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An exploration of children's views of their creative abilities in Visual Arts Education across a variety of age groups in an Irish primary school setting.

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Date: 1st of June 2021

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 Andrew Whelan at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request and may deposit it in Trinity College's open access institutional repository, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

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Abstract:

The overall aim for this small-scale research project was to explore children's views of their own creative abilities in Visual Arts Education across a variety of age groups in one Irish primary school setting. A qualitative approach to this research project was adopted and data was gathered through semi-structured group interviews with children from a variety of classes. Participants also completed a creative drawing task which provided them with an opportunity to create and also initiated the discussions surrounding their creativity.

Results from the study revealed that the participants had many valuable insights to offer into their creative abilities and processes during Visual Arts Education. The children specified what inspires them, where they get ideas from and highlighted factors that both influence and limit their creative processes. The children stated their need for more time, advance notice, extra materials and peer interaction during their creative endeavours in Visual Arts Education. They also acknowledged the importance of an emphasis being placed on the process, rather than the product, during art lessons.

The study suggests the need for accessing the voice of the child with regard to their own creative abilities. It further highlights the importance of exploring these views at varying stages in a child's education as creativity is ever-fluctuating and their opinions and insights are ever-changing.

Keywords: creativity, creative processes, voice of the child, inspiration, ideation

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Introduction

"Flowers are red young man

Green leaves are green

There's no need to see flowers any other way

Than the way they always have been seen"

Chapin, H. 1978

These lyrics were taken from Harry Chapin's song *Flowers are Red*. The message in this song references how imposing adult views on a child can affect how they see the world around them. If you tell a child often enough that flowers are red, it will eventually become a known truth to them. This attitude can teach children that there is a right way to think, a right way to see the world and a right way to express their thoughts and opinions. "Creativity can be understood as having the power or quality to express yourself in your own way" (NicCraith, 2009, p.12). Supporting creative learning during Visual Arts Education can help children develop the strength they need to express their own opinions.

Aims and Purpose:

The aim of this small-scale research project is to explore, compare and contrast children's views of their own creative abilities in Visual Arts Education across a variety of

classes in one Irish primary school setting. The study hopes to gather a greater understanding of the perspectives of children at different stages of primary education. It is hoped to gain an insight into creativity in Visual Arts Education and what factors might impact creative thinking from a child's perspective. The question I aim to answer during this research is "How do children's views of their creative abilities in Visual Arts Education vary across the age groups in an Irish primary school setting?"

The following specific objectives are central to the study and the overall aim of the research:

- To examine the perceptions of students on their creative abilities across a range of ages.
- To compare the varying views of pupils on their creativity in order to gain a greater understanding of their creative processes in Visual Arts Education.
- To access pupils' views and to explore the factors that influence, limit and enhance the creative learning process in Visual Arts Education.
- To provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a creative task and to discuss the processes they followed.

Researcher Positionality and Research Rationale:

In 2015 I completed a small-scale research project as part of my undergraduate work that examined how exact instructions and pre-determined outcomes affected children's creativity during Visual Arts lessons. Throughout this research project, and in the intervening years I have spent teaching, I have seen how, when given the opportunity, children had many insights to offer on their creative abilities. Something that has intrigued me, over this period of time, is how children of different ages seem to

express contrasting opinions and views on this topic. These experiences have encouraged me to explore this topic further and led me to recognise that there is a dearth of research including children and their opinions of their creativity. In fact, the majority of research in Visual Arts Education is focused on adults' opinions (Tan and Gibson, 2017). This was surprising to me as Epstein (2001) emphasises that children are more than capable of developing a greater understanding of and reflecting on their own art and the work of others.

In our current Irish society we need creative people coming up with creative solutions to solve modern-day challenges such as climate change, sustainability and migration (NCCA, 2020). The ability to come up with new solutions to old and new problems is seen as playing a major role in economic development and performance in many countries around the world (Carlile and Jordan, 2012). Creativity is not seen as the elusive skill it once was, but rather it is recognised that it can be present in our everyday lives in how we manage problems and interact with our environments (Fumoto, Robson and Greenfield, 2012). Although creativity may be prevalent in our everyday lives, creative thinking may still need to be nurtured and developed. The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework states that "unlocking and promoting children's creative potential impacts positively on their motivation, self-esteem and overall development" (NCCA, 2020, p.8). This indicates the importance of focusing on creativity in education and implicitly in educational research. As children are experts on their own lives and learning experiences it is also important to involve them in educational research and give them the opportunity to express their opinions (Berson, Berson and Gray, 2019). Therefore the rationale for this research is to access children's opinions and gain a greater

understanding of children's creativity in Visual Arts Education in order to further develop their creative potential.

Context:

The 1999 Irish curriculum is one that celebrates creativity and encourages children to see, experience and express their views of the world in many creative forms (NCCA, 1999). Since the release of the 1999 Irish curriculum, global recessions have had a negative impact on how the arts were viewed and valued as the focus moved away from innovation which regrettably resulted in a decline in appreciation of creative learning in Irish education (Kelly, 2014). The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) is re-emphasising the importance of placing focus on creativity in the Irish curriculum once more. Visual Arts Education aids in the societal goal of creative development and a purposeful arts curriculum is instrumental in the process of stimulating creative thinking (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). Kelly (2014) highlights that when young children participate in the creative arts it is clear that they have limitless imaginations and that Visual Arts provides them with a space to create links between this imagination and the real world.

"Every creative journey begins with a problem. It starts with a feeling of frustration, the dull ache of not being able to find the answer. We have worked hard, but we've hit a wall. We have no idea what to do next" (Lehrer, 2012, p6). Creativity is not solely about the end product. It is about the process, the mind-set needed to persevere, the new thought that wasn't there before and the solution. Imagination and creativity are not separate from other thought processes but rather they are a way of thinking. We just have to learn how to access and utilise this creativity in productive ways. The Draft

Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) acknowledges children's natural aptitude for creativity and emphasises how they need ample creative learning experiences. As Visual Arts Education is seen as a subject immersed in creativity, it seemed that it was a good place to begin exploring this creative learning. The question arises as to what inputs and insights do children in the Irish Education system have to offer on this topic?

Research Approach:

This research project is a small-scale study that is informed by constructivist philosophy and follows a qualitative approach. Semi-structured group interviews with children were the main source of data during this research project. Prior to commencing the interviews, the participants also completed a creative drawing task which provided a basis for the subsequent discussions around children's opinions of their creative learning.

Summary:

This chapter gives a brief overview of the rationale, researcher positionality and context of this research project. It also outlines the aims and objectives and poses the following research question which I aim to answer: "How do children's views of their creative abilities in Visual Arts Education vary across the age groups in an Irish primary school setting?". In the chapters that follow there is a review of relevant literature which situates the research in an Irish context. Chapter 3 outlines the qualitative methodologies chosen and the rationale behind why these approaches were selected within the context of this research project. In Chapter 4 there is an analysis and discussion of relevant findings which were provided by the children who participated in this study and which relate back to the literature reviewed in Chapter 3. Finally in Chapter 5 a conclusion that highlights the implications, limitations and recommendations of the study can be found.

Literature Review

"The philosophical foundation for teaching integrated arts in the primary school is based on the belief that aesthetic and creative education is the entitlement of every child and the nature and quality of this provision determines the distinctiveness of cultural life and academic performance in school" (Bloomfield and Childs, 2013, p.1). The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) recognises the importance of this entitlement and highlights how the arts provide experiences to children to explore and develop a greater understanding of their creativity. The aim of this research project is to explore children's views of their creative abilities in Visual Arts Education across a range of ages in an Irish primary school setting.

When exploring creativity it can be hard to find just one standard definition of what the word means (Fox and Schirrmacher, 2014). Starko (2005) has suggested that often our cultures, and how we are brought up, have an impact on how we view and value creativity, setting standards for measuring creativity in pieces of work and personality traits. Beetlestone (1998) views creativity as a form of intelligence while others, such as Batchelor and Bintz (2013), see it more as human potential. It may be that the word creativity is essentially too difficult to define as it is not just a concept; it is a process, a creation, a mind-set, a set of skills/characteristics/environmental factors and also the courage to act on your own thoughts (Fox and Schirrmacher, 2014). It seems that one definition in isolation does not accurately describe creativity in every context or

setting. Perhaps it can be defined using a combination of these definitions depending on the given circumstances. Consequently the definition of creativity that I will follow in this research is that creativity is a human potential in which courage is needed to act upon one's thoughts and produce original, unusual or imaginative ideas.

Irish Perspectives on Creativity:

Although one standard definition of creativity may not exist, it is generally agreed that it can play an important role in the future of our society and many have highlighted the positive impact it can have in our modern world (Creative Ireland, 2020). "As the world we inhabit becomes smaller, faster and more competitive," creative thinking is becoming more essential (NicCraith, 2009, p.11). Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves (2012) discuss how creativity is now looked upon as an attribute that envelops and permeates every aspect of our everyday lives. Although creativity may be present among the highest achievers, people of all ages display creativity in minor ways in their daily lives (Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves, 2012). Therefore, it is of no surprise that in the last ten years there has been much focus on the development of creativity in Irish policy-making. In 2012 the Arts in Education Charter (AEC) highlighted changes in the Irish economy that emphasised a need for an Irish education system that promotes the development of creativity in children. The AEC states that a purposeful Arts Education in a primary school setting is essential in the development of creativity as it can stimulate pupils and encourage their problem-solving skills and adaptability (The Department of Education and Skills, 2012). With such an emphasis on creativity it is no wonder that initiatives and policies such as Creative Ireland, Creative Schools and the Creative Youth Plan were set up in recent years. The Creative Ireland Programme is a

five-year government legacy that aims "to mainstream creativity in the life of the nation so that individually and collectively, in our personal lives and in our institutions, we can realise our full creative potential" (Creative Ireland Programme, 2017). Through the Creative Ireland Programme (2017) initiatives such as Creative Schools and the Creative Youth Plan were established in order to encourage and inspire creativity in children across Ireland. The Creative Ireland Programme Review (2020) stressed the importance of creativity being central to public policy-making and delivery while the Creative Youth Plan (2018) emphasised the many benefits it can bring to children's happiness and eventual livelihood.

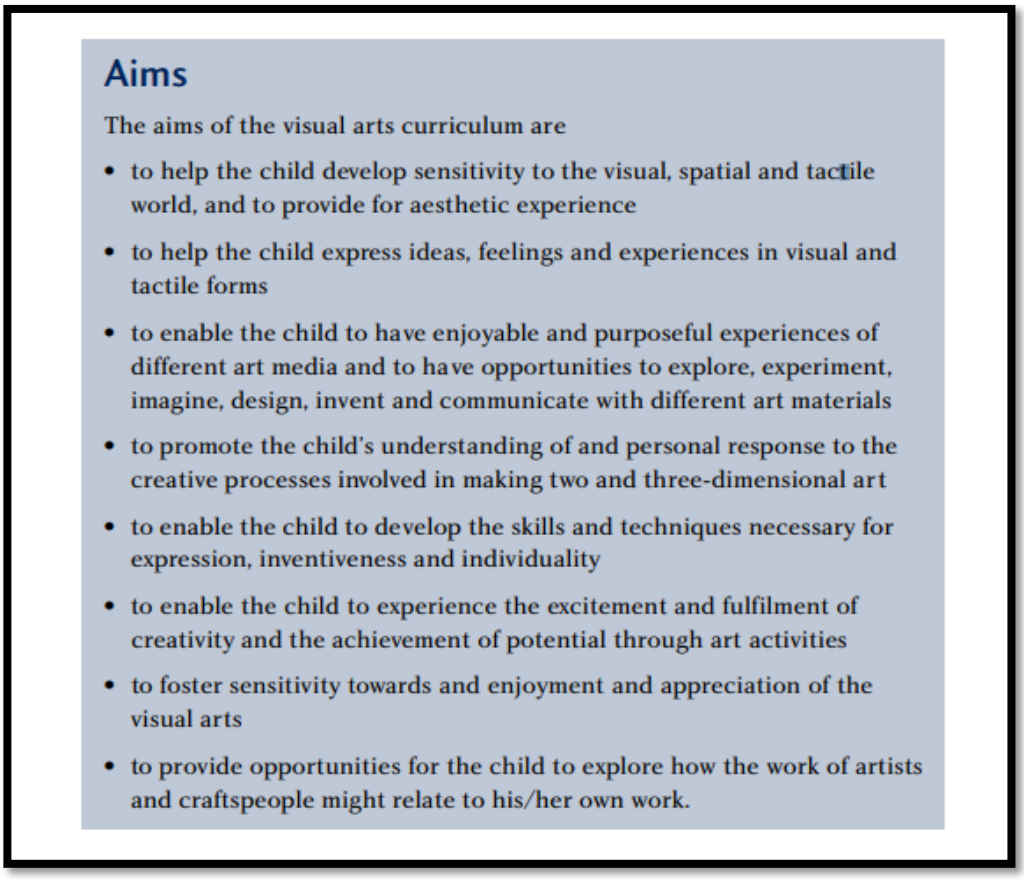
The creativity that a child acquires in youth "is like a compass guiding (them) organically towards academic success, entrepreneurship and a positive sense of emotional stability" (Creative Youth Plan, 2018, p. 34). The Arts in Education Charter in Ireland (2012) highlights the vibrant and complicated process of creativity that draws on various aspects of a person's life. The charter also emphasises the complex but rewarding impact that creativity can have on a person's health and happiness. This complex process cannot be summarised as a simple skill or as purely intellectual but rather it takes on a much deeper meaning and can have profound implications on all aspects of life. It is evident that creativity is increasingly becoming an important focus in Irish policy-making but the question arises as to how effective these policies are and are they being implemented. The Creative Ireland Programme (2017) has acknowledged the vital importance of starting these creative policies with children. Education is one of the best resources we can use in order to implement policies and consequently foster creativity in the youth of our society.

