visual art to support other subject areas or to reinforce ideas. The next section will discuss the role and influence of the primary school teacher in visual arts education.

### **The Role of the Teacher in Visual Arts Education**

The importance of the role and influence of the educator in delivering a high-quality visual arts experience to their students cannot be over-emphasised (Hattie, 2012). The primary school may be the only experience presented to some children to engage in making and learning about art and, as these are potentially our future artists, it is vital that they receive the opportunity to engage with the best quality learning experiences in visual art. Arts Education Partnership, & National Art Education Association (2019) have published a document called Visual Arts Matter: How Visual Arts Education Helps Students Learn, Achieve and Thrive which highlights the benefits of visual arts engagement on students; boosting their academic achievements, cultivating skills for learning and improving their educational experiences (AEP & NAEA, 2019).

Sharp (2004) highlights the need for a primary classroom to be a creative space facilitating the artistic development of students who are actively involved in their own learning where they are given time to develop their own creative projects (Sharp, 2004).

Eisner recognises that the teacher can have a transformative influence on the art experience of the child, promoting a positive environment that fosters the children's ability to learn, and that this environment encourages independence, skills development, collaborative learning offering a safe secure place where risk taking is encouraged, learning from outcomes, whether they are intentional or not (Eisner, 2002). Goldberg (2017) emphasises the importance of the role of the educator considering that "in teaching and learning, one thing is always for certain: students are at the core of everything we do" (Goldberg, 2017, p. 4) where teachers evaluate their students, reflecting and reviewing their own approaches and instruction to meet the needs of every child.

Having noted the importance of the role of the teacher in the effective delivery of a high quality visual arts programme, the next section will consider the teacher and professional development in visual arts education.

### **Visual Arts Education and Teacher Professional Development**

It is important to note that teachers as individuals may have very different abilities and aptitudes with regards to visual arts, but even the most accomplished visual arts teacher would not consider themselves an expert on every aspect of art as it is too vast a subject (Taylor, 1992). In 2016 the Teaching Council of Ireland published a report on *Cosán*, a framework designed to promote and acknowledge teachers' learning. According to the report on *Cosán*, it is up to the individual teacher to educate themselves by engaging with



professional development and ongoing personal research to ensure that they meet their own needs and that of their students (TCI, 2016).

Thornton (2013) states that although newly qualified primary teachers may have good general knowledge and identify more with teaching as a process, they do not have the same specialist understanding of all the subjects studied as that of their secondary counterparts. Therefore the primary teachers appear more confident in their role as a teacher but less confident as subject specialists, whereas the reverse can be said of the secondary teacher (Thornton, 2013). Holt (1997) finds that when compared with specialist teacher, the generalist teacher can provide more effective visual arts education given their in-depth knowledge of their students and their ability to tailor it to their interests, thereby enabling them to develop their creativity and achieving successful outcomes.

A recent research report called Exploring Teacher-Artist Partnership as a Model of CPD for Supporting & Enhancing Arts Education in Ireland found that *“both teacher and artist skills, knowledge and understandings can complement each other very successfully and most powerfully where meaningful, sustained partnerships are invested in”* (Kenny & Morrissey, 2016, p. 85). This report also noted that participants recommended that this initiative should be available to all primary schools, given the significant benefits which were experienced by not only the artist and teacher partnership, but also by the students, schools and the local community (Kenny & Morrissey, 2016).

### **Summary**

In conclusion, the review of the literature conducted in this chapter has highlighted the limited research related specifically to the value of art product in visual arts education, consequently this dearth in the literature supports my decision to undertake this study

exploring the value of art product in visual arts in the Irish primary school. This chapter reviewed literature on the following topics: Visual Arts Primary Curriculum in Ireland, Process and Product in Visual Arts Education, Making Art in Visual Arts Education, Looking and Responding in Visual Arts Education, Assessment in Visual Arts Education, Curriculum Integration in Visual Arts Education, The Role of the Teacher in Visual Arts Education and Visual Arts Education and Teacher Professional Development.

The visual arts curriculum was designed to endorse creativity and to allow the individual to express their own uniqueness rather than copying a template or teacher's product (Gol, 1999c). In attempting to promote this new development in the curriculum, it became process orientated with less emphasis on the art product or outcomes (Hickey, 2005). It is interesting to note that through the art making process, self-expression, the individuality of the child's expression is brought to fruition through their unique art product and only the child as the artist has the autonomy to judge their work and to say what it represents (Jolley, 2010).

Hoffmann-Davis (2008) states that visual arts is unlike many other subjects as we participate on an emotional level when we engage with it, whether it is through the making of it, reflecting on or responding to it, whether that is by looking at it or our appreciation of it. As a child engages with the process of art making, it is the product that provides a picture or record of the stages of development (Hoffmann-Davis, 2008).

The literature reviewed in this chapter suggests that the teacher has an influential role to play in the delivery of the visual arts curriculum. Imagination and creativity are nurtured by looking at and responding to their own individual work and the work of others, thereby motivating the students to express themselves creatively. The evidence presented in

this chapter seems to affirm the findings of *Creativity and the Arts in the Primary School* report that “the visual arts curriculum should not be considered anti-product, it is saying that all good art products come about as a result of good processes” (INTO, 2009, p. 138).

The next chapter presents an outline of the research approach undertaken and provides justification for the chosen research methodology.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter describes and explains the research methods adopted, and the procedures used in the study by exploring the tools and the methodologies underpinning this research project.

The methodological approach taken in this study is based on a qualitative paradigm. The study incorporates interviews with individual primary school teachers, and focus group interviews with fifth and sixth class primary school students. This chapter includes information on the Research Approach Adopted, Research Questions, Sampling, Ethical Considerations, Data Protection, Research Tools, Data Collection and Data Analysis. Validity, Reliability, Triangulation, Researcher Positionality, Bias, Limitations and a Summary of the chapter.

#### **Stages of the Research**

For the purposes of this methodology chapter, I will adopt the five stages of a research project as outlined by (Cohen, Mannion, & Morrison, 2007, p.98):

**Stage 1:** Development and operationalisation: The initial stages of the study after the literature review, the research questions are drafted, deciding on a methodology approach and sampling.

**Stage 2:** Instrumentation and the piloting of the instruments: Developing the interview schedules for the teacher participants and student focus groups and piloting,

**Stage 3:** Data collection: Conducting the teacher participant interviews and student focus group interviews. Transcribing the interviews.

**Stage 4:** Data analysis and interpretation: Review transcripts, code and identify themes

**Stage 5:** Reporting: Compiling report on findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations. This will be outlined in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of the research study.

**Stage 1: Research approach**

At the outset of this study, a choice of the two methodologies or a combination of both, known as a mixed methods approach, were considered.” Qualitative research is distinguished from quantitative research in that quantitative research is concerned with frequency while qualitative research is concerned with abstract characteristics of events” (Kincheloe, 2002, p.188).

**Quantitative versus qualitative approach.** The merits of both the quantitative and the qualitative approach were explored based on their suitability to generate the data required to answer the research questions, taking into consideration the participants from whom the information was to be sourced (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative research was deemed to be the most appropriate method in this instance, as it offered opportunities to explore attitudes, behaviour and experiences (Dawson, 2009). An exploratory study seeks to investigate a comparatively unexplored subject, to discover new knowledge or concepts (Denscombe, 2010). Exploratory studies are generally small-scale studies using a qualitative approach.

This is an exploratory qualitative study using a constructivist approach and its aim is to identify the perspectives of primary school teachers and primary school students on the value of art product in the Irish visual arts curriculum. A constructivist approach contends that humans have their own reality or true knowledge which cannot be separated from an individual’s feelings or the workings of their mind (Kelly, 2006). The aim of this research

study is reliant on the views of the participants based on their experiences and therefore the constructivist approach was deemed the most appropriate (Creswell, 2003).

Another aim of this research was to be as efficient as possible in this a small-scale study whilst yielding the best possible results, and was guided by the research questions. This necessitated listening to, and gaining an in-depth insight, into the lived experiences of teachers and students on the value of product in visual arts in the Irish primary school (Neuman, 2014). Data for this study was garnered through open ended questions through one-to-one interviews and focus-group interviews. The decision to include both primary school teachers and primary school students in this research was guided by the importance of teachers as researchers listening to the voice of the student to inform our practice (Kincheloe, 2003).

### **Research Questions**

This project focuses on the perspectives of primary school teachers and primary school students on the value of art product in visual arts education by exploring the following two research questions:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?
2. What are students' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?

### **Sampling**

Cohen et al., (2007) states that a smaller group of individuals may be used provided they are representational of the total population from which it is drawn. Convenience sampling is described as a sampling approach which is representative of the group itself

(Cohen et al., 2007). However, as this is an exploratory study, it is hoped that further studies will take a more random sampling approach to offset this limitation (Denscombe, 2010).

**Teachers.** Therefore, it was incumbent on me to enhance the validity through careful purposeful sampling (Denscombe, 2007) and to this end, I earnestly enlisted teachers who worked in both rural and urban schools. The teacher participants were all teaching in primary schools across different class settings, from infants up to the senior end of the primary school and, also in a special education setting. The criteria adopted strived to provide a true reflection of the whole population, albeit based on a much smaller number of participants.

**Students.** Access to the student sample group was facilitated through a previously established relationship that I had with the school principal. The timeline for the data collection process was concise, the sample student group of fifth and sixth class students from a co-educational primary school were readily accessible to me. The decision to target the senior end of primary school was based on their having experienced at least six years of visual arts education and due to their age and level of ability, I considered them suitably able to articulate their views, more so than their younger counterparts.