Creativity in the Irish Curriculum:

In the Draft Primary School Curriculum, Kofi Annan states that "tomorrow's world is already taking shape in the body and spirit of our children" (p.2, NCCA, 2020). This quote reminds us that the children of our world, and the decisions they make throughout their lives, will shape the society of the future. Unfortunately, we cannot predict the future but we can help provide children with skills that might help them face that future. NicCraith (2009) highlights how education should help to shape people who are capable of independent thinking and who will not repeat the mistakes or patterns of previous generations. She states that a creative curriculum should offer children many creative experiences and opportunities to develop independent thinking. The 1999 Irish curriculum is based on a child-centred learning approach that values the uniqueness of the child (NCCA, 1999). There is also some focus on the creativity of the child, particularly in the Visual Arts curriculum, where one of its main aims is "to enable the child to experience the excitement and fulfilment of creativity and the achievement of potential through art activities" (NCCA, p.9, 1999) (see figure 1).

Robinson and Aronica (2016) highlight how education plays such an important role in the development of our society as it can have major implications on economic, cultural, social and personal aspects of our world. They feel that current education systems are constantly striving to raise education standards but that these systems are not prioritising correctly. They believe the focus is on academic standards and that this focus is not meeting the needs of the children in these systems. Robinson (2011) further states that creativity is one of the skills that get lost among these skewed education standards. He feels that current education systems suppress creativity and, as a result,

education is one of the main reasons why people question their creative abilities as adults due to an overemphasis on standardised testing and pure academics. It is possible that Robinson is saying as there is currently excessive pressure on schools to keep up with curriculum overload and to reach high standards set out by society. Kelly (2014) highlights how a global decline in appreciation of the arts and creativity, since the 1999 curriculum was released, has also had a negative impact on the approach to creativity in the Irish education system. The focus on testing and exam results (Kelly, 2014) and an overloaded curriculum have also posed challenges to teaching and learning in the Irish context (INTO, 2015). Jesson (2012) asserts that "the lack of time in a crowded curriculum to experiment, innovate and think about ideas" (p.14) has a negative impact on creativity in education.



Aims

The aims of the visual arts curriculum are

- to help the child develop sensitivity to the visual, spatial and tactile world, and to provide for aesthetic experience
- to help the child express ideas, feelings and experiences in visual and tactile forms
- to enable the child to have enjoyable and purposeful experiences of different art media and to have opportunities to explore, experiment, imagine, design, invent and communicate with different art materials
- to promote the child's understanding of and personal response to the creative processes involved in making two and three-dimensional art
- to enable the child to develop the skills and techniques necessary for expression, inventiveness and individuality
- to enable the child to experience the excitement and fulfilment of creativity and the achievement of potential through art activities
- to foster sensitivity towards and enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts
- to provide opportunities for the child to explore how the work of artists and craftspeople might relate to his/her own work.

Figure 1: The aims of the Visual Arts curriculum (NCCA, 1999, p.9)

Fortunately, the new Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) allows for creativity to play a much more central role in the Irish primary curriculum than the 1999 curriculum. The Draft Primary Curriculum puts creativity forward as one of seven key competencies (see figure 2) that will help shape the new curriculum and recognises children as creative beings who require ample opportunity to express and nurture their creativity. The framework also highlights the many benefits that a creative curriculum can bring. These range from broader societal implications, such as a population that is better prepared to face current global issues (e.g., climate change or sustainability), to the personal gain that can be acquired by individual students. The potential global value of a creative society is immeasurable but the personal implications for the students of Ireland could be just as monumental. The framework also discusses how creative learning can lead to more unique work produced by students across all areas of the curriculum which, in turn, can promote self-esteem and aid in the overall development of a child (NCCA, 2020, p.7-13). It is clear from this framework how much thought and consideration has been given to the potential benefits that can be gained from a creative curriculum. However an element that is missing from this document is the voice of the pupil. Children's opinions could potentially bring new creative ideas and approaches to the curriculum which in turn could positively impact their own creative learning journey.

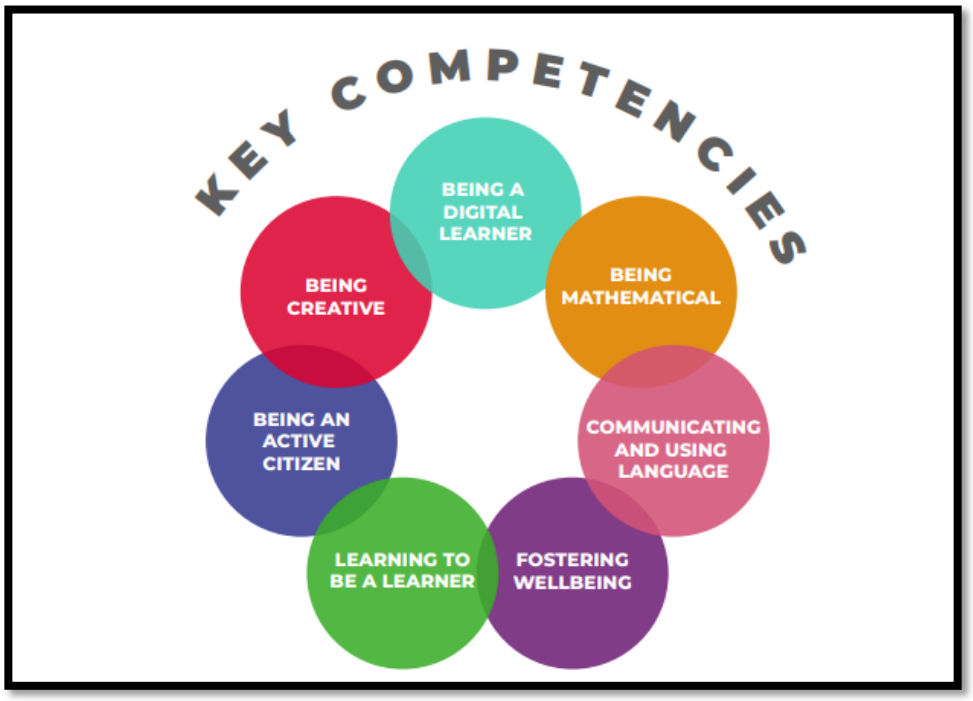


Figure 2: The Draft Primary Curriculum Key Competencies (NCCA, 2020, p.7)

Creativity and the Arts:

"Arts Education is life-enhancing, is central to children's development and is invaluable in stimulating creative thinking" (NicCraith, 2009, p.7). In 2012 the Irish Arts in Education Charter (Department of Education and Skills) further emphasised the valuable impact Arts Education can have on the overall objective of creativity development in our economy and culture. They stated that a purposeful Arts Education has the potential to enrich a child's life in many ways. One of the most valuable attributes associated with Arts Education is its ability to inspire creativity while promoting competence and flexibility in its pupils (Department of Education and Skills, 2012). A focus on creativity through arts education can aid in the development of a more creative society while also helping children feel the sense of fulfilment that accompanies the conquering of creative tasks (NicCraith, 2009). Although creativity is not solely linked with the arts they do play a very important role in the development of creative children. The arts provide a safe

space where creativity can be nurtured and enhanced (Robinson and Aronica, 2011). As today's society is seeking more creativity there is a greater need than ever for the Irish curriculum to meet this demand. The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020) aims to use the arts as part of the development of creative students since they provide opportunities for its pupils to experience and understand their creativity in many ways.

Creativity in Visual Arts Education:

The Creative Youth Plan (2018) highlighted the important role that Visual Arts Education plays in the development of creativity and stated that this can have a positive impact on other subjects in the curriculum. It would, however, be remiss to look upon this as being the sole value of creativity within Visual Arts Education. In the modern world of education there is much focus on assessment and measurement of abilities with particular emphasis on final products or outcomes (Zimmerman, 2009). This over-emphasis on assessment poses difficulty in Visual Arts Education in general as the process, rather than the product, is of greater importance. Zimmerman (2009) further suggests that one way to enhance development of creativity in Visual Arts Education is to encourage pupils to share the process they have undertaken while creating their artwork. Epstein (2001) claims that children are more than capable of thinking about and expressing their opinions on art and reflecting on their own artistic creations. This requires higher-order thinking and, as children are more than capable of this creative expression, they can yield unique and imaginative results from their own creative process. In addition the more experience in visual arts that children have the more it can lead to creative learning (Tan and Gibson, 2017). In essence children's ability to express their opinions on their creativity and the development of their creativity are intrinsically

linked. The more opportunities they have to express their views on creativity mean they are exposed to more creative thinking. Therefore promoting creativity through the arts can also enhance the learning process in Visual Arts education itself.

There are many benefits to creativity in Visual Arts Education but how a creative curriculum is implemented is of vital importance. How such a curriculum is implemented should be explicitly explained to all educators. "A creative curriculum offers children plenty of opportunities for creative behaviour. Such a curriculum will call for original work, independent learning, self-initiated projects and experimentation" (NicCraith, 2009, p12). The Creative Youth Plan (2018) highlights the importance of giving children the time and resources they need to be creative. This is a basic requirement in implementing a creative visual arts curriculum and is an important and necessary starting point. Along with time and resources Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves (2012) highlight the essential foundations needed when developing creative thinking in children. These social, cognitive, emotional and motivational foundations are central to creative development. The Arts in Education Charter (2012) states that creativity is enhanced by other components such as emotions, imagination and instinct. Therefore not only do other elements create a foundation for creativity but they are also intrinsically linked and will continue to complement each other throughout all learning opportunities. The question remains as to how we can best lay these creative foundations. The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020) suggests some ways in which this can be achieved. They state that an emphasis should be placed on cherishing what children themselves value while providing them with ample opportunity to create. This can be accomplished through "exploring, clarifying and expressing ideas, feelings and experiences" (NCCA, 2020, p.8).

Children and their Creative Development:

Creativity is a fundamental quality that is present in all human beings, including young children (Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves, 2012). Fox and Schirrmacher (2014) would go further and suggest that children can, in fact, be creative with almost anything. If creativity is inherently present in us all at what point does the limitless creativity of youth abate? Jones and Wyse (2013) have stated that creativity and originality are not only found in childhood but they are rooted in childhood. If this is the case then the process of creative development during childhood is of the utmost importance as it could have profound implications on creativity throughout our lives. Kelly (2014) highlights how, while observing young children taking part in creative activities, it is clear that their imaginations are limitless and that Visual Arts Education affords children the opportunity to make connections between the real world and their imagination. This kind of creative learning is often children's preferred learning method as it comes naturally to them and can be fun and exciting.

Children's Creative Processes in Visual Arts Education:

"There was nothing. Now there is something. It's almost like magic"

(Lehrer, 2012, p253).

As Leher (2012) states, when something new is created it can almost seem magical but this is not always the case as creative processes can often be quite complicated. Edwards (2014) distinguishes the difference between the creative product and the creative process. He states that during the creative process there is a greater focus on the present than on the end product. The Wallas Model of the Creative Process

highlights four key steps in the creative process (see figure 3). These are the preparation phrase where information is gathered and materials and resources are prepared, the incubation period where time is given for ideas to develop, the illumination stage of enlightenment and finally verification where the idea is put to the test (Edwards, 2014).

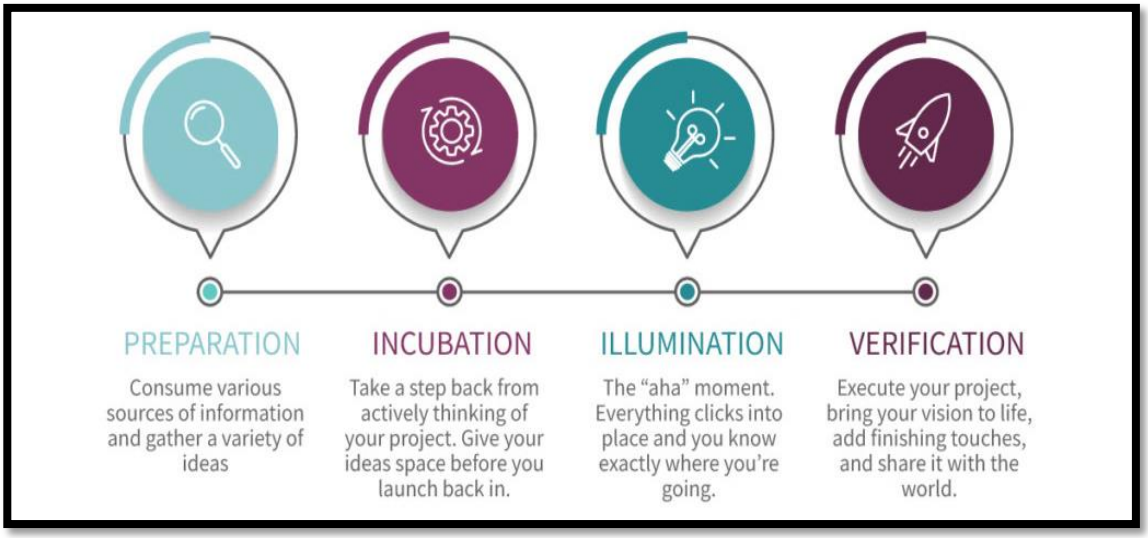


Figure 3: The Wallas Model of the Creative Process (Alaloaf, 2020)

Robinson and Aronica (2016) highlight that the creative process needs a delicate balance between letting imaginations run free while also refining and controlling ideas which can be difficult to achieve. As the creative learning process can be difficult Jones and Wyse (2013) highlight the importance of intrinsic motivation when it comes to enhancing children's creativity. If a child is interested in what they are doing they are much more likely to draw on creative traits such as perseverance and enthusiasm when they encounter problems to solve. Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves (2012) take this one step further by stating that, if a child creates a creativity-based activity themselves, they are even more likely to stay motivated throughout the process. Therefore in order to attain the best creative outcomes during a visual arts lesson it would be important to use the child's interests or, more crucially, to include them in the

process of creating the activity. Edwards (2014) emphasises how, in a child-centred educational setting, the best ideas often come from the children themselves.

Jesson (2012) states that, instead of children being given the creative autonomy to come up with their own ideas, they are often over-fed information by their teachers. This means that the preparation and incubation stages of the creative process are often skipped entirely or given little to no time. Bloomfield and Childs (2013) discuss how creativity in Visual Art lessons often begins with a simple stimulus that leads on to visualisation, experimentation, exploration of resources and communication of ideas. The children need advance notice of tasks, time to process their thoughts and an opportunity to plan with their peers (Jesson, 2012). This process should be appealing to children as there is no right or wrong way to approach it and it does not require that they "know how to create" (Edwards, 2014, p.3). Overall the creative process during Visual Arts education should be fun and engaging for all (NicCraith, 2009). Educators should look for ways in which to make this process as enjoyable as possible. Initiating discussions with students regarding their opinions on their creative processes could provide teachers with an insight into how this can be made possible for the pupils they teach.

Influences and Limitations of the Creative Process:

Robinson (2011) states that children need to feel that they and their talents are appreciated in order to be creative and highlights diversity as being key to this process so that all students feel they are valued. Robinson (2011) also discusses how creative development in the arts can be linked with technical control and mastering the use of materials. Robinson, in this instance, is contradicting himself as he fails to acknowledge the diversity in abilities of children which can contribute to diversity in the world of

creativity. In fact, those who may not have mastered an artistic skill may be required to apply more creativity in finding ways in which they can express themselves than those of greater ability. Although artistic skill and better control of materials may mean that a child has more avenues in which they can express their creativity, it does not necessarily define their creativity. Edwards (2014) asserts that having the confidence to take risks, during creative endeavours, is much more important than artistic skill and talent. This links into the process-vs-product discussion that comes up time and time again in Visual Arts Education. Visual Arts lessons, in primary school settings, can too often be focused on product-based activities rather than attention being placed on the processes followed (Edwards, 2014). Although artistic skill is often defined by the end product it is being increasingly acknowledged that greater attention to the processes taken can be an indicator of higher abilities (Clark and Zimmerman, 2004). This concept plays an important role in creativity during Visual Art lessons as, if the focus is on the processes taken, children can learn to problem-solve and adapt regardless of their artistic skill level. The Arts in Education Charter (Department of Education and Skills, 2012) echoes this point by stating that a focus on the creative process can add individuality and quality to a child's artwork. Therefore process-based art lessons can aid creative development and improve the overall quality of Visual Arts education instruction.

Although artistic skill is not the main factor in creative development during Visual Arts Education this does not mean that the teacher's role is insignificant during creativity-based art lessons. In fact, NicCraith (2009) states that developing children's potential through exploration and creativity is one of the most important roles of an educator. Robinson (2011) maintains that requesting children to be creative is simply not enough but that they need the necessary support in order to do so. He feels it is the teacher's

responsibility, during visual art lessons, to strike a balance between teaching the skills necessary for artistic ability to grow while also inspiring their creativity. Robinson (2011) states that this can be quite complex and that, in order to achieve this and teach for creativity, teachers must be creative themselves. This potentially puts a lot of unfair pressure on teachers and their creativity given the limitations they face with regard to curriculum overload and large classes (INTO, 2015). NicCraith (2009) highlights that children need time to be creative and this is becoming increasingly difficult with the limitations faced by teachers. Therefore creating a classroom environment that is focused on creative development is of the utmost importance. This often needs creative approaches from teachers who are willing to take risks, provide surprising and adventurous lessons and create ample opportunity for creative behaviour (NicCraith, 2009). Teachers also need to be aware of the preconceived outcomes of tasks they are setting and be sure to set age-appropriate standards on the outcomes of this work (Edwards, 2014).

Zimmerman (2009) suggests that another way in which teachers can help to nurture creativity in their pupils is to simply recognise when creativity surfaces and know how to encourage it. He also recommends that students should also be able to identify when their creativity emerges. Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves (2012) outline some traits that can signify creative thinking in children. These include their willingness to take on challenges, their persistence and how they engage in activities they enjoy. The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) further outlines the creative attributes they recognise as playing a large part in being creative. These attributes include "participating in creative/cultural experiences, being curious, being imaginative, being innovative, using creative processes and exploring alternative ways of

communicating" (NCCA, 2020, p.11). Although there are many ways in which creativity can surface in a child, knowing and understanding these traits and attributes is a vital part of teaching for creativity during visual arts lessons. Children can potentially provide the greatest insight into their own creative learning processes and skills.

The Voice of the Child:

Tan and Gibson (2017) highlight the fact that the majority of research involving Visual Arts Education focuses on adult opinions and views. This may be due to the fact that the subject is difficult to assess and that, therefore, the benefits of Visual Arts Education can be hard to justify. Hence the majority of Visual Arts Education research revolves around justifying its place in the curriculum and as a consequence there is a dearth of research involving children in this area. This is unfortunate since including children in research is of importance as they are the experts of their own lives (Berson, Berson and Gray, 2019) and can give us the greatest insight in to their educational needs.

> "There is growing evidence of the benefits of participation by children and young people in decision-making across a range of measures, including improved services, policies, research, active citizenship and, most importantly, improvements for children themselves, for social inclusion and for society generally. Inclusion of children and young people in decision-making can promote children's protection, improve their confidence, communication skills and ability to negotiate, network and make judgements." (Creative Youth Plan, 2018, p.22)

Not only can including children in research be of value to the world of research but it can also have a very positive impact on children's lives as they feel they become agents of their own learning and therefore their own futures. This can empower children and show

them that they are valued members of society while also respecting their rights (Merriman and Guerin, 2006). Given the potential benefits to including children in research it follows that any child-centred curriculum should revolve around child-centred research.

Creative Capacities in Visual Arts Education:

Jones and Wyse (2013) view creativity as an endless quality that begins in mundane, everyday life but ends with creative genius like that found in artists such as Picasso. NicCraith (2009) highlights how children are naturally creative and that they experience the world around them with fresh new eyes and often respond to these experiences in original ways. In their study Tan and Gibson (2017) found that children often believe that everyone has artistic potential but anticipate that people's artistic abilities will improve with age. Edwards states that "creativity is not a synonym for talent" (p.9, 2010) and, given the complexity of creativity, it is difficult to know how connected these two concepts are. If there is a connection between talent and creativity then, as artistic skills improve, creativity should also improve with age. In the Cambridge Handbook of Creativity (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2019) it states that creativity does not continually flourish and that creative development is not smooth. In fact, it is highlighted in this handbook that childhood creativity incurs many slumps throughout their primary education. A drop in children's creativity was noticed at two stages in primary education, initially when children were around five years old and again as they reached the age of nine or ten (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2019). This shows that there are many changes in children's creative abilities throughout primary school but it does not take into account the children's opinions of their own personal creativity.

Robinson (2011) highlights the contrast between children's and adult's opinions of their own creativity, stating that most children believe they are very creative whereas most adults feel they are not. Robinson (2011) also believes that education plays a huge role in this as preschool children enter school life with a wealth of creative confidence but by the time they leave education they often lack confidence in their abilities. Kelly (2014) states that imagination peaks when children are younger and often declines as children progress through education so this could be a factor in their creative confidence. Students often become more pessimistic as they age and this can have a negative impact on how they view their creativity and how they approach creative tasks (Jesson, 2012). However, an appreciation of the arts in early education can help nurture children's imaginations and develop their creative thinking as they mature (Kelly, 2014). Kelley and Kelley (2013) testify that creative confidence plays a crucial role in creativity. They believe this can be achieved with some effort and many creative experiences. In order to achieve this they suggest that people must stop comparing themselves to others while, at the same time, be willing to make mistakes and take ownership of their failures. This process takes courage and self-efficacy. Fox and Schirrmacher (2014) specify that having the courage to carry through on new ideas is central to the creative process. It seems that confidence therefore plays a huge role in creativity throughout life and a creative curriculum should work towards building this. Fumoto, Robson, Greenfield and Hargreaves (2012) further state that taking part in creative activities for one's own benefit can have positive implications on a person's self-worth. "The encouragement of creativity from an early age is one of the best guarantees of growth in a healthy environment of self-esteem and mutual respect" (UNESCO in NicCraith, 2009, p.11). In essence creativity, confidence and self-worth are all intrinsically linked. Therefore in

order to develop children's creativity, educators also need to work on enhancing pupil's confidence and sense of self-worth.

Conclusion:

Zimmerman asserts that "in order for creative autonomy to be fostered, teachers and students need to be able to identify when creativity emerges and know how it should be nurtured and supported" (p.329, 2009). This highlights the importance of including children in research involving creativity in Visual Arts Education. Both pupils and teachers alike need to understand and appreciate students' creativity in order for their creative potential to blossom. As creative ability is continually fluctuating in primary school children it is important to understand students' creativity at a variety of different age levels in order to best help them reach their creative potential. Given that children have a right to express their views and that their perspectives can have a positive impact on education (Messiou, 2002) it would be remiss not to seek their views regarding their own creativity in Visual Arts Education. "It is that simple. Authentic and democratic community development from the bottom up begins with giving young people a voice and empowering them to go on to make wise, creative decisions in their own communities". (Creative Youth Plan, 2018, p.34).

Research Methodology:

Focus of Research:

The rationale for this research is to explore, compare and contrast children's views of their own creative abilities in Visual Arts Education across a variety of classes in one Irish primary school setting. The study aims to gather a greater understanding of the perspectives of children at different stages of primary education. It is anticipated that an insight into creativity in Visual Arts Education and what factors might impact creative thinking from a child's perspective will be gained. The question I aim to answer during this research is "How do children's views of their creative abilities in Visual Arts Education vary across the age groups in an Irish primary school setting?"

Research Design:

"Research is a combination of both experience and reasoning and must be regarded as the most successful approach to the discovery of truth" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.7). It is clear research is of the utmost importance in the pursuit of truth but research can take many different forms. Quantitative research methods often follow a scientific and confirmatory approach, whereas qualitative approaches focus on what is seen or on peoples' experiences and perspectives to generate new ideas (Johnson and Christensen, 2019). The main focus of this research project was to access the children's opinions of their own personal creativity. As this research project is based on the views of children it was deemed that a qualitative approach that gathered data in

the form of words would be more beneficial than a quantitative approach that focused on numerical based data (Johnson and Christensen, 2019). Silverman suggests that "the methods used by qualitative researchers exemplify a common belief that they can provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data" (2000, p8). It is my intention that the qualitative methods I have chosen will provide me with the opportunity to delve deeper into the opinions of the children involved while creating meaningful interpretations.

"With the epistemological assumption, conducting a qualitative study means that researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants being studied" (Creswell, 2007, p.18). As a result the methodologies used in this research included semi-structured group interviews, a creative drawing task and contemporaneous notes. Two groups of children from each of the following classes: Senior Infants, 2nd, 4thand 6th, in one primary school setting, took part in the research (see table 1). Prior to the group interview children were asked to take part in a creative drawing task entitled *The 30 Circle Challenge* (Kelley and Kelley, 2013). The aim of this drawing task was to put the children at ease and to enhance the discussions within the interview process. The children then took part in a semi-structured group interview where their opinions on their own creativity were discussed. These group interviews were the main method of data retrieval throughout my research, as they gave me the greatest insight into the perspectives of the children taking part. Throughout the drawing task and group interviews I took contemporaneous notes of any relevant evidence I had seen or heard.

Table 1: Summary of Participants

	Interview 1	**Interview 2**	**Interview 3**	**Interview 4**	**Interview 5**	**Interview 6**	**Interview 7**	**Interview 8**
Class Group:	*Senior Infants 1* (S.I. 1)	*Senior Infants 2* (S.I. 2)	*2nd Class 1* (2nd 1)	*2nd Class 2* (2nd 2)	*4th Class 1* (4th 1)	*4th Class 2* (4th 2)	*6th Class 1* (6th 1)	*6th Class 2* (6th 2)
First Participant	Child 1, S.I. 1	Child 1, S.I. 2	Child 1, 2nd 1	Child 1, 2nd 2	Child 1, 4th 1	Child 1, 4th 2	Child 1, 6th 1	Child 1, 6th 2
Second Participant	Child 2, S.I. 1	Child 2, S.I. 2	Child 2, 2nd 1	Child 2, 2nd 2	Child 2, 4th 1	Child 2, 4th 2	Child 2, 6th 1	Child 2, 6th 2
Third Participant	Child 3, S.I. 1	Child 3, S.I. 2	Child 3, 2nd 1	Child 3, 2nd 2	Child 3, 4th 1	Child 3, 4th 2	Child 3, 6th 1	Child 3, 6th 2
Fourth Participant	Child 4, S.I. 1	Child 4, S.I. 2	Child 4, 2nd 1	Child 4, 2nd 2	Child 4, 4th 1	Child 4, 4th 2	Child 4, 6th 1	Child 4, 6th 2
Fifth Participant	Child 5, S.I. 1	Child 5, S.I. 2	Child 5, 2nd 1	Child 5, 2nd 2	Child 5, 4th 1	Child 5, 4th 2	Child 5, 6th 1	Child 5, 6th 2
Sixth Participant	Child 6, S.I. 1	Child 6, S.I. 2	Child 6, 2nd 1	Child 6, 2nd 2	Child 6, 4th 1	Child 6, 4th 2	Child 6, 6th 1	Child 6, 6th 2

Data Collection:

"Whatever procedure for collecting data is selected, it should always be examined critically to assess to what extent it is likely to be reliable and valid" (Bell, 2014, p.119). Consequently, I explored a variety of forms of data collection before conducting my research and as suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) I decided that a few different forms of data collection would best suit the children who took part in the research. As I was accessing children's opinions I felt that interviews would give me the

opportunity to better explore their feelings and delve deeper into their responses in comparison to written answers provided in a questionnaire (Bell, 2014). As there were also some younger children taking part in the research, the use of interviews gave them an opportunity to voice their opinions independently, without having to rely on the ability to read or write. Bell (2014) highlights that the process of triangulation and using more than one method of data collection is preferable as it provides different perspectives and the opportunity to cross-reference the data. Consequently, interviews became my main source of data throughout the research while photo documentation and field notes provided an opportunity to get a better perspective on this data.