### **Ethical considerations**

When conducting research, there are many ethical issues that require deliberation including the initial permission to proceed with the study and adhering to data protection legislation. Prior to the commencement of the research, I was required to submit a research ethics application to the Marino Institute of Education Ethics Committee (MERC). The request for ethical approval is fundamental to all good research studies (Denscombe, 2010) and the data collection element of this study could only be instigated upon approval. This was a

detailed and complex process and required due care and attention. One important ethical implication that required careful deliberation was that children were unable to give informed consent, although assent is acceptable, and parental permission is obligatory (Department of Youth and Child Affairs, 2012). All of the parents and students received an information letter and consent/assent forms (included in the appendices). It was essential that consent and assent was received for student participation in the research and the inclusion of student artwork in the study. The students' participation was on a voluntary basis; students and parents were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any point, and that withdrawal from the study would have no detrimental or negative impact on them. My moral and ethical responsibility as researcher was noted, especially the disparity in power where the research is teacher-led, and all appropriate care and attention was exercised during the data collection process (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

All the potential teacher participants received a copy of the interview schedule at least seven days prior to the actual interview (Drever, 2003), to be reviewed at their leisure and giving them the opportunity to seek clarification on any questions or issues that arose. Having been furnished with the information letter and consent form by email, following their verbal agreement to participate, all the teacher participants were able and willing to give informed consent in writing prior to the interviews.

### **Data Protection**

Anonymity and confidentiality were paramount to the involvement of the participants and all information that was duly imparted. All names, locations and, descriptions were changed, and pseudonyms were adopted throughout to protect their identity. Guided by data protection legislation, the protection of the personal data and privacy of the sample



group participants' data was maintained by transcribing the interviews myself. I used a password-protected computer, and secured all the recording equipment, transcripts and sourced data in a locked filing cabinet. All the collected data will be retained until July 4th, 2021 when it will be destroyed. Should anyone withdraw from the study, all personal information or data that had been acquired in relation to this investigation will be destroyed immediately.

The literature review served as the starting point for this piece of research as it provided a road map for the study. This review helped to inform the design of the interview and focus group questions and in the latter stages it contributed to the data analysis (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Following the literature review, I noted a gap in the literature regarding art product in visual art, and this further emphasised the importance of the potential contribution of not only primary school teachers but also primary school children to this research study. The inclusion of both groups provided a more complete picture on the perspectives of the whole school community.

## **Stage 2: Research Tools**

The tools for data collection were comprised of semi structured interviews with primary school teachers and three one-off focus groups with primary school students. Each of these will be discussed individually in greater detail in the following section.

## **Pilot Study**

The pilot study represented an opportunity for a trial run of the strategies that were to be employed for the research study: comprising of a semi structured interview with a primary school teacher and a focus group interview with four primary school students. This ensured that the chosen instruments were fit for purpose, and consequently, could provide

the answers needed for the research questions (Dawson, 2009). This preparation proved to be essential, and, although time consuming, it helped to frame the questions and provide resultant data which was then analysed, even though this was a relatively small sample. The pilot study took place during the last week in January.

**Pilot teacher participant interview.** In this instance, the primary teacher interview was one of the main data collection instruments, thus the pilot-study provided an essential insight into the phenomenon studied and provided the interviewer with hands on interviewing experience. The pilot teacher interview provided invaluable experience of the interview process and an opportunity to amend certain interview questions, thereby, ensuring issues that arose were rectified and not repeated in the main study (Drever, 2003). The preliminary findings were interesting and served to inform and improve on the instruments, however this data was not used in the actual study.

**Pilot student focus group.** The pilot conducted with the focus group students consisted of an art activity with the group, which was then followed by the focus group interview. The interview was audio-recorded to ensure correct use of the device. This experience proved to be particularly informative, as it transpired that the children in the focus group thought visual arts comprised of only drawing and painting. These are the two strands that are most frequently used in the primary school, so, this may explain their misconception regarding the visual arts curriculum. This pilot focus group interview also assisted in determining if the instrument was fit for purpose and had the ability to measure what it had been chosen to do (Cohen et al., 2007). Lessons learned at this stage of the process saved time and a potential disaster at a later stage. Informed by these findings, I reviewed the proposed methodology, thus ensuring all the focus group participants had the

opportunity to engage with all the strands of the curriculum prior to conducting the focus group interviews.

**Permission.** Following the approval of the Marino Institute of Education Ethics Committee (MERC) to proceed with the study, signed consent was obtained from the Principal and Board of management of the participating school. Prior to the data collection process potential respondents were invited to participate. Written permission was obtained from all the participants, this process involved; a letter of information and consent form drafted for the Principal and Board of Management (Appendices A and B), parents of the primary school pupils (Appendices C and D), and, the participating primary school teachers (Appendices E and F). The letter of information outlined in detail all the relevant information on the study and ensured that everybody knew exactly what participation in the study involved and were therefore giving informed permission (Cohen et al., 2007).

Having sought and received the consent in writing from the Principal of the school, the letters of permission were sent out to the parents. All consent forms had to be returned by 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2020, signed by the parents stating whether permission to participate was given or not, thus ensuring that no child was overlooked, and serving as confirmation that all parents had received the information. My first step was to explain to the students in simple language the aim of the study, explaining their involvement and responding to any questions that arose as recommended by Cohen et al., (2007). A signed consent form giving approval for the children to participate was sourced from parents of students willing to take part, this outlined the purpose of the research study and actions to be taken. Following this, a child-friendly letter of information and assent form was presented and read aloud, and any questions that arose were answered orally and the children then signed the assent form

(Appendices G and H). All forms were written in simple language and printed on cream paper. The Dyslexia Association of Ireland recommend Comic Sans as a font style and in line with their recommendations all letters and forms were written in simple language using short sentences and printed on cream paper (Dyslexia Association of Ireland, 2020). Although English was the students first language some students presented with literacy difficulties. After the initial stages, everything was conducted orally, but I remained heedful of any comprehension difficulties whilst engaged in the research.

### **Interviews**

According to (Kelly, 2006) the process of interviewing is a more natural process of collecting data than asking people to complete a questionnaire and affords the researcher the opportunity to interact with the interviewee.

**Advantages of semi-structured interviews.** Interviews provide a more complete picture; the interviewee has a better understanding of the process, as the researcher is present and either party may seek clarification, or more detail if required (Drever, 2003). This one-to-one interview approach ensures it remains conversational gathering information regarding preferences, views, practices, motivation, and situations (Dawson, 2009). The semi-structured interviews offered some flexibility in relation to the order of the questions, providing verbal prompts for additional information or clarification if required (Drever, 2003).

**Disadvantages of semi-structured Interviews.** This type of data collection can be time consuming to administer given that it may take up to an hour to conduct the interview, followed by transcribing the data, which given the level of detail required is extremely time

consuming and finally, the data analysis also requires a substantial investment of time (Drever, 2003).

The decision to use semi-structured interviews was taken primarily because I considered it the most effective data collection instrument to answer the research questions. I had also worked in recruitment prior to teaching, therefore I had experience interviewing and felt at ease with the process. The interview schedule (Appendix I) guided the formal nature of the interview ensuring all topics were covered: it commenced with questions regarding teaching experience and teacher training to begin the flow of the interview and help put the interviewee at ease (Drever, 2003).

For the purposes of this study I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven primary teachers. The design of the interview schedule involved drafting, and redrafting, to ensure that the qualitative questions would provide responses not only to the research questions, but also a wider inquiry that would capture the experiences and perspectives of the individual interviewees, as recommended by (Agee, 2009) whom determined good qualitative questions can be important tools of discovery. Interview questions posed were informed by the findings of the literature review, although, it is important to note that the literature review process revealed a gap in the literature pertaining to art product in visual art education. The interview schedule is included in the appendices.

### **Focus Group**

**Advantages of focus groups.** Focus groups generate a wide range of responses in one session, are reported as being enjoyable for the participants, and the group setting stimulates ideas and does not discriminate against participants with literacy difficulties (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

**Disadvantages of focus groups.** The number of questions is limited, given the number of participants and therefore it may be difficult to manage, some participants may dominate and influence other members of the group and not everyone may contribute (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

The focus group was selected as the data could be collected within the time frame and provided a valuable insight into the students' views on visual arts. There were two stages to this process of data collection with the student focus groups. Informed by the findings from the pilot, I undertook six art lessons with the children, to ensure all strands of the visual art curriculum were covered. The advantage of this approach was to guarantee they had experienced a high-quality art lesson on each of the strands and, facilitating talk and discussion around their art making. The lesson plans for the visual arts activities are included in the appendices (Appendices J, K, L, M, N and O). A sample of images of the art product generated during these art activities is included in this chapter. The focus group questions are included in the appendices (Appendix P).



*Figure 3.1: Art product generated in drawing lesson (Personal collection).*



*Figure 3.2: Art product generated in Fabric and fibre lesson (Personal collection).*



*Figure 3.3: Art product generated in printing lesson (Personal collection).*

### **Stage 3: Data Collection Process**

The data collection process is integral to the type and the quality of data collected, as it is the method utilised in research which defines the data or the information that is gathered (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The aim of this research project was to understand the perspectives of primary school teachers and primary school students regarding art product in visual arts. There were two distinct stages of data collection in this project: semi structured

interviews with teacher participants and student focus groups. The timetable for the data collection process commenced on the 7<sup>th</sup> February and was completed by the 19<sup>th</sup> February. Data collection was to be completed by the midterm break and this was achieved by the availability and willing co-operation of all the participants.

**Student focus groups.** Sixteen children: five males and eleven females aged between ten and twelve years of age, participated in three focus groups, comprising of two groups of five students and one group of six. Each student focus group was recorded using a digital voice recorder and subsequently transcribed. Field notes were also taken as recommended by Cohen et al., (2007) which contributed to and facilitated a greater insight into the process and the additional benefit that it provided clarity during the transcription process.