Data Collection 1: Semi-structured Group Interviews

O'Reilly and Dogra (2016) highlight interviews as being an excellent method for gathering information on people's opinions, experiences and feelings. However, the interview process can seem quite daunting to children as they may look upon it as a very formal procedure (O'Reilly and Dogra, 2016). For this reason I chose to use small group interviews as these can be less overwhelming for children. These took the form semi-structured group interviews with eight focus groups, two group interviews each from a Senior Infants, 2nd Class, 4th Class and 6th Class. Multiple class groups of different ages were chosen in order to provide an overview of the participants' views across varying age levels. Participating classes were chosen at two-year intervals, throughout this one primary school, to provide a general indication of pupils' opinions in this one setting.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest that groups of approximately six are the optimal size when interviewing children. Therefore children were interviewed in groups of six from their own peer group making a total of 48 children partaking in

interviews across the four different class levels (see table 1). The more informal the nature of the interview schedules the more suitable they are for children (Berson, Berson and Gray, 2019). Consequently a semi-structured format was used as it is more beneficial for engaging the child and for gauging their understanding of the questions throughout. This form of interview structure ensures participants have more choice and control (Berson, Berson and Gray, 2019). Through the use of some open-ended questions I provided participants with the opportunity to bring to light their own feelings and experiences, affording me opportunities to explore different avenues which I may not have thought about previously (see appendix G). I endeavoured to actively listen throughout the interviews and to modify questions to suit the needs of the children that I was interviewing (O'Reilly and Dogra, 2016).

Data Collection 2: Creative Drawing Task

In order to further elevate the voice of the child and to provide them with a different avenue for participation (Berson, Berson and Gray, 2019) I also used a drawing activity at the beginning of each of the group interviews. Berson, Berson and Gray (2019) highlight how task-based methods during research studies can make children feel more comfortable but suggest that there has to be a valid purpose to these tasks. Merriman and Guerin (2006) emphasise that drawing tasks are seen as a useful method that is appropriate for all participants as they can find it enjoyable and non-threatening. The pre-interview task the children took part in is called *The 30 Circle Challenge*, whereby they were given three minutes to turn as many circles as possible into recognisable objects (see figures 4, 5, 6 and 7). The aim of this activity first and foremost is to put children at ease prior to commencing the group interview. Merriman and Guerin (2006)

discuss how drawing activities are familiar to children of all ages as they can often find them quite enjoyable. This in turn can make them feel more comfortable while participating in research. The drawing task also provided students with an opportunity to generate ideas and to apply their creativity. Tasks such as *The 30 Circle Challenge* can show the fluency and flexibility of the ideation process, since a good thought or concept is easier to come by if there are many ideas to choose from (Kelley and Kelley, 2013). I took photographs of the children's drawing task upon completion of the interviews and used these photographs as part of my data analysis process. The creative drawing task also provided a stimulus for the interview process as the children were enabled to discuss their ideation process and this aided the collective discussion of their views on their own creativity.

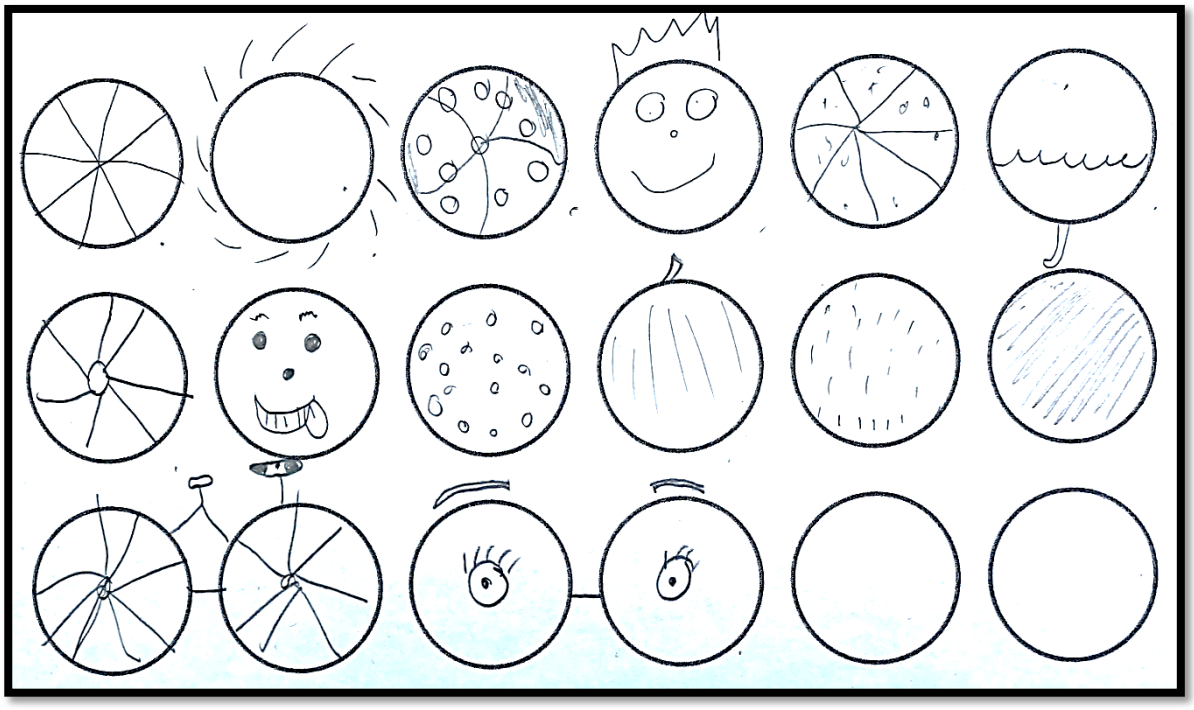


Figure 4: Sample of 6th Class '30 Circle Challenge'

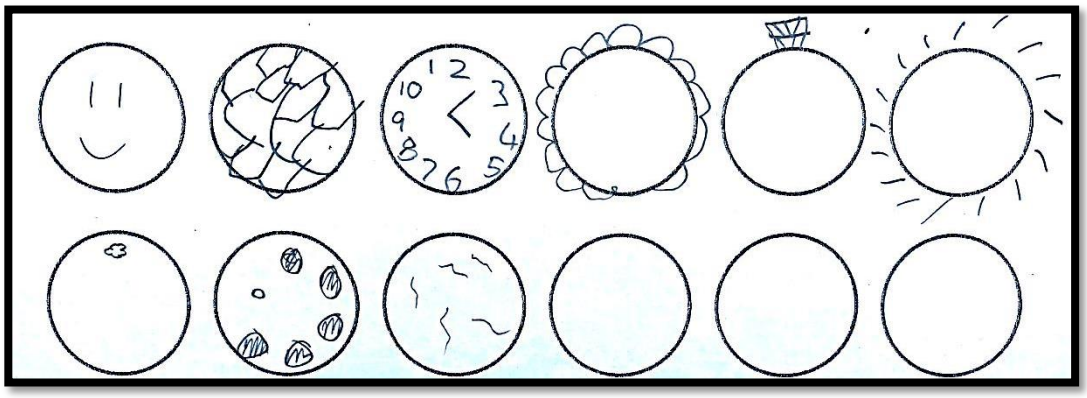


Figure 5: Sample of 4th Class '30 Circle Challenge'

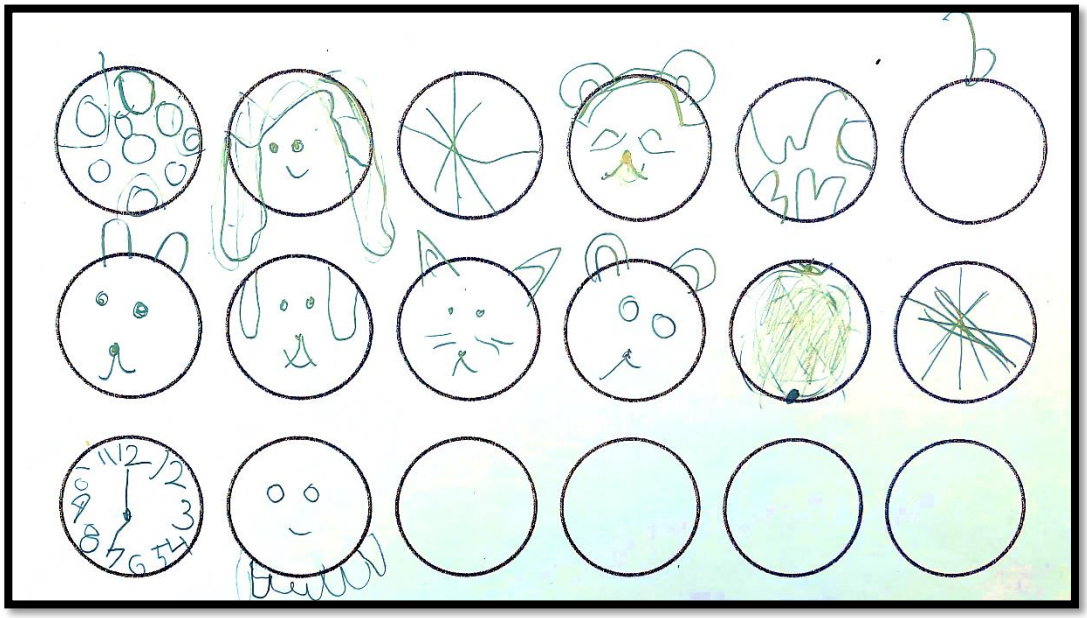


Figure 6: Sample of 2nd Class '30 Circle Challenge'

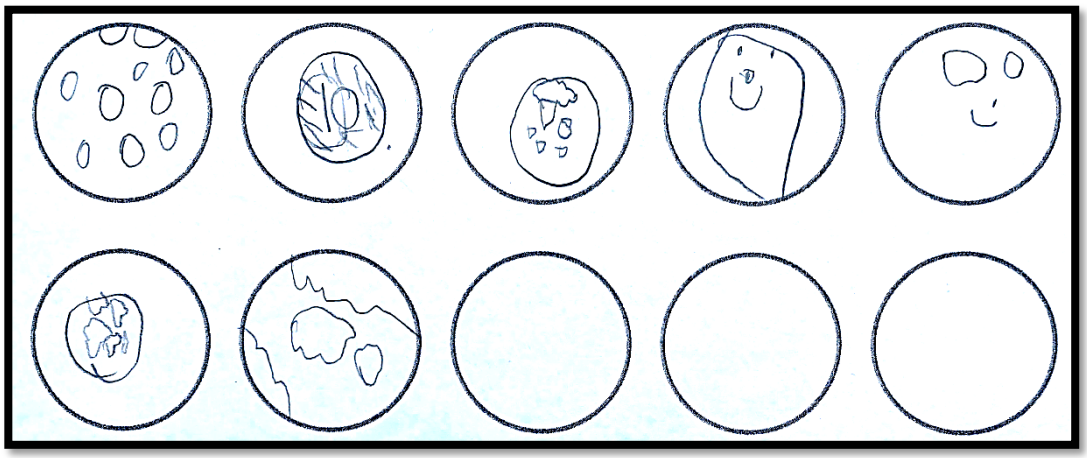


Figure 7: Sample of Senior Infant '30 Circle Challenge'

Data Collection 3: Observation

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest that the use of field notes can enhance the process of data collection. "Field notes are widely recommended in qualitative research as a means of documenting needed contextual information [and they] ensure rich context persists beyond the original research" (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2018, p.381). Therefore, as the children were taking part in the drawing tasks and interviews, I took some contemporaneous notes of the relevant evidence which I had seen or heard. This included children's reactions, comments and the processes they had undertaken throughout the activity.

Participants, Setting and Timeframe:

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that it is of the upmost importance that all children participating in research need to feel comfortable and confident. Including elements such as drawing activities can ensure the participants are at ease while also ensuring that they enjoy the process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). To further aid their comfort throughout the interview process I chose to use purposive sampling while selecting participants. "Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in a research study" (Johnson and Christensen, 2019, p.231). In order to choose my sample, I liaised with classroom teachers in order to assist with the selection process and ensure that all children included in the study had high self-efficacy and were comfortable talking about their own creativity. A limitation surrounding purposive sampling, and all non-probability sampling, is that the research cannot be generalised or be representational of the general population (Johnson and Christensen, 2019).

Probability samples, such as random sampling, were considered in order to give a more general and wider overview of research in this area (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). However, given that the research was based on the participants' views and opinions of their own creative abilities, a wider generalisation would be hard to achieve. Furthermore Cohen, Manion and Morrison state that is important that all participants in a research project should "have something to say and feel comfortable enough to say it" (2007, p.377). By using the process of purposive sampling I ensured that I obtained high quality data as all of the children participating in the interviews were comfortable discussing their creative abilities.

Interview Structure

As part of the qualitative research I interviewed children from a mixed, vertical, Catholic primary school. 48 children from four different class levels took part in the research (see table 1). Interviews can provide a depth of explanation within a particular context and the interviewer can clarify questions and probe the answers of the respondent providing more complete information (Drever, 1995). The qualitative design involved the use of semi-structured interviews. These interviews have predetermined questions but the order and wording of questions can be altered based on the interviewee's responses or on what the interviewer deems appropriate (Robson, 2002). Using a semi-structured interview format afforded me the flexibility to diverge from the structure in order to use probing techniques and gain a deeper understanding of the pupils' perspectives (Drever, 1995).

Piloting the Interviews:

I decided to pilot the interview on two children, with whom I am well acquainted, both of similar age to those children who took part in the research. The purpose of piloting the interview was to eliminate any ambiguous or confusing questions and to check the length of the interview (Opie, 2004). The pilot interview took around twenty minutes. Through piloting the interview many valuable insights were gained. The first being that a greater description, prior to the commencement of *The 30 Circle Challenge*, was needed in order to give the participants a greater understanding of the task at hand. It was also noted that, due to social distancing, some of the participants' voices were hard to hear in the recording. Therefore, the digital recording device was placed much closer to the pupils and a second, back-up, digital recording device was placed closer to the researcher during the interviews.