**Teacher participant interviews.** The interviews were conducted face-to-face at a meeting place of the interviewee's preference which in this instance, was at their school, and all subsequent interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder. Each interview was conducted outside of school hours and, took approximately thirty minutes. I transcribed each interview on the day as this informed and enhanced my interview skills guided by Drever (2006) who advised that after the interview the transcripts were checked for accuracy and this process was repeated several times.

#### **Stage 4: Data Analysis**

I transcribed all the interviews which helped me to familiarise myself with the data. As recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006), qualitative research transcripts were examined and the collected data analysed and coded for thematic analysis. These were divided into two groups; the data collected from the teacher interviews and the student focus groups, to facilitate the coding. Once this phase was completed it was then possible to identify patterns



or themes, collate the data into the themes that had been identified review the themes and re-analyse all the data, refining the themes or patterns. Data analysis steps taken, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) , are summarised and outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

*Six Step Approach to Thematic Analysis.*

<b>Six Steps for Thematic Analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006).</b>		
1	Data	Transcribe, read and re-read data to identify opening ideas
2	Initial codes	Adopt a systematic approach to code the data set as a whole
3	Identify themes	Collect all related codes to each potential theme
4	Review themes	Review coding and themes of entire data set
5	Definition	Each theme is refined, definitions created, and the story revealed
6	Produce report	This forms the final analysis, extracts refer back to research question and literature. Analysis report is then produced.

Finally, the analysis is collated and the findings presented along with extracts from the data collected whilst referring back to sources in the literature review and the research question.

**Validity.** Qualitative studies seek validity and authenticity as we explore the lived experiences of the study participants to provide a truthful account of their perspectives (Neuman, 2014). Cohen et al., (2007) states that validity is achieved where the data collection tools are fit for purpose and their ability to generate the data required to answer the research questions. As previously mentioned the semi-structured interviews and focus

groups were chosen as the most effective tools available given the size and timeframe of this exploratory study.

**Reliability.** Reliability dictates that were the same research repeated, the results would be consistent thus ensuring the results are reliable and dependable (Neuman, 2014). The interview schedule was consistent throughout, the transcription was checked and rechecked for accuracy and vigilant coding was conducted to ensure results were reliable in line with Creswell (2003). The use of triangulation enhanced the credibility of the study (Cohen et al., 2007) and was achieved by targeting two different groups and using two different types of data collection tools, thereby increasing the reliability of the data generated for the purposes of this research.

**Triangulation.** Robson & McCartan (2016) state that whilst triangulation is relevant to the overall validity of the data there may be discrepancies between different sources. However, in this study, the rationale for the use of triangulation was also to provide a fuller picture, which, as Denscombe (2010) advocates, in social research may enhance the findings and the overall validity of the data.

**Researcher positionality.** Another important influence to note is my positionality given that the researcher is the “primary research instrument” (McCaslin, & Scott, 2003, p.453) in qualitative inquiry. Therefore a clear understanding and awareness of my positionality, is important to note, not only for the researcher but also for the reader (McCaslin & Scott, 2003).

Teaching visual arts in a primary school setting, informed by observations of my students, I acknowledge the importance of process but also recognise the joy and sense of achievement students experience from producing a personal tangible outcome. My own

experiences of enjoying craft activities like knitting, weaving and felting contribute to my belief that the product of art has a value. The decision to pursue this topic was guided by a motivation to acquire further knowledge on the perceived value art product in visual arts education. In the pursuit of this inquiry I made every effort to remain as unbiased as possible. My objective was not to confirm my own views but to inform myself based on the findings of the review of the literature and the perspectives of the research participants.

**Bias.** The “researcher as instrument” could potentially influence any qualitative research recording subjective views, these should be acknowledged and every effort made to counteract any partiality (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p171). Participant bias refers to giving responses that aim to please rather than their personal views whereas in the case of a disaffected participant the reverse may be true (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Throughout the collection process I stressed to all the participants that in my role of neutral researcher I was interested in recording their personal views and experiences. The purpose of this research was not to confirm my views but rather to investigate the lived experiences and opinions of primary school teachers and primary school students (Neuman, 2014). The challenge of remaining unbiased permeates throughout this study and should contribute to the overall reliability of the results.

**Limitations.** I think this study could be replicated given the existing variables and the challenge it presents, for future researchers seeking to affirm if the results are reproducible in other studies. As the fifth and sixth class student participants in this study originated from one primary school, their experiences and views may not be representative of the entire population whereas the teacher participants, were actively recruited for their experience of teaching in different class settings and schools. However, they were known to me and this

could have influenced their responses although I had emphasised to each teacher participant that the rationale for the study was to ascertain what they thought. All of the participants in this study were recruited by convenience sampling which as mentioned by Cohen et al., (2007) is representative of them as a group, rather than of the whole population. The use of convenience sampling in this small-scale exploratory study may have influenced the findings, therefore further larger scale studies using random sampling would offset these limitations.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented a comprehensive outline of the research approach undertaken and sought to vindicate the chosen research methodology. This chapter outlined: Research Approach Adopted, Research Questions, Sampling, Ethical Considerations, Data Protection, Research Tools, Data Collection and Data Analysis. Validity, Reliability, Triangulation, Researcher Positionality, Bias, and Limitations. The next chapter, therefore, moves on to present and discuss the findings from the qualitative data that was collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and through focus groups with students, connections are made in tandem between the findings and relevant literature reviewed for the study.

#### **Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this study is to explore perspectives of teachers and students on the value of art product in the Irish primary school visual arts curriculum. The visual arts curriculum is made up of six strands, namely; Drawing, Paint and colour, Printing, Clay, Construction and Fabric and fibre. Each strand incorporates the two strand units; making art, and looking and responding to art. This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative data that was collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and through focus groups with students. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven primary school teachers whom had experience teaching across a variety of classes and in different primary schools in Ireland. The three student focus groups were conducted with fifth and sixth class students from one primary school in order to facilitate the collection of data from a sample of the student population. I held visual art classes covering each of the strands of the visual arts curriculum for all of the children contributing to the focus groups

The data collected in this study was analysed using thematic analysis, informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) work. I transcribed the interviews, familiarised myself with the data, coded the transcripts, identified initial themes, reviewed the emerging themes to create an overall picture, refined and defined specific themes, labelled the themes, and finally produced the report based on findings from this data analysis. The data was collected and analysed in relation to the key focus of the study, which is, teachers' and students' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education.

The findings are presented and discussed in relation to the key research questions which are:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?
2. What are students' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?...

Connections are made between the findings and relevant literature reviewed for the study.

### **Teachers' Perspectives on the Value of Product in Primary School Visual Arts Education.**

All of the teacher participants recognised that art product may be described as the outcome or finished piece. However, there were a few teacher participants who reported the view that the learning acquired along the way might likewise be posited as an outcome or art product, as teacher participant Darragh illustrates:

Is product the end result or the thing they have in front of them when they're finished, or is the product the skills they have learned as they are coming to this end product, you know, is it the skills they are practising and developing as they build on that to create other products? I know there is a difference between the process and the product – there is the process and one could argue that the skills attained are a product as well (T5, L36-40).

This idea of art product culminating in a newly acquired skill, an original idea or knowledge, rather than only being defined as the end product or finished artefact, lends itself to the design element of the visual arts and is supported by the work of both Spendlove (2007) and Jesson (2012). Teacher participant Ciara defined the art product as a learning progression as described below:

I would say a product is anything that they create, it is not necessarily the final product or the perfect product but it's just basically taking them from a to b. They see the process through making something even if they think next time, I will do it differently because I've seen what I can do. (TI3, L28-30)

The key findings in relation to teachers' perspectives on the value of art product in the visual arts curriculum include Valuing Art Product as a Form of Personal Self-expression to be Treasured , Integrating Art Across the Curriculum, Providing a Source for Assessment, Support for the Looking and Responding Strand Unit, Providing a Source of Material for Exhibitions of Students' Artwork, Promoting Creativity, and Promoting Social and Emotional Development. Each of these key findings are expanded on in the sections that follow.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Form of Personal Self-expression to be Treasured**

The teacher participants unanimously agreed that they considered art product to be important to and for the children; this point is supported by the findings of Tarr (1996) whom, following her research study exploring six key areas for the creative making process, concurred that the making of an artefact was extremely important to the children participants in her study. In this study, teacher participant Fionnuala elucidated how the art product may be personal to and for the student artist as "the whole idea of producing something they can call their own. It brings out talent that they can't express elsewhere in the curriculum" (TI4, L68-71). In line with the visual arts curriculum (Gol, p.18,1999c) in making art the creative process was reported by teacher participants as where most of the student learning and skills development took place and therefore it was described as more important than product, or even the most important aspect of making art, by all the teacher participants. These views are reflected in teacher participant Ciara's comments: "I think the

more emphasis put on the process and practice the more likely it is the children will produce a better product eventually - it's not about first time product" (T13, L62-63). However, the visual arts teacher guidelines also state that "In making art, the process of making is as valuable as the final product (Gol, 1999c, p.11)" which would suggest that rather than the process being more important, as perceived by the teacher participants' opinions expressed, that, in fact, process and product are equally valuable.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Means of Integrating Art Across the Curriculum**

As detailed below, a number of points were reported in relation to the value of art product as a means of integrating art across the curriculum; these include supporting a thematic approach to learning, responding to other subjects, and promoting inclusive teaching and learning.

**Supporting a thematic approach to learning.** The primary school teacher participants described a variety of methodologies adopted in the delivery of the visual arts curriculum; it was taught both as a discrete, standalone subject, and integrated with other subjects. Several of the teacher participants stated that they find a thematic approach more effective in delivering the curriculum and incorporate visual arts using a cross-curricular approach; this is supported by the work of Barnes (2015) who states that when a thematic approach is used effectively, the experience becomes a deeper, more meaningful one, providing a more cohesive approach to learning.

A thematic approach is in line with Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework where play-based learning is reported as facilitating students' education through a range of integrative approaches and leads to a more profound type of learning in infant classes in primary schools (NCCA, 2009), as teacher participant Áine recounts, "I think that



children can explore all subject areas through art especially at the lower end of the primary school. I think there is great scope for language development and creativity and just finding out about all subject areas through doing the various aspects of art” (T16, L15-17).

**Responding to other subjects.** The use of visual arts as a methodology for teaching and learning through art integration is in keeping with the work of Goldberg (2017). The teacher participants contributed many examples of how art integration is incorporated across the curriculum; teacher participant Fionnuala gave an example of how art product may be used to demonstrate learning and evaluate what has been learned in other subjects:

It is a way of representing what has been learned. If you covered a topic you can make a drawing, make a sculpture so something that shows what you have learned.

It is a very useful way of responding to literature like very often you would make images from a poem and represent it through art. (T14, L102-105)

Visual arts was considered by the teacher interviewees to be quite unique in that it is one of the few subjects that can be integrated right across the primary curriculum, and teacher participant Ciara described how drawing was utilised at the junior end of the school to enhance literacy: “It supports their learning, we all use illustration for vocabulary, even getting them to draw, when you are doing phonics or sounds, getting them to draw a picture so they can remember what the word means” (T13, 75-77). This is supported by Fox and Lee’s (2013) study on the use of observational drawing as a methodology for retaining information for longer and the findings from this study confirmed that the use of drawing in science increases information retention.

**Supporting inclusive teaching and learning.** All of the teachers agreed that the integration of art across the curriculum through students’ creation of art product supported

different learning styles and abilities, offering opportunities for all children to succeed and even excel within the class, thereby facilitating a more inclusive environment, as presented by teacher participant Áine, “Children who aren’t academic find they can express themselves and explore subjects through art” (T16, L57-60). Teacher participant Fionnuala also highlighted how integration of visual arts may be helpful in teaching children with literacy difficulties: “The written does not always appeal to all children and to be able to respond through art would be very, very helpful to a lot of children” (T14, L99-100). These views are supported by the work of Donovan & Pascale (2004) who emphasised the versatile nature of integration as a teaching approach that may be adopted as a methodology thereby enabling educators to meet the diverse needs of all their students regardless of their ability or learning styles.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Source for Assessment**

The teacher participants considered art product as a valuable source for assessment as most of the teachers based their summative assessment on the final product. However, formative assessment; self-assessment and peer assessment were also utilised by the teacher participants. This supports the work of Craft, Jeffrey & Liebling, (2007) who advocate a more creative approach to assessment involving active participation of both students and educators. As detailed below, a number of points were reported in relation to the value of art product as a source for assessment; these include art product as a source for self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher assessment.

**Self-assessment.** Students looking at and reflecting on their art product was regarded as important by the teacher participants as it gave children an opportunity to reflect on and assess their own outcomes as declared by teacher participant Ciara:

We keep an art portfolio for the year so they can look back then and see their first pieces of art as compared to the end of year. For SALF (Self-Assessment Learning Folder), the children choose their favourite piece of work and they have to explain why they choose it and hopefully refer to some technical terms or progress they have made (T13, L45-48).

This finding is in line with a study conducted by Keane and Griffin (2015), although Keane and Griffin's (2015) study did highlight that self-assessment may not present an accurate or a true reflection of work due to the stage of development of the students leading the assessment, and, in light of these limitations, the authors recommend a triangulation of self, peer, and teacher assessment for the most accurate picture of achievements.

**Peer assessment.** Schönau (2012) highlights the importance of developing effective critical skills which in turn enhances positive peer interactions by promoting the skills of learning from one and other, observation, talk and discussion through peer assessment in visual arts as Teacher participant Gráinne notes:

On the day I would always have peer assessment and I would have the artists chair where I would bring them up in front of the class where they show their work and they talk about it. This allows their peers to ask the questions and it allows them to explain what they have done (T17, L64-67).

**Teacher assessment.** Portfolios were cited as a useful means of recording and retaining the visual art product for the academic year as recommended by the *Assessment Guidelines for Schools* NCCA (2007). None of the teacher interviewees reported using digital portfolios for assessment, although 3-D art product was reported as presenting challenges which could be resolved by the use of digital portfolios for assessment, as supported by Avci

(2012), as they are easy to use, provide unlimited storage space, ease of access for both teachers and students who have a instantly available picture of progress achieved to date.

A number of the teacher participants highlighted the importance of talk and discussion during the art making activity as a means of assessing and understanding the creative thought process of the child. A common view held by most of the teacher participants was that teacher observation was essential for assessment purposes but also to offer timely advice and intervention; a recent study called *Aligning Assessment, Learning and Teaching in Curricular Reform and Implementation* by Lysaght et al., (2019) supports this finding in relation to assessment. Ciara offers her opinion: "I think every teacher uses their observation...they could see who is excelling, who finds it difficult ... help them that way and even just questioning children on their likes and dislikes on art (TI3, L48-49)".

### **The Value of Art Product as a Support for the Looking and Responding Strand Unit**

Teacher participants considered art product as an integral and essential element of the looking and responding strand unit of the visual arts curriculum and these observations reflect the findings of Flannery (2010). There were a number of sources mentioned by the teacher participants for the artwork utilised in this strand unit: it originated in books, posters, online as digital content, or as the original product as outlined in the visual arts curriculum (GoI, 1999b). The strand unit looking and responding was reported as being used as a stimulus or source of inspiration for an art lesson by the majority of the teacher participants, and it was also reported as being utilised for development purposes to assess the process and to evaluate the outcome. Teacher participant Gráinne shared an example:

I would always have a number of questions that I would ask the children, this would cater for the lower and higher level. I would always focus on an artist in looking and

responding and the different styles they might have used. After the looking and responding...I might get them to respond in a way that they might interpret the artist's work in their own way (T17, L46-49).

Teacher participant Fionnuala reported using art product as a means to develop oral language in conjunction with looking and responding to an artist's painting: "Where you encourage them to tell the story" by observing and "if possible, to find the story of the painting and see how their interpretation compares with the real story" (T14, L53-55), this supports the work of Burnham & Kai-Kee (2011) who describe how responding to art work can promote language development and discussion.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Source of Material for Student Art Exhibitions**

Teacher participants reported that art product which was used as a source of material for student art exhibitions was of value both as a means of enhancing the school environment and as a means of valuing visual arts as a subject.

**Enhancing the school environment.** There were unanimously positive responses from all of the teachers participants regarding the visual arts displays in schools, which were reported by teacher participants as being aesthetically pleasing and as enhancing the school environment; these findings are consistent with Tischler(2015) who determines that the visual qualities of art can cause an immediate and sometimes a longer term improvement on the aesthetic of a setting.

**Valuing visual arts as a subject.** Exhibitions of children's work were reported by teacher participants to be important not only aesthetically, but also for having educational value, the teacher participants also noted the added importance that children assign to any artwork chosen for public display which is in keeping with the work of Douglas and Jaquith

(2009). Displays of students art work elevates the art product to that of an artist where it is valued by students, teachers and parents. Teacher participant Brid attributed the following benefits of visual art displays in the primary school as:

It places importance and emphasis on the arts curriculum. They promote discussion on skills and techniques used in art lessons. They create and foster a love for art.

They show the students that their work is of equal importance to other subjects and they also show the student's creativity, imagination and skills (TI1, L27-30).

### **The Value of Art Product as a Means of Promoting Creativity**

In line with the findings of the *Creativity in the Classroom* report conducted by INTO (2009), creativity involves two essential elements; the idea which is fostered by the imagination, and the innovation which generates an original product. The teacher participants reported viewing visual arts as essential for childrens' creative development and as one area of the curriculum where children were able to express themselves freely. Teacher participant Brid noted that each child's art product was unique to them: "whatever stage the child finishes and all children would finish at a different place and a different level, but it is their own finished product based on their own level and their creativity" (TI1, L37-38).

In keeping with Penketh (2017), the teacher participants reported that the classroom evolves into a child-centred creative space that promotes a practical, active learning environment providing more opportunities for collaboration, sharing and communicating their thoughts and ideas with others, as highlighted by Teacher participant Brid in the following excerpt: "I think they need to be actively involved and I think it's good to work individually, in groups and in class settings where everybody gets an opportunity to share their knowledge and skills" (TI1, L49-50).

**The Value of Art Product as a Support for Social and Emotional Development**

Art product can stimulate talk and discussion, promoting more interaction whether it is a completed product or a work in progress. The sense of achievement and pride that children get from creating a piece of art can be beneficial to the confidence and self-esteem.

**Social Interaction.** The teacher participants found that art production promotes social interaction where students work in a positive and productive environment whether they are creating their own pieces or are collaborating with others in pairs or in group work. The teacher participants observed that making art had a transformative effect not only the classroom environment but also on the level of engagement and enjoyment of the students. This supports the findings of a study by Kennedy (2017) that participation in art activities resulted in a calmer learning environment which promoted increased levels of social interaction improving relationships, and teacher participant Gráinne noted how it promoted talk and discussion “It also develops their social skills as a lot of children would ask their peers to see their work and would always compare the work of the person beside them or at the same table” (T17, L60-62).

**Enhancing Self-esteem.** Exhibition of their art product was deemed by the educators to be evidence of their toil or fruits of their labour, affording them a sense of achievement, enhancing their self-confidence and self-esteem and, indeed, promoting their imagination and creativity. Teacher participant Áine observed the positive emotional impact art production has:

I think it gives the children a great sense of pride to see their work displays and parents as well, if they are in for a meeting will always go to see their own child’s work. Children as well as soon as they see their work up on the wall and its mounted,

will see it with a fresh pair of eyes and other children's work .... a talking point and a stimulus.... you can find them going over and talking about it (T6, L38-42).