Interview Procedure:

The participants in this research consisted of eight small groups of children from four different class levels: Senior Infants, 2nd Class, 4th Class and 6th Class. Purposive sampling was used to select two groups of six children to take part in the interview process from each of the aforementioned class levels. Costley (2000) advises that, in order to alleviate any feelings of apprehension, the purpose of the research should be explained to all participants in great detail. Therefore, the participants and their parents were informed of all aspects of the research before it commenced. Prior to the semi-structured group interviews a letter of consent and plain language statement were sent home to parents/guardians (~~see~~ appendix C-F). The purpose of the interviews was explained to the children and they also filled out a simplified consent form.

Creswell (2007) highlights that the more familiar the participants are with their domain and the longer the researcher has spent in this field the more likely they are to understand their contributions to the research. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) discuss how a natural setting can aid participant's comfort levels throughout the research. Consequently all group interviews were held in an environment that is familiar to the children and one in which the researcher has worked for several years. Plain simple language was used during the interviews and questions were repeated where necessary. A mixture of closed and open questions were used to collect factual information as well as information on opinions and perspectives (appendix G).

Accommodation for Covid 19:

Throughout the interview process all Covid 19 guidelines were strictly adhered to in accordance with HSE Guidelines. The researcher and all participants adhered to social distancing guidelines and the interview space was sanitised prior to and after each interview. With regard to the drawing activity all participants were given their own individual worksheet and pencil. When the interview was over the participants were given the opportunity to take the new pencil with them in order to prevent any cross contamination of resources.

Data Analysis:

Creswell (1998) asserts that there is no single correct method of analysing qualitative data but, that clearly, the course of action chosen must reflect the purpose of the study. The data that I have analysed in this study included photographs of the pupil's work from the creative drawing task, contemporaneous notes and transcripts of interviews from all eight groups. Analysing photographs of the children's work took the

form of content analysis. Farokhi and Hashemi state that "cognitive development and drawing skills are important factors to consider when analysing children's pictures" (2011, p.6). As the participants in this study were all of different ages their cognitive development and drawing abilities were varied. Therefore the children were given the opportunity to discuss their drawing at the beginning of the group interview and this both inspired the interview discussion and aided the analysis of the photographs of the children's work.

The data gathered through contemporaneous notes took the form of observation which can complement that of other techniques (Robson, 2002). Butler-Kisber (2010) suggests that field notes can be written in situ, but they tend to be cryptic in nature due to the pace at which they are written. They highlight the importance of transcribing field notes and interviews soon after they are completed. As a result I transcribed the recordings and the contemporaneous notes as soon as possible after each interview.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that qualitative data analysis involves understanding participants' contributions to the research. Griffee (2005) suggests two main stages in analysing interview data. He states the researcher must first become very familiar with the data and then, using analytical categories, create meaning from this data. Consequently I first became very familiar with the data by listening to the audio recordings several times and by reading over the transcripts and my field notes. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight how a thematic approach to data analysis is the most suitable starting point during qualitative research. "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.6). After becoming familiar with the data, initial codes must be generated and then themes

should be explored, reviewed and then defined (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The use of numbers in the transcripts to define each child as they spoke, and the use of coding across all group interviews, made for easy identification of the main themes (see figure 8). Data analysed from the photographs and contemporaneous notes were compared to the data taken from the interviews and subsequently overall themes were created. In order to achieve this I have used the method of triangulation. This is the process of getting a deeper understanding of a topic from two or more sources (Robson, 2002). The combination of the various data collection and analysis procedures fed into a deeper understanding of the research.

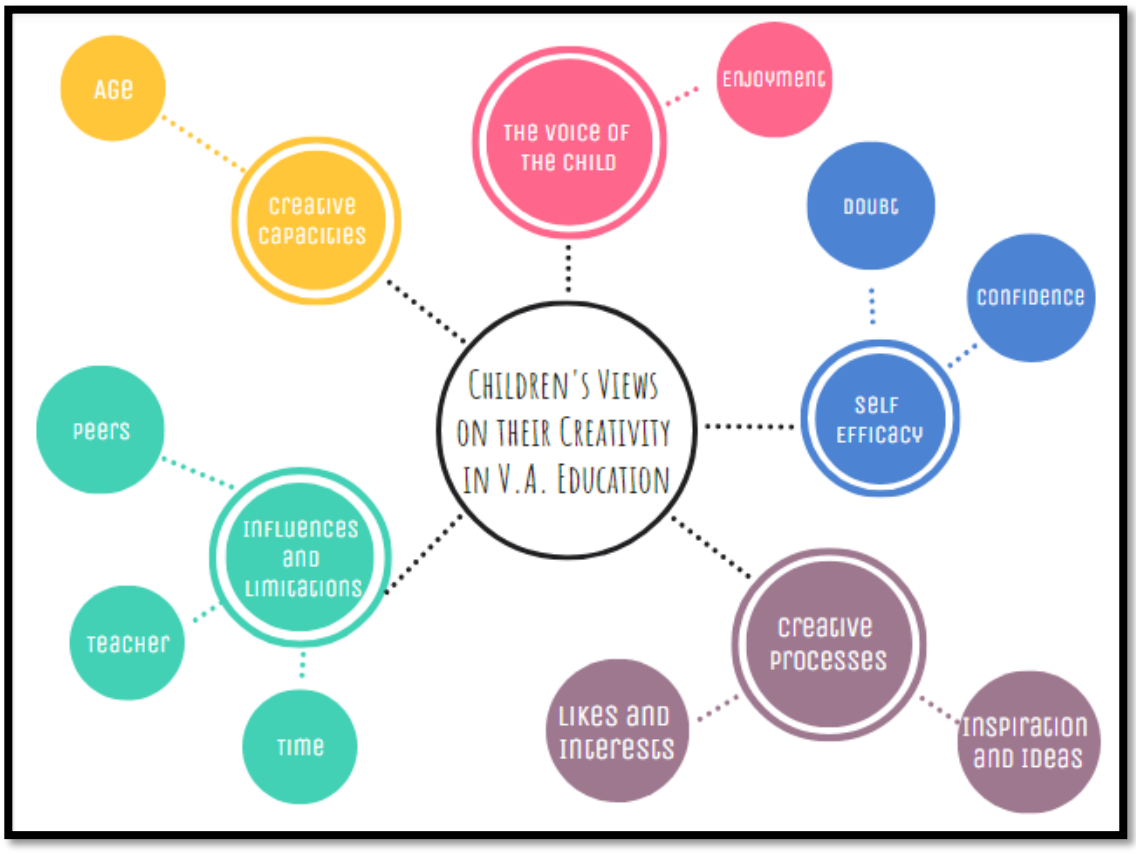


Figure 8: Main themes and sub-themes found.

Ethical Considerations:

All research contains ethical questions. This is especially true when researching with children. Therefore, as my research was focused on children's opinions, ethical considerations were a high priority throughout. Alderson and Morrow declare that "ethical questions weave through every aspect of research, shaping the methods and findings. Ethics involves thinking critically about this process rather than arriving at an imagined perfect endpoint" (2004, p. 12). Throughout my research I endeavoured to think critically about this process and aimed to pursue truth in an honest and open manner with all participants.

It is important to recognise children as active participants in matters that concern them (O'Reilly and Dogra, 2016). Throughout the research the children were informed, in appropriate child-friendly language, of the aims and purposes of the research and of their right to withdraw at any point. I endeavoured to remain critically reflective throughout the research and to remain aware of any cues that might have highlighted participant's potential reluctance not to participate (Berson, Berson and Gray, 2019). Lewis (2002) highlights concerns about the ethical aspects of completing research with children. Below I have outlined some of the ethical concerns I had during my research and how I addressed them throughout.

Access/Gatekeepers:

Cohen, Manion and Morrison state that it is important when doing research with children that researchers first "consult and seek permission from those adults responsible for the prospective subjects, and second, they approach the young people themselves" (2007, p.54). Therefore I informed parents and guardians of the purpose of

the research and of the procedures involved and gave them an opportunity to ask any questions they may have had prior to requesting their permission to proceed. Permission and consent was gained by way of a letter and consent form which explained to parents and guardians that they were consenting to have their child take part in an interview and have their work photographed (see appendix C and D). Before commencing the research I also sought permission, by letter, from the principal of the school.

Consent/Assent:

Along with obtaining the consent of the pupils' parents, I also sought the pupils' agreement to participation. The British Educational Research Association (BERA), (1992) recommends that the participants in a research study have a right to be informed of the aims, purposes and likely publication of findings involved in the research. BERA (1992) further recommends that honesty and openness should characterise the relationship between researchers and participants while allowing them the right to withdraw from a study at any time. Therefore, prior to commencing the research, the aims and purposes were explained to all participants in child friendly language. The right to withdraw from the study at any time was also made clear to both parents and pupils. The participants were given their own child-friendly consent forms that allowed them to decide if they would like to take part in the interview process. This consent form included them giving permission to have their work photographed and demonstrated their understanding of the confidentiality embedded in the research (appendices E and F)

Anonymity:

Opie (2004) states that while partaking in small-scale research it can be difficult to guarantee complete anonymity and it would therefore be unethical to make a promise of

this to participants. From the outset of the research I explained to all participants of their right to privacy (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007) and that I could not guarantee their anonymity throughout the research. However I further explained that no identifying details would be revealed in my project. No names would be included; neither would the name of the school nor any geographical details be disclosed. I further explained that pseudonyms would be used throughout the study. I also ensured that any possible identifying data would be removed to the greatest extent possible.

Confidentiality:

From the outset I explained to the participants their right to privacy and the place of confidentiality in relation to this research study. I ensured that I would not make the connection between participants and the information they have provided known publicly (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Prior to commencing the research I explained to participants, in child-friendly language, how I intended to use any information gathered and endeavoured to stay true to this commitment throughout the research process.

Social Responsibility:

As a citizen and a member of the civil service it is my moral duty to follow a pursuit of truth. This was particularly important as the central aim of this study is to investigate the pupils' perspective. Costley (2000) identifies issues of status and position and the perception of what the interviewer wants to hear, as difficulties which may arise when an adult is questioning children. While interviewing pupils from the school where I teach, I guarded against position by placing the pupils at the centre of the interview. As I am a fully garda-vetted teacher, I have plenty of experience modulating language for children and ensuring that all practice is child-centred. As Christensen and James state

"research should be conducted with, rather than on, children" (2000, p.7). The pupils were reminded before the interview that they were the experts and that understanding their perspectives and experiences was a core element of the research.

Ownership and Data Protection:

Bell (2014) highlights the importance of a participant's right to privacy with regard to data processing and dissemination of the data. It is my intention to retain all data/information gathered in a secure manner for 13 months following completion of the research. Hard copies of data will be stored in a locked box in a secure location with any identifying details removed and digital data will be stored in a password-protected laptop and Digital Recording Device.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state the importance of informing participants of who will have access to the completed research study. It is my intention to provide Marino Institute of Education with my completed research. I also intend to make a copy of this research available to the school in which the research was completed. I will further provide a simple explanation to participants and their parents explaining the results of the study.

Validity and Reliability:

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) discuss how limitations to validity and reliability cannot be completely avoided, particularly during qualitative research, but these draw backs can be minimised. They also state that the process of triangulation can aid validity during qualitative methods. Therefore I chose to use three different forms of data collection in order to give a broader view of the research topic. Butler-Kisber (2010)

highlights the importance of trustworthiness when taking part in qualitative research. A trustworthy research project is one that is transparent, continually verifies findings while linking them to field texts and includes the voice of the participants throughout the work (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Throughout my research I was thorough and endeavoured to stay true to these values. "One of the intellectual virtues embodied in the process of carrying out research is the pursuit of truth" (Lewis, 2002, p.112). As the voice of the child, and their opinions of their own creativity, were central to this research so too was the pursuit of truth.

Conclusion:

"Those undertaking qualitative studies have a baffling number of choices of approaches" (Creswell, 2007, p.6).The choices chosen by a researcher shape the entirety of their study and must be carefully considered. As part of this research study I have chosen to employ qualitative methods to elicit the views and opinions of the children who participated in this study. Following the rationales outlined in this chapter, I chose to carry out 8 semi-structured group interviews which included a creative drawing task and contemporaneous notes were taken throughout. In the next chapter the analysis and findings of this data will be outlined and discussed.

Findings and Discussion

Focus of the Research:

The rationale for this research is to explore, compare and contrast children's views of their own creative abilities in Visual Arts Education across a variety of classes in one Irish primary school setting. Throughout the study I aim to gather a greater understanding of the perspectives of children at different stages of primary education, gaining an insight into creativity in Visual Arts Education and what factors might impact creative thinking from a child's perspective. The question I aim to answer during this research is "How do children's views of their creative abilities in Visual Arts Education vary across the age groups in an Irish primary school setting?"

The Voice of the Child:

Tan and Gibson (2017) highlight that the focus in Visual Arts Education research is based upon the opinions and views of adults and that consequently, there is a dearth of research in this field on children's opinions. This is a lost opportunity as children are the experts of their own education and can have much insight to offer into their own learning (Berson, Berson and Gray, 2019). As part of this research project, 48 children from a variety of different age groups, took part in eight semi-structured interviews (see table 2) with the aim of supplementing the limited research available on children's opinions in Visual Arts Education. Throughout this research the value of the voice of the child was distinct. From the outset the participants were delighted to be asked to

participate and could not wait to have the opportunity to voice their opinions. This excitement was emphasised during the interviews with statements such as "I was excited to go in the interview" (Child 3, Senior Infants Interview (S.I.) 1) and "the smiley face is me now, very happy" (Child 5, 6th 2). One child from 4th Class expressed how the interview process itself had inspired him and stated that "after school I might find an empty folder and like an art book and start drawing or something" (Child 2, 4th 1).