This is consistent with Douglas and Jaquith (2009) who describe how the end product serves to promote self-esteem, improving morale and also noting how students respond to positive affirmation of their artistic efforts, whether that is from the educator, peers or family members.

Having recorded and reviewed the findings in relation to the teachers' semi-structured interviews, the next section will present the findings from the focus group interviews with the student participants.

### **Students' Perspectives on the Value of Art Product in Primary School Visual Arts Education**

Although the student participants were never asked directly to define art product, the meaning they attributed to it in the focus groups demonstrated their understanding of art product as being the outcome or end result of work that had been generated during an art lesson or art making activity. The focus group students attributed their own value to their art product, the importance of the completed art products was evident. They retained them in special boxes, shelves and cupboards allocated for storing their finished pieces, displaying them on the walls and fridges in their own homes.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Form of Personal Self-expression to be Treasured**

There was agreement among focus group participants regarding the outcome of an art lesson or art activity, in that they perceived that art lessons should culminate in some form of production. This output was important to them as it offered them a sense of achievement and it was personal and unique to them as indicated by focus group student Leona: "sometimes it's nice and sometimes it's not, either way I keep it." (FG3 L75)



The intended audience also influenced the amount of care and attention that was given to the making of art as described by focus group student Eimear:

If it's your own thing then obviously it matters but if somebody gives it to you and then they say hand it up, someone else has it done and you feel the pressure to get it done even though you would like to put more time into it as it's important, but you're rushing it. (FG2, L96-98)

Time was unanimously agreed by the focus group students as a factor that impacted their art making endeavours, indeed students voiced a need for a greater allocation of time to be given to visual arts suggesting more visual arts classes, whilst a minority mentioned that they would like more time to complete their work as highlighted by focus group student Conor "If you don't have it finished - getting more time to finish it" (FG1, L.34). This is another indicator of the importance that the children place on art product and the perceived frustration experienced by them when prevented from achieving the outcome they aspire to. This finding concurs with Sharp (2004) who states that adequate time and sustained periods are essential for the development of creative projects.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Means of Integrating Art Across the Curriculum**

Whilst recalling their 'best memories' of making art in primary school, the students whose recollections included the greatest degree of detail, stating the class they were in, the art activity and end product recalled art integrated activities, some as far back as Junior Infants. Resonating with Hardimans' (2016) study advocating the implementation of thematic planning and integrated learning as an effective means of developing a deeper understanding and ensuring knowledge attained is retained for longer, the primary school children's recollections of earlier art works reflected this. Focus group student Siobhan's example was

integrated with SPHE (Social, Personal, Health Education) “Oh do you know remember when we had to do the thing in second class *Show Racism the Red Card*, the big poster with all the players on it. That one” (FG2, L5-6).

**Inclusion.** The visual arts was reported as an enjoyable experience by the student participants regardless of their academic ability. It was a lesson that they looked forward to with eager anticipation and for some children it was reported as presenting a level playing field where they can perform on an equal standing or in some cases even excel. Focus group participant Cara gave an example “Different to written work, you are doing painting and clay and construction and stuff like that so it’s more fun that written” (FG3, L110-111). This is supported in Penkeths’ (2017) study on the power of making art and creating artefacts provides a more inclusive environment, regardless of the ability of the participants.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Source for Assessment**

Art product was seen as an essential element to assessment, whether it was the outcome or the work in progress that was being assessed. A recurrent theme that arose from the focus group interviews was that art was extremely personal to the student as it is unique to an individual and is an expression of one’s self. This is consistent with the work of Hickman (2005) who notes that children value their work based on their own assessment and the views of others.

**Self-assessment.** It was interesting to note that the children in the focus groups were more discerning about what they perceived to be the quality of their art product and their assessment of their own artwork. There is no doubt that the outcome was important for the student participants, but they also displayed a critical ability to evaluate their own art product; this is supported by the work of both (Jolley, 2010; Jesson, 2012) regarding the

importance of children developing the skills to critically assess their own artistic outcomes, observing the positives of their own output. Focus group student Caoimhe observed: “It depends how much work I put into it, cause if I put a lot of work into it and it doesn’t turn out good, I get mad with myself but if it’s only five minutes drawing, then it doesn’t really matter” (FG2, L.92-93).

The value of the product of their creative endeavour in providing motivation to embark on a similar venture to achieve a new improved model at home was reported by a focus group student, Siofra, who said: “Anything I didn’t make right at school, then I will try to remake it again at home” (FG2, L58). This finding supports the research by Spendlove (2007) on how an outcome may inform and endorse other artistic endeavours acting as motivation to create or develop an improved version of the original.

### **The Value of Art Product as a Support for the Looking and Responding Strand Unit**

Focus group participant Orla’s experience of using looking at and responding as a stimulus for her own art production was defined by “trying to copy the olds like the Mona Lisa” (FG1, L59) which is in line with Freedman & Stuhr (2004) who describe the unique response that is experienced when we view any picture or object, confirming that art appreciation is a very individual and a personal response as it is the individual who attributes meaning to it. Drawing on her experiences outside the classroom for art production, focus group participant Leona said: “Sometimes there’s an art exhibition on TV and then you see something, and you want to do it. I kind of change it to suit myself” (FG3, L52-53) and reflects the guidelines on looking and responding issued by the (CCEA, 2020).

### **The Value of Art Product as a Source of Material for Student Art Exhibitions**

The displays of art work around the school were reported as being important on a number of levels; student participant Sorcha described them as “visually appealing” (FG2) and Finn reported considering them to be “creative” (FG1). This contrasts with the findings of LaJevic (2013) who felt that using art for purposes of decoration undermines the process as the focus is on the product.

The variety of abilities and outcomes exhibited was highlighted by focus group student Leona’s statement: “I like the artwork around the school because there are so many levels of how it is being done and it’s all so different” (FG3, L82-83). This resonates with Hickman (2005) who said that the use of art product for display purposes may well have a place in the primary school, but it is vital that students should have an opportunity through creative activity to express themselves, not only imaginatively but in an truly original outcome.

### **The Value of Art Product in Visual Arts Education as a Means of Promoting Creativity**

The student participants described producing art in visual arts as being “more fun....you get to be more creative and show off your creativity” (FG1, L106) as reported by focus group participant Saoirse. Children in the focus groups reported that the art class offered a sense of freedom of expression which promoted creativity, an opportunity to express themselves through art production, and a more positive learning environment, as highlighted by student participant Liam: “It’s different to English and Irish because you have to sit down in the seat and you have to concentrate and you don’t really like it, but with art you can do whatever you want and it’s really enjoyable” (FG3, L.107-108) and echoed emphatically by focus group participant Seamus: “Art is far more creative than Irish or English”(FG3, L115). The sense of freedom that students experience through exploration and

experimentation to produce their own artwork is recognised by Lyons (2010) and Winner et al., (2013) as being a different approach to learning especially given that in art production there are no rights or wrongs. Most of the students expressed a preference for free exploration of the tools and materials in visual arts and the opportunity through creative exploration to develop their own product, as stated by student participant Éibhlín who said; “I would just like the materials out in front of me and do it myself....like my own project” (FG2, L83). This is supported by the findings of a study by Tarr (1996) where participating artists advocated that time for free exploration should be incorporated into every art lesson.

The student participants had all worked with visiting artists and when asked to relate their creative experiences they focussed on the art products they had made. Focus group participant Aoibheann reviewed her experiences by enthusiastically listing the products she produced whilst working with visiting artists/craftspeople:

We are in the middle of making bird houses. At Christmas we made bee houses, I can't remember - we did decorations for the Christmas tree, we did weaving at the start of the year and I did a wee Scottish man. (FG2, L112-113)

The student participants' experiences support the findings of a study *CRAFTed: Learning skills for life* (DCCI, 2019) which listed the benefits of engaging in craft making activities. They fostered imagination, creativity and, problem solving through collaborative school-based partnerships with teachers, students, and artists/craftspeople (DCCI, 2019).

### **The Value of Art Product as a Support for Social and Emotional Development**

The student participants noted the positive emotional impact of engaging in making art product in school as expressed by Máire: “You can be yourself in it, sometimes you can

express your feelings in it” (FG1, L107), and Nora thought: “You just feel more relaxed doing it”(FG1, L109), Orla said: “You can do whatever you want in it” (FG1, L110) and Conor felt: “You can express yourself”(FG1, L111). This is supported by the findings of Winner et al., (2013) who reported on the unique nature of arts education. The findings from the focus groups supported this as only one child out of the twenty children in the focus group listed school as their only opportunity to participate in making art. All the other student participants described their extra-curricular activities in visual arts that they pursued outside school, where they were free to explore their own areas of specific interest in producing art, through after school clubs, summer camps, classes with artists or craftspeople, online sources or working with family members on artmaking activities. This is consistent with the findings of Smyth (2016) who stated that arts participation not only enhanced self-esteem, there was evidence that children who engaged in art activities in school were more likely to partake in outside school art activities.

### **An Integration of Teacher and Student Perspectives on the Value of Art Product**

A very interesting point to note is the consensus between teacher and pupil participants on the value of art product in the primary school visual arts curriculum; this is highlighted in the remarkable parallels that can be seen between the findings for each group, and the way in which the same key themes were noted across the teacher interviews and the pupil focus groups.

**A form of personal self-expression to be treasured.** At the end of the creative endeavour the students had an expectation of a tangible outcome or artistic production, the teacher participants recognised this as being very important to them which is supported by the findings of Tarr (1996). Although it is interesting to note that the quality of the final

product was not as important to all of the student participants, who were able to make realistic and critical assessments of their own unique outcomes. The student participants also required sufficient time for completion of their artistic endeavour and a number expressed frustration when this did not happen, in line with Sharp (2004).

**Integration of art across the curriculum.** Teachers utilised visual arts integration across the curriculum through thematic planning to provide more meaningful and deeper learning opportunities as supported by Barnes (2015), this was in line with Aistear in the infant classroom NCCA (2009). Children's recollections of previous work reflected this as integrated art activities were recalled with much greater detail regardless of the number of years that had passed in the interim. Art production represented a form of inclusion where all learning styles were catered for and offered an alternative to written responses as detailed by Donovan & Pascale (2004).

**A source for assessment.** Art product was reported as being an essential component of assessment; teacher participants used summative assessment, and hard copy portfolios were utilised by all the teacher participants to provide a visual evidence of individual student's progression. In line with Lysaght et al., (2019) teacher observation was a valuable tool for assessment and learning. Oral questioning, talk and discussion was reported as being used as a means of assessment for student and teacher participants alike, student participants talking about their own works and also the work of others. Although not explicitly referred to as triangulation by the teacher participants, they did report using all three sources (peer, self and teacher), which represents best practice and provides a more accurate assessment picture as reported by Robson & McCartan (2016)

**Look and responding strand unit.** The focus for this strand by the teacher participants predominantly involved looking at artists work or art product (CCEA,2020) using it as a stimulus at the beginning of a visual arts lesson and it offered opportunities for oral language development. Interestingly, in school, looking at and responding to art product was reported as a visual arts class activity for the student participants, but the student participants also reported engaging in looking at and responding to their own art product and the work of other students informally in class, within the school, and outside school in areas of visual arts that was of special interest to them.

**Exhibitions of students' artwork.** The displays of artwork in schools were universally appreciated by student and teacher participants alike, and were reported as contributing to a colourful, sensorially pleasing environment in line with Tischler (2015). Observing their own work on display was reported as giving student participants a sense of pride in their own attainments, serving as a talking point with other students, teachers, parents and visitors to the school, this supported the work of Douglas & Jaquith (2009). The teacher participants also attributed educational value to it, deemed it to be a record of learning and a means of communication regarding the subjects and themes that children were learning and evidence of their learning on a given topic.

**Promoting Creativity.** Teacher participants noted the making art was not only essential for students' creative development but also transformed the classroom environment into a hive of activity offering enhanced creative opportunities as supported by the work of Jesson (2012), promoting talk and discussion, increasing interaction between students resulting in increased engagement and higher levels of productivity. Both teacher participants and students reported that a sense of freedom experienced by the children was



conducive to creative expression boosted by the knowledge that there was no right or wrong as outlined by Lyons (2010), making it a safe environment to express themselves and experiment.

**Social and emotional benefits.** The sense of pride and increased self-esteem that children experience from their art products was reported by the teacher participants. The student participants referred to the sense of achievement and motivation that they derived from their art products as reported by Kennedy (2017). All of the teacher and student participants recognised the relaxed environment, which increased levels of social interaction and collaboration between students during art production activities as highlighted in Penketh (2017), offering more opportunity for talk and discussion regarding art product, albeit in a productive, purposeful way.

### **Other Findings**

Other findings from the study included meaning attributed to product in art and issues in relation to teacher education in visual arts education.

**Meaning attributed to art product.** All the primary school teachers and the primary school students defined the art product as the tangible object or outcome that is produced at the end of the art lesson. Three of the teacher participants put forward additional ideas: product could be the skills they learned whilst engaged in an art activity, preparatory work like sketches or work that is generated during a lesson rather than only the finished product.

**Teacher education in visual arts.** Eisner (2002) notes the importance of the role of the teacher in visual arts, and the influence they have on the delivery of visual arts in the curriculum. Although, not directly linked to the value of art product these other findings

from the study may have a significance in relation to the delivery of the visual arts education in primary schools.

***Preservice Training.*** The appraisal of pre-service education received by the participating teachers was mixed; three of the teacher participants thought that their pre-service training sufficiently prepared them to deliver the visual arts curriculum, two of whom had attended a college which included a visual arts specialism. However, the majority, the remaining four teacher participants felt that the pre-service education they had received in visual arts did not equip them to deliver that aspect of the primary curriculum; this is in keeping with the findings of Thornton (2013), who determined that whilst preservice training of primary school teaching facilitated teachers developing more competent skills in classroom management and teaching skills, teachers did not perceive themselves to be subject specialists.

***Generalist v Specialist.*** Although the primary school teachers are generalist teachers, the teacher participants reported perceiving an expectation of delivering the same level of tutoring as an art specialist, these findings support the research conducted by Thornton (2013), although Taylor (1992) recognised that even the most accomplished art teacher would not consider themselves to be an expert on every aspect as the subject is so vast. Teacher participants reported that their in-depth knowledge of their students could render primary school teachers more effective than a specialist art teacher at delivering the visual arts curriculum within their own class; this finding is supported by Holt (1997) who stated that this could result in better outcomes for their students.

***Professional Development.*** Only two out of the seven teachers had engaged in professional development in visual arts in the previous year which in each case consisted of

an online summer course. Teacher participant Brid expressed a desire to “get more training, especially practical hands on classes where people teach you skills that you can use in the classroom” (T1, L24-25) and teacher participant Áine expressed an interest in gaining more knowledge on “I.T. through art because I would feel it is something I don’t feel very comfortable with. It’s definitely something I would like to do.” (T6, L37-38). This is in line with the TCI (2016) report recommending engagement by teachers in professional development to promote their own learning and to meet the needs of their students.

### **Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings that emerged from analysis of the data that was collected in the teacher interviews and the student focus groups, which focused on exploring teacher and student perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education. The findings were presented in response to the two key research questions and in relation to the literature. The main findings of the study are that art product was reported as being valued by teacher and student participants as: a Form of Personal Self-expression to be Treasured , Integrating Art Across the Curriculum, Providing a Source for Assessment, Support for the Looking and Responding Strand Unit, Providing a Source of Material for Exhibitions of Students’ Artwork, Promoting Creativity, and Promoting Social and Emotional Development. Other findings reported include the meaning of art product and a need for more teacher education in visual arts. Taken together, these findings suggest that many values may be attributed to art product in visual arts. The next chapter, moves on to discuss the implications of these findings, identify the limitations of the research, make recommendations for further research, and finally, conclude the study.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The main aim of this study was to explore the perspectives of primary school teachers and primary school students on the value of art product in primary visual arts education. A review of the literature on this issue revealed a dearth in the evidence base on this topic, which supported the rationale for undertaking this study. The research questions in this study sought to explore perspectives on the value of art product in visual arts education. The Primary Visual Arts Curriculum that was introduced in 1999, places an emphasis on process as it maintains that most of the skills are learned at this stage (Gol, 1999c).

The research questions which guided this study were:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?
2. What are pupils' perspectives on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education?

In this chapter I highlight the findings, discuss the implications of these findings, identify the limitations of the study, make recommendations for further research, and finally, a summary of the chapter.

### **Main Findings**

The main findings of the study are that art product was reported as being valued by teacher and student participants as a form of personal self-expression to be treasured, integrating art across the curriculum, a source for assessment, support for the looking and responding strand unit, a source of material for exhibitions of students' artwork, promoting creativity, and social and emotional benefits. Other findings reported include the meaning attributed to art product and a need for more teacher education in visual arts.

The teacher participants highlighted the importance of art product to their students, their emotional attachment to this outcome and this was reiterated by the student participants. The student participants enjoyed the positive affirmation of their artistic efforts and their creative product was cherished. One unanticipated finding was the ability of the student participants to critically assess their own art product.

The use of art for integration purposes was advocated by all the teacher participants but it is only considered to be truly successful if the learning outcomes of both subjects have been achieved Bequette & Bequette (2012). Art product was used as a visual stimulus and observational drawing was found to assist in retaining information for longer as Fox and Lees' (2013) study verified. Utilising a thematic approach offered students an opportunity to respond to or illustrate their knowledge through art production which was especially useful for children with literacy difficulties facilitating a more inclusive learning environment. There was also evidence of learning being retained for longer, as illustrated by the student participants when recalling their favourite art products.

Art product was found to be of value for the purposes of assessment whether it was during the art lesson or based on the final outcome. Triangulation where teacher, self and peer assessment are utilised may be a more effective approach painting a more realistic picture of a student's attainments (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Art product was considered by all of the participants to be essential for the looking and responding strand unit, whether it was the students' own work, that of their peers or professional artists, this was supported by the work of

Another finding was the resounding approval for the use of art product for school art exhibitions, the value attributed to this practice had a number of positive implications;

acknowledging the work of the student artist, elevating the importance of art product, and creating a vibrant, aesthetically pleasing environment where students, teachers and parents could appreciate and respond to the variety of art work on display.

Student participants have an expectation of a creative outcome whilst engaged in visual arts, fulfilling this aspiration promotes a sense of achievement and self-esteem and is consistent with Douglas and Jaquith (2009). This tangible object was important as it is personal to them and a form of self-expression.

Visual arts was considered an inclusive and enjoyable classroom experience for the student participants as it offers a respite from the more academic subjects, the active engagement and participation of the students made it an enjoyable experience for the teacher participants too.

### **Other Findings**

Product in art was considered as the end product by the majority of the participants in this study, however a few of the teacher participants offered alternative views including preliminary drawings or sketches and work in progress. Spendlove (2007) states that art product represents more than the tangible object at the end of a creative activity, but ideas developed, and skills learned during the process were also considered to be art product.