Table 2: Summary of Participants

	Interview 1	**Interview 2**	**Interview 3**	**Interview 4**	**Interview 5**	**Interview 6**	**Interview 7**	**Interview 8**
Class Group:	*Senior Infants 1* (S.I. 1)	*Senior Infants 2* (S.I. 2)	*2nd Class 1* (2nd 1)	*2nd Class 2* (2nd 2)	*4th Class 1* (4th 1)	*4th Class 2* (4th 2)	*6th Class 1* (6th 1)	*6th Class 2* (6th 2)
First Participant	Child 1, S.I. 1	Child 1, S.I. 2	Child 1, 2nd 1	Child 1, 2nd 2	Child 1, 4th 1	Child 1, 4th 2	Child 1, 6th 1	Child 1, 6th 2
Second Participant	Child 2, S.I. 1	Child 2, S.I. 2	Child 2, 2nd 1	Child 2, 2nd 2	Child 2, 4th 1	Child 2, 4th 2	Child 2, 6th 1	Child 2, 6th 2
Third Participant	Child 3, S.I. 1	Child 3, S.I. 2	Child 3, 2nd 1	Child 3, 2nd 2	Child 3, 4th 1	Child 3, 4th 2	Child 3, 6th 1	Child 3, 6th 2
Fourth Participant	Child 4, S.I. 1	Child 4, S.I. 2	Child 4, 2nd 1	Child 4, 2nd 2	Child 4, 4th 1	Child 4, 4th 2	Child 4, 6th 1	Child 4, 6th 2
Fifth Participant	Child 5, S.I. 1	Child 5, S.I. 2	Child 5, 2nd 1	Child 5, 2nd 2	Child 5, 4th 1	Child 5, 4th 2	Child 5, 6th 1	Child 5, 6th 2
Sixth Participant	Child 6, S.I. 1	Child 6, S.I. 2	Child 6, 2nd 1	Child 6, 2nd 2	Child 6, 4th 1	Child 6, 4th 2	Child 6, 6th 1	Child 6, 6th 2

Epstein (2001) discusses how children are more than capable of thinking about and reflecting on their own art and that of others. While the participants enjoyed the interview process and were inspired by the work of their peers and the conversations they had throughout, they also had valuable insights to offer. At each age level participants found an opportunity to express their opinions in their own way. During the Senior Infant interviews the participants used simple terminology to express the natural process of creativity, "because thinking is sort of, kind of, my thing what I do" (Child 6, S.I. 2). During the 2nd class interviews some children expressed how the creative processes they undertake can be "really hard to explain" (Child 2, 2nd 1) but always endeavoured to get their point across in the best way they could. The older participants from 4th and 6th class offered valuable insights and reflections into their creativity now and their creative abilities when they were younger. At the older ages levels they were able to offer samples of their creativity from their younger years while also critically reflecting on these experiences. Even though creativity is a complex topic, the participants in the study recognised its value going forward stating "if you don't (have creativity) it's boring" (Child 6, 6th 1) and endeavoured to offer their opinions, to the best of their abilities, throughout the research. The depth of their understanding of their own creative abilities and their insightfulness throughout was invaluable.

Creative Processes:

A recurring theme throughout all of the interviews was the creative processes undertaken by children during visual art activities. Edwards (2014) distinguishes the difference between the creative product and the creative process and states that during the creative process there is a focus on the present and less of a focus on the end

product. The Wallas Model of the Creative Process highlights four key steps in the process. These are the preparation phase where information is gathered and materials and resources are prepared, the incubation period where time is given for ideas to develop, the illumination stage of enlightenment and finally verification where the idea is put to test (Edwards, 2014). During this study, children of different ages described the processes they follow while being creative during art lessons. In the interviews with the children from Senior Infants they found it difficult at times to explain their thought process and made simple statements such as "I just thought of it, I just thought of all of it" (Child 3, S.I. 2). However when given the opportunity to elaborate on their creative process they were able to describe how "your brain helps you to try to work" (Child 3, S.I. 1) and "can talk to you" (Child 1, S.I. 2). They highlighted the importance of having a source of inspiration, stating that they are often inspired by what they see or their teacher but this is only the start of their idea and then they take it from there. At this young age they were also able to recognise the importance of perseverance in the creative process. They stated that "it's good to try your best… but sometimes it's a little bit really too hard and then I take a few more minutes on it" (Child 3, S.I. 1). Edwards (2014) highlights how young children are constantly making mistakes while learning about the world around them. In order for children to learn how to persevere through their mistakes they need to be met with a positive response from the adults around them. These findings indicate that children of all ages need to be taught about the benefits of making mistakes and persevering through difficulties during their creative processes.

NicCraith (2009) discusses how, in our modern visual world, children are not provided with ample opportunity to follow or see the creative process from beginning to

end as they too often only experience the end creative product e.g., TV/movies. She states that Visual Arts Education provides children with an opportunity to experience the creative process for themselves. Although the children in this study from 2nd, 4th and 6thclass at times found it difficult to describe their creative processes, they still had plenty of insights to offer on the different stages they go through while thinking of, creating and executing ideas.

> *I get my ideas from just thinking, from thinking straight. Then whatever I do. My, my head will…It's really hard to explain…for my head, it will like tell me what to draw. So I can just deal with the flow.* (Child 2, 2nd 1).

When the participants were asked about where they got their ideas from and their ideation process during art lessons they often struggled to put this process into words. "I came up with them in my head I guess" (Child 3, 2nd 1). Although they occasionally found the phrasing difficult, a lot of the participants did discuss the importance of being inspired while creating their own ideas. They highlighted how during Visual Art lessons their teacher will often put a source of inspiration "on the board and then (they'd) sort of mix a few things and which would make it something new" (Child 3, 4th 1). Bloomfield and Childs (2013) indicate that during Visual Art lessons, creativity begins with a source of inspiration that leads to children embarking on the creative process of visualising, experimenting, exploring resources and engaging in discussion. Some children discussed how they like to be given a theme or topic as a starting point and then like to be given the time to think through and develop their own ideas but emphasised that, in practice, they are not always given enough time to do this.

> *"It can be easy if you have an idea in your head what you're going to draw but, and if it's only like you have a five minute warning, it kind of, kind of just, like, you can't really think and you're focusing on, I only have this much time."*(Child 2, 4th 2)

Kelly (2014) labels the time before the creation process begins as the 'incubation period'. She agrees that pupils need ample time to gather their thoughts and ideas and to sit with them for a while before they can form new creative ideas. Although this incubation time is important, participants from 4th and 6th class also discussed how overanalysing can inhibit them in their creative process as they can get "really, really invested" (Child 3, 6th 2) in one particular component of their end product instead of developing their idea as a whole. To combat this overthinking it was suggested that when being creative you should "just let your juices flow" (Child 2, 4th 1) and although you might begin with a plan you should also "make it up as (you) go sometimes" (Child 6, 4th 1). The Oxford Handbook of Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Shalley et al., 2015) highlighted that a state of flow happens when people become completely immersed in what they are doing and this is conducive to more creative thought. It seems that some of the participants recognised that when they are in this state of flow that it is often best to not overthink their processes and instead trust their instincts.

Just like the Senior Infant children some of the older participants discussed how you often have to make mistakes first before you arrive at your final idea and that perseverance throughout the creative process is vital but it is not always easy. "I just think about how long it takes doing it and then I just stopped doing it after a while" (Child 5, 6th 2). NicCraith (2009) emphasises the importance of risk-taking during the creative

process and states children need to know that mistakes are an important part of this learning process. Although some participants highlighted perseverance others also stated that knowing when to stop can also be just as important in the creative process. It is clear that the older children, particularly those in 6th class, had really thought about the complexity of the creativity process and even discussed ways in which familiarity with the process, and therefore their own creativity, could be increased.

> *"Yeah, they could start, like, by when we're young telling us…just giving us a blank picture and say like, you can draw that or you can colour that and then we kind of start knowing what to do from a young age and it just gets better as we get older."*(Child 2, 6th 1)

In this context, the older participants of this study had lots of ideas to offer on how to improve their own creative processes. They suggested that it would be beneficial to write down ideas as they come to you, act upon an idea sooner rather than later, let one idea lead to another and remember that a good idea "doesn't have to be a really good picture" (Child 1, 4th 2). These invaluable insights and ideas highlight the need for more research with children in this area.

Inspiration and Ideation during the Creative Process:

One of the most important parts of the creativity process is inspiration and ideation. Buheji, Saif and Jahrami (2014) discuss the importance of inspiration, stating that it "plays the role for capturing and harnessing ideas" and encourages "individuals to bring ideas into fruition" (p.16). Throughout the interviews, children from each of the four age levels indicated ways in which they are inspired and from where they get their ideas. Sources of inspiration that continually appeared across the eight interviews

included areas such as settings, experiences, people, technology, memories, likes and interests. While discussing *The 30 Circle Challenge* the participants often mentioned how the setting they were in inspired some of their drawings. "Well I drew a flower because I saw flowers outside the window and I drew a clock because I just thought… watch, and I drew the earth because I saw over there there's a game about it" (Child 3, 4th 2) (see figure 9).

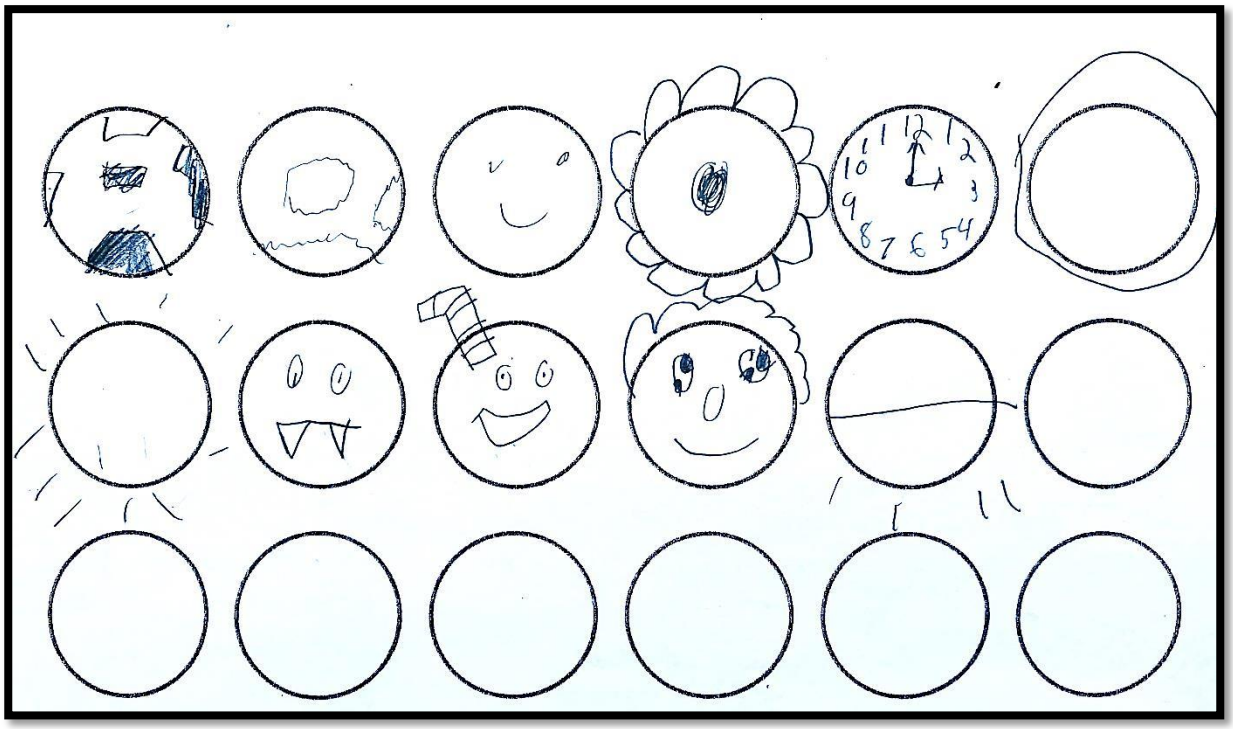


Figure 9: An example of how a setting can inspire creative drawings.

Some of the children stated that they get inspiration from their classrooms when they are doing Visual Art lessons. "I live in a very small apartment so there's not much to look at. So I just get my better ideas from school because it's, it's beautiful, it's big and yeah it's really nice" (Child 6, 2nd 1). It is clear that the classroom can provide some inspiration during art lessons but some children also highlighted that the classroom setting is quite limited "because I would like to look around and then I realise I already used it" (Child 5, 4th 1). NicCraith stated that "pupils' creativity is directly influenced the

culture and climate that surrounds them" (2009, p.77) and that classroom and school environment play an important role in cultivating creativity. Another common source of inspiration was the natural environment around them and other settings or sights they have seen. This could be as simple as "walking to school sometimes or when I'm in the car, I see some ideas" (Child 4, S.I. 2) and some even acknowledged that "when you're older you might be able to travel a bit, and then you might see new things that you've never seen before" (Child 3, 2nd 2). The participants also stated that they get lots of ideas from technology, their memories, other art, pictures, Pinterest and even "people's (Covid-19) masks" (Child 3, 2nd 1).

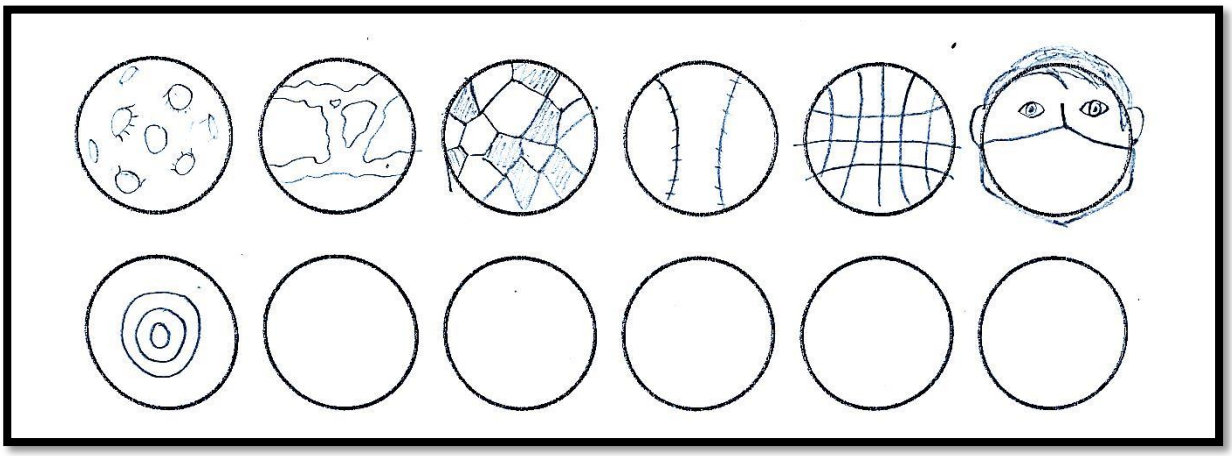


Figure 10: An example of how a setting can inspire creative drawings.

Through the discussions surrounding the ideation process some pupils also mentioned how their current likes and interests play an important role in the development of their ideas. "Well through my moon and my earth, I am interested in space. I've read a lot of space books recently. For the three sports footballs, I suppose I play sports" (Child 4, 6th 2) (see figure 10). The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020) highlights that there should be an emphasis placed on encouraging children's interests as they take part in meaningful creative tasks. Although children from all age

groups mentioned their likes and interests in relation to their ideas, it was children from the 6th class interviews who highlighted just how much of an impact they can really play. They stated that when they are interested in a given topic they are much more likely to be inspired and they also like to have ownership over these ideas too.

> *"I agree with (Child 5), I don't like to be told that this is like what you have to draw, I like to come up with my own ideas and then drawing like thinking yeah this is my idea, and I want to draw this or write this, what I'm being told, like, not my idea. So I'm more reluctant to."* (Child 3, 6th 2).

These children from 6th class emphasised that they would like to be more involved in the ideation process during Visual Arts lessons and suggested that a theme or topic, provided by their teacher, would be enough to inspire their ideas. NicCraith (2009) states that a creative curriculum provides its students with ample opportunity to carry out self-initiated tasks, work independently and produce original work. When children are involved in the entire creative process they are often intrinsically motivated and this, in turn, can have a positive impact on their creativity (Jones and Wyse, 2013).

Creative Capacities across the Ages:

An interesting finding was the variation between what the younger children and the older children said about creative capacities at different age levels. The participants across all ages showed their ability to be critically reflective of their creativity from past and present examples and even made some future predictions.

> *Well, I kind of think we were more creative when we were younger because I remember one of my favourite movies when I was like three was Rapunzel…I got a*

> *piece of paper and merged my Nana and Grandad with Rapunzel, so I made my Nana be in the tower and she had the long hair and then my Grandad was standing down the bottom* (Child 2, 4th 2).

In this example this 4th class child was enabled to recall a time in her life when she was creative and highlighted this as an example as to why she was more creative when she was younger. The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity (2019) discusses how creative development is not always smooth but rather faces many highs and lows as children progress through life. Although most children participating in the research felt they were quite creative at this moment in time, the older children, particularly those in the 6th class interviews, concurred with the above stated perception about how they were more creative when they were younger. They discussed the perceived freedom they had when they were younger and how this freedom enabled them to have "more ideas" and "say random things" (Child 6, 6th 2). When asked why they think they have less freedom to be creative now that they are older they mentioned how they are "kind of hung up on" technology (Child 2, 6th 1) and their hobbies.

This is insightful as, in his research, Gomez (2007) suggested that modern technology can "support the expression and development of creativity" (p.35) and that a multimedia-based approach in the classroom can improve creativity. NicCraith (2009) highlighted how the world we are living in is becoming smaller due to this modern technology and therefore it is moving at a faster, more competitive pace. It seems the older participants recognised this as they discussed how, as they get older, "life gets a bit more serious, more responsibilities and less creativity because you're told you have to do this, you have to do that" (Child 4, 6th 2) and highlighted school as being part of the cause

for this problem. This echoes Robinson's (2011) sentiment where he states that education can suppress creative development as the older we get we may often lose some of our creative confidence. The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity (2009) highlights that around the ages of 9 or 10, children often face a creative slump. NicCraith (2009) discusses how the creative slump around this particular age could be associated with how children of this age are more compliant and are less spontaneous. This could account for why the older participants felt their creative capacities were declining with age.

In the interviews with the younger children from Senior Infants and 2nd class, in contrast to the older participants, they were quite adamant that the older they get the more creative they will become. They stated the reasons for this being that "my brain would be stronger" (Child 2, S.I. 2) and "I might have a better memory" (Child 3, S.I. 1). They also highlighted how they look to others older than them, such as family members, for inspiration for their ideas as they recognise their creative abilities and aspire to be like them too. In each interview across all of the ages, participants emphasised that as people experience more of the world they are exposed to more sources of inspiration for their creativity. "The older I get, the more things I get to like see and experience and then I get more ideas" (Child 5, 4th 1). Kelley and Kelley (2013) also agree that through experiences and effort creativity can be cultivated in everyone. It is interesting to note that, although the older children equally acknowledged the fact that they have potentially been exposed to more creative learning opportunities, they didn't associate that with a positive correlation in their creative abilities. "So it's kind of you learn more, but you do worse" (Child 2, 6th 1). Jesson (2012) attributes this outlook to the fact that

the older children get, the more pessimistic they become and this, in turn, can have a negative impact on their creativity.

One child in 2nd class disassociated age from creative growth, stating "it's not about age. When you're older your brain gets bigger and your mind and you get better creative" (Child 2, 2nd 1). Here this child has made the important distinction that there may not be a direct connection between specific ages and creativity but that our capacity for creative growth may increase as we get older. Kelly (2014) states that imagination is at its' peak during early childhood and begins to deteriorate as they progress through primary school. Kelly (2014) also suggests that placing high value on the arts throughout childhood can help with fostering imagination and in turn improve creativity. Evidence from this study highlights how children's perceptions of their creative abilities vary considerably according to their age. Neither the younger nor older participants felt they were at their most creative at their current age. This research suggests that age may not be the main defining factor in creative capacities throughout primary school and rather an emphasis should be placed on providing children with as many high value creative experiences as possible.

Self- Efficacy and Creative Confidence:

Kelley and Kelley (2013) state that creative confidence is the self-belief one has in their ability to create change and produce new ideas and highlight that creative confidence requires courage, a positive mind-set and the ability to let go of failure. Throughout the eight interviews there were many occasions where the participants referenced their self-efficacy with regard to their creativity and their ability to come up with ideas. All children partaking in the research were chosen due to their apparent high

self-efficacy in their creative endeavours. During each group interview most children stated that they liked the ideas they came up with while attempting *The 30 Circle Challenge*. They explained why they liked their ideas making statements such as "I liked them because I came up with them myself" (Child 4, 2nd 1) or "because I did the best I could" (Child 3, 4th 2). Some even simply liked their ideas as they reminded them of their likes and interests. "I like my ideas because mostly they're food and I like food and, and the smiley face because I like being happy" (Child 2, S.I. 2) (See figure 11).

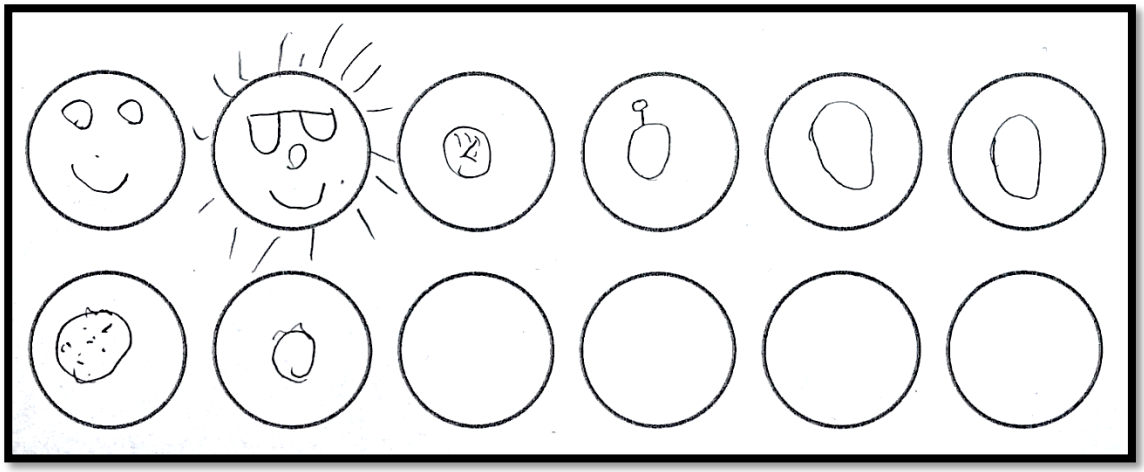


Figure 11: An example of how likes and interests can impact creative confidence.

Robinson (2011) states that children enter primary school full of creative confidence which gradually diminishes as they progress through education. Although there was evidence of creative confidence in each interview there were also elements of self-doubt interspersed throughout. This self-doubt was not limited to the older participants, which highlights the complexity of self-efficacy and how it is ever fluctuating. After I had given the instructions to *The 30 Circle Challenge* some of the older children had questions about the rules of the task. This was particularly true during the first of the 6th class interviews when participants asked about drawing outside of the circles and using more than one circle. Although they were not given any more guidance

than other groups, this group thought outside the 'circle' and used the 30 circles in many different ways (see figure 12).

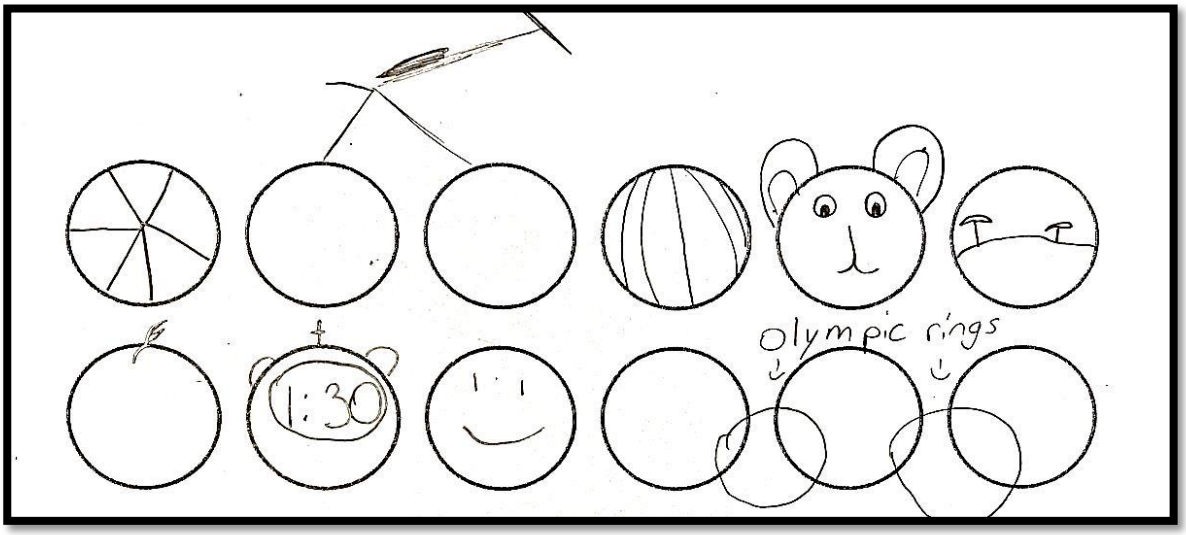


Figure 12: An example of creative drawings

However, while discussing *The 30 Circle Challenge* during the interview, these participants spoke of how they "kinda ran out of ideas" (Child 6, 6th 1) and of how they "don't have a big imagination" (Child 5, 6th 1). Kelley and Kelley (2013) discuss the importance of fluency and flexibility when coming up with ideas, inferring that when you have many ideas it is easier to choose a great idea. When assessing their *The 30 Circle Challenge*, the authors suggest looking for the quantity of different and distinct ideas the participants can come up with in the limited time, which should be an indication of their creative fluency and flexibility. It was quite interesting to note that, following the criteria for counting creative ideas during this drawing challenge, this group (6th Class 1) had the largest total of creative ideas between them (see table 3).

Table 3: Totals of Creative ideas portrayed during 'The 30 Circle Challenge' at each age level.

	Senior Infants 1	Senior Infants 2	2nd Class 1	2nd Class 2	4th Class 1	4th Class 2	6th Class 1	6th Class 2
Child 1	7	7	6	7	9	4	9	5
Child 2	3	4	9	4	5	4	9	7
Child 3	5	4	7	6	5	8	8	14
Child 4	5	7	7	6	8	7	14	5
Child 5	4	7	6	6	5	4	10	8
Child 6	5	5	5	7	7	9	9	3
Total	**29**	**34**	**40**	**36**	**39**	**36**	**59**	**42**

This contrasted to the first interview with Senior Infants (Senior Infants 1) where the children dived straight into the task without asking any questions and were very confident in their outcomes. "I like my ideas. Because…they…are…good" (Child 1, S.I. 1). They did not ask any questions prior to starting *The 30 Circle Challenge* and instead went with their own interpretation of the task. This meant that some of them did not use the given circles as part of their drawings (see figure 13) but still showed their ideas in their own way. These younger children understood the concept of drawing circle pictures but misinterpreted the instruction of using the given circles as part of their drawing. Although this slightly changes the outcome it does not take from their ideas. Edwards (2014) highlights the importance of not imposing adult standards on to children's

artwork and insists that the creative process should not be suppressed by opinions of a preconceived right/wrong approach.