One of the issues that arose from the study that did not relate specifically to the research questions included teacher professional development in visual arts. Eisner (2002) indicates the importance of the role of the teacher in visual arts, and the influence they have on the delivery of visual arts in the curriculum. More than half of the teacher participants considered the preservice training they received did not equip them to deliver the visual arts

curriculum. The teacher participants felt that lack of time and availability of practical courses impacted their ability to engage in professional development in visual arts.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings from this study suggest that art product could inform teaching and learning of visual arts in a variety of ways especially in relation to looking and responding, assessment, integration and student art exhibitions. These initial findings are based on a small-scale exploratory research study and further research is required.

The looking and responding strand unit represents half of the time dedicated to visual arts education (Gol, 1999c). A more effective approach that could be adopted for implementing the looking and responding strand unit was outlined by Flannery (2010) indicating that art product may be used not only as a stimulus, as was noted by the teacher participants, but also for the development and evaluation of art production.

Art product is an essential aspect of assessment and where art product has always been used for summative assessment, the findings show that it also contributes to self and peer assessment. The perceived worth or value of their outcomes, is made by the individual artist (Hickman, 2005), therefore there may be a case for the use of art product in formative assessment as well as stated by Jesson (2012).

Art product as a tool for ideation purposes or as a stimulus, extends beyond the visual arts curriculum, enhancing thematic planning (Barnes, 2015) and may be used for integration purposes right across the primary curriculum as stated by Connolly et al., (2016). However, the ability of the teacher to deliver the visual arts education may impact the effectiveness of the integration as outlined by Smith-Shank (2014). This suggests a need for ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance the delivery of a integrated curriculum.



The importance placed on students art exhibitions by all the participants highlights a positive contribution that art product has to offer long after the art lesson has ended. This was supported by Tarr who stated that displaying or exhibition of art product provides an significant element of response for the student artists on their work (Tarr, 1996).

The study findings suggest it is possible that the value of art product is not sufficiently recognised in the curriculum documents and, that further studies could help examine whether there should be a re-evaluation of the focus on process and product in the curriculum.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was a small-scale research project conducted with time constraints which defined the choice of data collection methods and the research participants. Further studies, which take these variables into account, will need to be undertaken. However, the data gathered would support the following recommendations:

- A larger scale study involving students across a wider geographical location and a range of primary classes to determine the views of all ages and their perspectives on product.
- A larger scale study to examine the focus on process and product in the visual arts curriculum.
- A national quantitative study involving primary school teachers to examine their perspectives on the value of art product in the visual arts curriculum.
- A national study on teacher professional development to facilitate the effective delivery of a high-quality visual arts curriculum.

- A regional study by the ATECI to determine the needs of their members regarding professional development in visual arts.

Any review of the visual arts curriculum should explore the potential value of art product, not only to visual arts education but right across the primary curriculum through integration and assessment.

### **Limitations**

As noted in the methodology chapter, there are a number of limitations to this study which are summarised in this section. This was a small-scale study using convenience sampling due to the time constraints which results in the lack of generalisability of the findings and curtails the depth of analysis. Although the findings indicate that art product may have a value to primary school teachers and primary school students, further research is required to establish this. As this is an exploratory study in an area where there is a dearth of research, it is hoped that the findings from this study can be used as a basis for future studies, as recommended in this chapter, which could offset some of these limitations.

### **Summary**

This research study explored the perspectives of a sample of primary school teachers and primary school students on the value of art product in primary school visual arts education. Overall, the findings of this small-scale research suggest that the participants in this instance, did attribute many values to art product.

Considering the findings of this study, art product could be valued for the potential contribution it could make to visual arts education although further research on this topic is required. The student and teacher participants in this study gave evidence of when and how they attributed a value to art product. The visual arts teacher guidelines (Gol, 1999c) state

that process and product are of equal value and twenty years after its inception, the findings of this study may in some small way support this. However, the limitations of this study may have influenced the results, therefore further research will be required to substantiate these findings.

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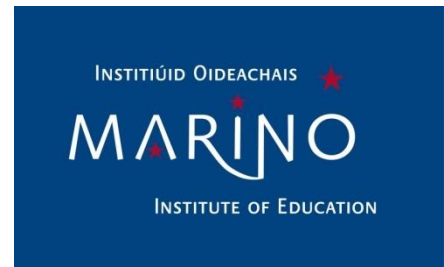
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Date

Dear XXXXXXXXXXXX

Requesting permission to undertake research

I am writing to ask permission to conduct a research project which aims to explore views of students and teachers on making art in primary school. I am conducting this research as a Masters' student at Marino Institute of Education. In order to determine the perspectives of fifth and sixth class students, the research would involve students participating in six art activities, followed by a discussion group that would be audio recorded. Permission will be requested to take photographs of students' artwork for inclusion in the study but no photographs of any individuals will be taken for the study. Both the art activities and the focus groups will take place during school hours. This participation is on a voluntary basis and students may withdraw participation at any stage. I foresee no risks for any child's participation in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life.

I will secure permission from both parents and children to involve them in the research. Information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. I will also be interviewing teachers in the school. The identity of the school, teachers, and children will be anonymised; names will not be attached to any information included in the research findings. Physical data will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet, whilst digital data will be stored on a password protected personal computer for security and confidentiality purposes. Information will be stored safely and securely with access only available to the research team and examiners and will be destroyed on 4 July 2021. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a thesis to be submitted as part of my Master's in Education Studies at Marino Institute of Education.

This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact [MERC@mie.ie](mailto:MERC@mie.ie)

Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me on XXXXXXXXXX. Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Yours sincerely

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Katherine Keys (Researcher)

Appendix B: Principal consent form



20 January 2020

**Exploring views of students and teachers on making art in primary school**

I, XXXXXXXXX, give permission for Katherine Keys to undertake her research in this school.

\_\_\_\_\_  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Letter to Parents

Date

Dear Parent / Guardian

I am writing to inform you that I am conducting a research project which aims to explore the views of students and teachers in making art in primary schools. I am conducting this research as a Masters' student at Marino Institute of Education. I believe that participation in this project will provide a wonderful learning opportunity for your child and me.

If you agree that your child may take part in this research, they will be asked to participate in a number of art activities followed by group discussion. The group discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed. Anonymised comments from the group discussion will be included in the findings of the research project. No names of any children or the school will be included in the findings of the research project. Both the art activity and the group discussion will take place during school hours. I foresee no risks for your child's participation in the study, beyond those experienced in everyday life. The information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. No information regarding your child or the school will be revealed in the research. Information will be stored safely with access only available to the research team and examiners and it will all be destroyed on July 4, 2021. The anonymised findings from the research project will be included in a thesis that will be submitted to Marino Institute of Education as part of my Master's in Education Studies.

This study has been considered from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact [MERC@mie.ie](mailto:MERC@mie.ie)

I would be very grateful if you could return this form to me by January 21, 2020.

If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, I would be happy to explain it for you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Kind regards,

---

Katherine Keys (Researcher)



## Appendix D: Parent consent form

Research study: Exploring views of teachers and students on making art in primary school

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your child is under **no** obligation to participate in this study. If they agree to participate, but at a later stage feel the need to withdraw, they are free to do so. It will not affect them in any way.

**Please answer all of the following (tick the appropriate box): Yes/No**

I have read and understood the letter about the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand what the research project is about, and what the findings will be used for.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I know that my child's participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the research project at any stage without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am aware that my child's results will be kept anonymous.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree for my child to participate in the above research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I give permission for photographs of my child's work (artwork) to be included in the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I give permission for my child to participate in the group discussion(s).

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree for my child's participation in the group discussion(s) to be audio recorded. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that anonymised comments made by my child in the group discussions can be included in the findings of the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my child's name and the school's name will not be included in the findings of the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

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Signature of Parent/Guardian

Signature of Researcher

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Letter to Teacher participant

Date

Dear Teacher,

This year I am engaging in a research project as part of my Master's in Education studies, the findings of which will be included in my Master's in Education studies final dissertation. I am writing to ask for your help with a research study on the views of teachers and students on making art in visual arts. I hope that you will be willing to participate because your responses are important and a valued part of the study. All recordings and information will be stored securely, and your name will not be attached to any of the data you provide. You are welcome to discontinue participation in the study at any time, should you wish to do so. I foresee no risks for your participation in the study beyond those experienced in everyday life.

The research project involves learning more about the views of teachers and students on making art in the primary school. Your participation would involve a one-to-one interview with me for approximately 40 minutes on your thoughts on. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All recordings and information will be stored securely, with access only available to the research team and physical data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Information gathered will be treated with privacy and anonymity. Your identity and the school's identity will be anonymised; names will not be attached to any information included in the research findings. The anonymised results from the study will be included in a dissertation to be submitted as part of my Master's in Education Studies at Marino Institute of Education.

Should you have questions regarding your participation, please contact me on [XXXXXXXXXX](#). This study has been approved from an ethical perspective by the Marino ethics in research committee. Should you have any questions or concerns about the ethical approval or conduct of this study, please contact [MERC@mie.ie](mailto:MERC@mie.ie)

Yours faithfully

---

Katherine Keys

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

## Appendix F: Teacher consent form

**Please answer all of the following (tick the appropriate box): Yes/No,**

I, ..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. Yes ☐ No ☐

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that participation involves answering questions relating to the research. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated with privacy and anonymity. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that anonymised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the final dissertation. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained until the 4 July 2021 when it will be destroyed. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above. Yes ☐ No ☐

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of participant*

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of researcher*

## Appendix G: Letter to Pupil

**Title of Study: Exploring views of students and teachers on making art  
in primary school**

**Researcher: Katherine Keys**

- This study is for my Master's in Education studies in Visual Arts at Marino Institute of Education.
- I am asking you to help because I would like to know what you think about making art at school.
- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an art activity and then I will ask you to answer some questions, as part of a group discussion
- What we learn in this research may help plan for Visual Arts.
- You may ask me questions at any time.
- You may ask to skip a question or ask to stop at any time.
- The questions I will ask are only about what you think.
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Photographs of my artwork may be included in the final version of the research project that is being submitted to Marino Institute of Education.
- Group discussions will be audio recorded.
- Comments from the group discussion may be include in the research project that is being submitted to Marino Institute of Education.

## Appendix H: Pupil assent form

**Please answer all of the following (tick the appropriate box): Yes/No**

I have read and understood the information on the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand what the research project is about and what the results will be used for.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to take part in the art activities for the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to taking part in the group discussion where I will get to share my ideas and opinions about the art activity.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that Ms Keys can take photographs of the artwork that I make in the research project art activities.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that Ms Keys can include the photographs of my artwork in the final version of her research project that is being submitted to Marino Institute of Education.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that Ms Keys can record what I say in the group discussions.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree that Ms Keys can include my comments from the group discussion in the final version of her research project that is being submitted to Marino Institute of Education.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I know that my name or identity will not be included in the findings of the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I know that the name of my school will not be included in the findings of the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to participate in the research project.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I know that my participation in the research project is voluntary and I can stop taking part in the research project at any time.

Yes ☐ No ☐



## Appendix I: Teacher questions

Thank you for agreeing to help me with this research. This research explores the views of teachers and students on making art. I really appreciate your participation. Have you any questions before we begin?

1. How long have you been teaching in primary schools?
2. Where did you study/complete your teacher training?
3. Did the college you attended offer any specialism in visual arts?
4. Do you feel the training you received prepared you to deliver the visual arts curriculum?
5. What classes have you taught/currently teaching?
6. Is art a subject you enjoy teaching? Why?
7. Which strand do you find the most challenging to teach? Why?
8. Where do you get ideas for your visual arts lessons?
9. Have you ever had the opportunity to engage in professional development in visual arts?
10. Do you think art displays are important? (for teachers/students/parents)
11. How would you define product in visual arts?
12. How would you teach looking and responding?
13. If you were asked to review the visual arts curriculum is there anything you would change?
14. Do you think students benefit from participation in visual art?
15. Could you briefly describe how you assess your students in visual arts?
16. In visual arts do you think the process is important? Why?/Why not?
17. In visual arts do you think the product or the outcome is important? Why?/Why not?

18. In process versus product, how would you rate the importance of each?
19. Have you ever felt you had to produce art for display purposes?
20. How would you use visual arts for integration purposes with other subjects?
21. How do you rate the importance of visual arts in relation to the other academic subjects?

Once again, I would like to thank you for your valuable time and I am really grateful for your participation.

Appendix J  
**Drawing lesson: Portraits**

**Curriculum strand: Drawing**

**Objective:** Create a portrait

**Linkage:** Paint and Colour

**Integration** Myself: Self-identity

**Materials:** Contact paper, different coloured permanent markers, card, clear plastic sheet

**Stimulus** Work of artist Julian Opie <https://julianopie.com/?year=2018>

**Activity:** A demonstration is given of the process to be used. The students work in pairs to draw a portrait. The contact paper is placed over the plastic sheet. One student holds it up against their face whilst the other traces the outline, position of eyes, nose, mouth and eyebrows with a black permanent marker. When both have completed this task, the contact paper is removed from plastic and attached to a piece of A4 card. Each student then completes the remaining detail of the portrait using a variety of coloured markers.

**Evaluation/Looking and responding:**

Once completed the portraits are displayed, students will look at their work and that of other students. They will discuss the process, tools and materials employed.

Appendix K  
**Paint and colour lesson: The Reservoir by Pablo Picasso**



**Curriculum strand:** Paint and colour

**Objective:** Children create their own Analytical Cubism artwork

**Linkage:** Drawing and Construction

**Integration:** Mathematics:

**Materials:** Card, Oil pastels, pencils, colouring pencils, classroom objects and rulers

**Stimulus:** The Reservoir by Pablo Picasso (1909)

**Activity:** Students use a variety of classroom objects (building blocks, shapes, containers etc.) to trace around. The individual shapes are joined with lines to create a 3d effect. When the drawing is completed the picture will be coloured using a maximum of three colours, although different shades may be used to create perspective,

**Evaluation/Looking and responding:**

The students describe what they observe in the painting and what they think the artist is trying to express (prior to knowing the name of the painting). On completion, the students' artwork is displayed, each student responds to their own work and that of their peers.

**Print lesson: Making monoprints****Curriculum strand: Print**

**Objective:** Making monoprints, emphasising line, shape and texture

**Linkage:** Paint and Colour

**Integration:** Mathematics: experimenting with 2-D shapes and properties to solve problems in design

**Materials:** Clear plastic Perspex, white, yellow, red, blue, and black printing ink, shapes, lollipop sticks, masking tape, A4 paper, rollers

**Stimulus:** Observing a demonstration of print making techniques

**Activity:** Each student receives a piece of plastic which is taped to the table with masking tape. This masking tape serves as the border. A small amount of ink is applied and rolled over the plastic. A design is made using lollipop stick to draw. When the drawing is completed then a sheet of paper is placed on top. The student then smooths over the page with their hand to lift the print. When the page is removed the print is revealed. The ink is rolled out and the printing begins again. The students experiment mixing colour and textures to create a variety of designs

**Evaluation/Looking and responding:**

Once the prints are completed, they are displayed, the students taking turns describing their work, how the designs were achieved and what they learned from their experience.

All of the students have an opportunity to view and comment on their own work and the work of their peers.

**Clay Lesson: Coil Pot****Curriculum strand: Clay**

**Objective:** Make simple pottery and sculpture

**Linkage:** Paint and Colour

**Integration:** History: Early Peoples and Ancient Societies

**Materials:** Potter's clay, wooden boards, clay tools, toothpicks and lollipop sticks.

Poster paints or acrylics (to decorate when dry)

**Stimulus:** Show the children a selection of pots, vases, mugs, bowls or other earthenware containers from a local pottery. Allow them to handle them and discuss the shapes, textures and decorations they observe.

**Activity:** Demonstrate how to roll out clay, make the coils, show technique for joining coils and smoothing out any joins. Show how texture can be added to the pot using a variety of tools. Each student is given a piece of clay which is rolled into a ball to ensure there are no air bubbles. Then it is divided into pieces, rolled out into coils and assembled to make the pot. Students experiment with the shape and finish to develop their own unique piece.

**Evaluation/Looking and responding:**

The students take turns describing the pots they have made and how they decorated them. When they are fully dry, they decide on their choice of colours should they wish to paint them.

**Construction lesson: Create a 3-D structure****Curriculum strand: Construction**

**Objective:** Making imaginative 3-D structures

**Linkage:** Paint and Colour

**Integration:** Science: Environment awareness and care

**Materials:** Recycled clothes, toy stuffing, cardboard boxes, recycled materials, paint, mod roc, wire, masking tape, glue gun,

**Stimulus:** Creating a 3d construction from recycled materials

**Activity:** Students work as part of a group planning, collecting the materials and making the structure of their choice. This is a collaborative team-based project. The students are given the task, then plan their work with drawings and a list of materials required. Then the construction begins on their individual projects. The role of the teacher in this activity is to act as facilitator offering advice and intervention if required

**Evaluation/Looking and responding:**

Each student group take turns describing their constructions, the making process and the decoration of the finished piece. Other classes will be invited to view them and the student artists will be available to answer any questions regarding construction or ideation.

**Fabric and fibre lesson: Introduction to felt****Curriculum strand: Fabric and fibre**

**Objective:** Make small inventive pieces in fabric and fibre

**Linkage:** Paint and Colour

**Integration:** Science: Properties and characteristics of materials: Designing and making

**Materials:** **1. Felted soap:** Wool roving, soap, nylon pop socks, hot and cold water, basins

**2. Felt Heart:** Different coloured felt sheets, pieces of wool, toy stuffing, ribbon, needles, scissors, beads, sequins, buttons and fabric glue

**Stimulus:** Activity 1: Demonstration of the process and samples of work are displayed

Activity 2: Students are shown how to make a 3d felt shape and techniques for decoration

**Activity 1:** Students choose up to three colours of roving, easing it apart to form a cobweb like consistency. The soap is covered completely, placing it inside the pop sock which is immersed in hot water. It is then removed, rubbing between hands as if you were washing and continue until texture of the wool becomes firm with a material like consistency. Finally remove from pop sock, continuing to rub in all directions. When firm to the touch, rinse in cold water and allow to dry.

**Activity 2:** Following a demonstration of a sample, students choose their materials for their heart decoration. Two pieces are sewn together, stuffing them slightly to give a 3d effect. Once this is completed, they will be decorated to create their own unique piece.

**Evaluation/Looking and responding:** The students take turns describing their choices and how the texture of the wool has changed during the felting process. Likewise for activity two they review their own work and that of other students describing the piece of work and design choices taken.



## Appendix P

## Focus group questions

1. How many years have you been making art in primary school?
2. Thinking back over all the years what is your best memory of making art. (The most enjoyable memory.)
3. Any memories of things that didn't go so well in art?
4. What do you do with the work you have made after the art lesson?
5. If you could change anything about art in primary school what would it be?
6. How is art class now compared to when you were in Junior Infants?
7. Do you ever have an opportunity to make art outside of school?
8. Do you ever get ideas from looking at art or talking about it?
9. Of all the things you can make in art, what have you enjoyed making most?
10. Would you rather be given something to do/make or be given the chance to experiment with different materials/processes?
11. Is the finished product or the outcome important to you?
12. What do you think about the artwork around the school?
13. Have you ever worked with an artist or craftsperson?
14. Of all the strands in art, which is your favourite/least favourite?
15. How is art different to other subjects in primary school?
16. If you were given the opportunity to have an art lesson with an artist, what would you like to do?

Anything else you would like to add?

Thank you very much for your participation