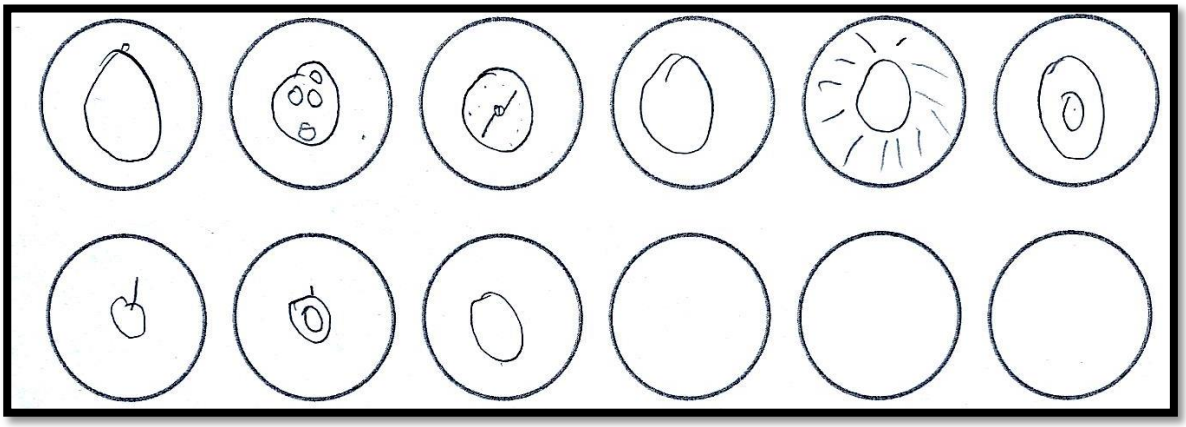


Figure 13: An example of drawings that did not use the given circle.

Although there were no set rules involved in the creative task, children from 2nd, 4th and 6th class seemed much more focused on the perceived 'rights and wrongs' of the task at hand. One of the older participants carefully thought about the parameters of the task and adjusted his approach to the task based on this. "I went for more quantity over quality, and like, how easy I can draw it in a fairly quick amount of time" (Child 3, 6th 2). One boy from 2nd class even assessed his work based on his interpretation of the task, stating "the only thing I didn't like about (my ideas) was that I used, I used detail outside of the circle which I think was kind of cheating" (Child 6, 2nd 1) (See figure 14). NicCraith (2009) discusses the importance of risk taking during creative endeavours and highlights how pupils should understand that mistakes are all part of the creative learning process. This should be a fun process for children as they try out new experiences without knowing how it will turn out instead of focusing on the perceived rights/wrongs or parameters of the task. It is important for all to remember that there is no one correct way to recreate (Edwards, 2014). In this study it seemed that how the participants

perceive the limitations of a creative activity can affect their approach to the task, their thought process throughout and even how they evaluate their creativity. Educators need to be mindful of this when setting creativity-based tasks and should ensure to not impose unattainable standards that will negatively impact the creative confidence of their students.

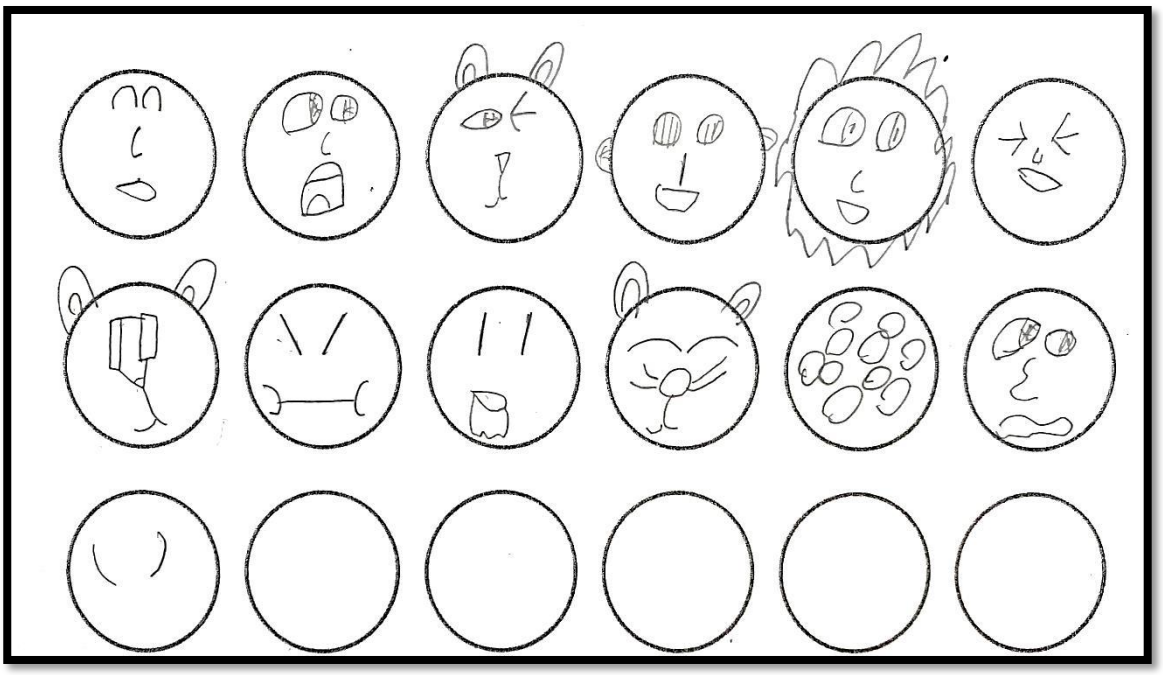


Figure 14: An example of drawings that did not use the given circle.

Influences and Limitations of the Creative Process:

Throughout all of the interviews the participants gave insights into the influences and limitations that affect their creative abilities. The Creative Youth Plan (2018) highlights the importance of giving children the time and resources they need to be creative. As *The 30 Circle Challenge* is a timed activity there was much discussion during the interviews around time and how it affected the results of the task. The participants made comments such as "I didn't get time to do all of them" (Child 1, S.I. 1) and "I didn't get to finish a few the way I wanted to" (Child 4, 2nd 1). Some of the participants stated

that the limited time during the activity affected the amount of detail they added to their pictures while others stated that it affected how many circles they attempted. Some of the children felt "under pressure" (Child 2, 4th 2) because of the timer and others said they were distracted by it as they kept "concentrating on it" (Child 1, 2nd 1). Although some participants felt under pressure due to time constraints, NicCraith (2009) outlines how the pressure in creative warm-up activities can offer children the opportunity to take risks and explore their creative thinking. The younger participants, in particular, seemed to enjoy this challenge, stating that "it's fun when you get to do a timer and there's not that much minutes" (Child 5, S.I. 1). Some children also highlighted how they took the timed aspect of the activity into consideration as they considered how best to approach the task.

> *"It's just the amount of time you had, normally I'm about 'I'll go over that, I'll finish that', I just skipped that because I knew we only could do a certain amount in the certain time so I tried to do as many as I could in this amount of time we had."* (Child 6, 4th 2).

It seems these pupils creatively adapted their approach to the drawing task in order to yield the best results. These students were enabled to forego some of their usual creative habits for the sake of the task at hand. Fox and Schirrmacher (2014) state that courage is central to the creative process as it is needed in order to trust your thoughts and adapt to the task at hand. The need for adaptability was evident throughout the interviews where participants highlighted how their creativity during Visual Art lessons often depends on the task at hand as "it kinda depends on what art we are doing" (Child 1, 6th 1). Others discussed how the choice of materials in a Visual Art lesson also impacts the

creative ideas they have as they can affect how they portray their ideas. "It depends on like if you're using paint it might be a bit harder to think of something, like chalk you can blend stuff but like paint you have to use stuff to make stuff to make the right colour" (Child 1, 6th 2). Robinson (2011) highlights how mastering materials is a key component of creativity in Visual Arts Education as it provides students with more avenues for expression. It seems the older children, in particular, were aware of the influence that different materials could have on the outcome of their artwork. Instead of letting a potential lack of mastery of materials affect their work, they like to factor materials into their creative thought process before beginning an art activity and adjust accordingly. This highlights the importance using a variety of different materials during Visual Art lessons (Edwards, 2014).

Furthermore, the discussions concerning time carried on throughout the interviews as the participants reflected on their creative processes during Visual Art lessons. On many occasions the participants discussed how their creativity can often be limited by the amount of time they are given to come up with ideas during art lessons and/or the amount of time that they have to complete the art activity. Jesson (2012) highlights how curriculum overload can negatively influence the creative process as there is not enough time spent on thinking through ideas and experimentation. The INTO (2015) echo this point stating that the crowded curriculum is one of the "most significant challenges facing teachers in terms of effective curriculum implementation" (p.29). One student highlighted how she prefers doing art at home "because at home I would have, like, I have all day to do it and in school we have a certain amount time" (Child 5, 2nd 1). Others spoke of how they would like more time to think through their ideas before they start an art activity as they are often only given "a five minute warning" (Child 2, 4th 2). In

both Senior Infant interviews, participants highlighted why having the time to think through their ideas and work through their difficulties is so important. They stated that "sometimes the first thing you think of is kind of weird and then you think it again and it's not weird" (Child 1, S.I. 2) and sometimes when something is difficult you just need to "take a few more minutes on it" (Child 3, S.I. 1). Jesson (2012) highlights how it is very difficult to be creative on the spot and consequently it is important to ensure that the students have ample time for creative work. Jesson (2012) also suggests that giving students advance notice of an up-coming creative activity can give them the opportunity to think through the task and progress their ideas. Across this study participants highlighted their need for more time before, during and after their creative activities and consequently educators should be mindful of this when preparing creativity-based tasks.

Some of the older participants from 4th and 6th class discussed how the pressure they put on themselves often affects their creative abilities. They discussed how they are "perfectionists" and can go through "about six pages trying to get it right" (Child 6, 4th 2). "You have this perfect image in your head. You started good, and then you make that one big mistake, and then it's like…" (Child 1, 4th 2). It seems that the older students in particular were much more focused on the final product of their work and, although they may be happy with their initial idea, they are not always happy with the final product. The DES carried out a study in 2005 that stated that in some Irish classrooms there can often be too much focus on the final product of artwork through the use of template and formulaic art activities (Nic Craith, 2009). This emphasis on the final product seems to have some of the participants of this study worried about making mistakes throughout the process of creating their art. Edwards (2014) states that an emphasis should be placed on the creative process rather than product-orientated art activities. He highlights

how this should be a fun and inviting process as students don't have to focus on their skills and abilities but should rather focus on the creative learning process. In the first 6th class interview the participants equated this focus on the final product to the practice of art being put up on the wall as "then things get compared" (Child 1, 6th 1). Their fear with this comparison was not so much that others would judge their work but rather that they would compare themselves to others. Kelley and Kelley (2013) highlight how having the ability to let go of this comparison is a key component in creative confidence.

> *"I feel like I'm not good at art, so I wouldn't choose it at home so the only time I ever really do art is at school and…half the time we'd be told what to do…I know someone's really good at drawing, they do it at home and they'll know and have a bigger inspiration, so they're over here drawing like some magnificent thing and then…I'm here stuck with this like random piece of drawing that I got on the spot…so I don't really like my, like, what I choose to draw. I don't like my imagination." (Child 5, 6th 1).*

It appears that the comparison these pupils have made with their peers is influenced by their perception of artistic abilities. Robinson (2011) states that creative development is intrinsically linked with the higher skill set children can acquire as they mature and that teaching for creativity requires a delicate balance between teaching skills and inspiring new ideas. This connection between artistic ability and creative ability noted by the 6th class participants was also noted by other children throughout the research. These pupils made statements such as "I like what I do because I think of ideas, really good ideas and when I put it together it doesn't look good" (Child 1, S.I. 1) and "I'm like stressed out because I try to think of something in my mind, and then, when I actually draw, it doesn't

look as good as my expectation" (Child 5, 4th 1). Although at all ages the children highlighted their lack of some artistic skills as a crucial component of their creativity, the younger children who took part in the research were confident that as they got older their skills would improve and this would not be an issue anymore. "When we are older, we will be bigger, and we will be more better and our brain will be more thinkable" (Child 4, S.I. 1). It seems the younger pupils have predicted that as they age and their artistic skills and creative capacity grows so too will their general creative abilities.

The older participants felt that their "standards (have) definitely improved" (Child 3, 6th 2) and therefore they put more emphasis on their artistic ability rather than the creative process. This overemphasis on artistic ability appears to have had some negative implications on their creative confidence despite the potential positive implications the younger participants have predicted for themselves. Edwards (2014) states that it is important to remember that you don't have to be highly skilled to be creative but rather you have to be ready to take some risks throughout your creative process. This study has made it clear that a focus on the development of artistic skill doesn't necessarily lead to improved creative confidence. As Edwards suggests a focus on risk-taking may be more beneficial to the development of creative confidence as we grow.

Influence/Role of the Teacher and Peers:

Pupils who participated in the 6th class interviews also highlighted another reason for their occasional lack of creative confidence and stated that they sometimes find it difficult to come up with ideas as they are "always told what to do, so (we) never know what (we're) doing" (Child 3, 6th 1). Jesson (2012) states that some teachers have a

tendency to overfeed their students with too much information instead of giving them the space they need to form their own thoughts and ideas.

> *"Well I think the younger you are the more ideas you already have. Because like, when you're with someone very young, sometimes they do just say random things, and they're very random. So your mind is able to just do it. But when, as you get older, you kind of, like, lose that because when you're younger you don't have, you have like some freedom. You're not in school, going, and the teacher telling you what to do."*(Child 6, 6th 2)

It seems that the 6th class participants recognise that they have not always been given the option to create ideas for themselves and this has had a negative impact on their creative confidence. However they have suggested their own solution to this problem for future generations. They feel it would be important to do imagination-based art activities from a young age so they are more comfortable when coming up with their own ideas as they get older. "Simple activities, it's not anything that's going to go up on a wall or anything like that, just kind of mess around a bit, explore" (Child 3, 6th 1). Other age groups also stated that doing creativity-based tasks such as *The 30 Circle Challenge* would help them develop their ideation process. They stated that they could repeat this activity "at home and get practice" (Child 5, 2nd 1) and that in repeating the activity "over and over again you'll start to get more good at it" (Child 3, S.I. 1). One child also stated that repeating the activity would encourage them to come up with new ideas which is good as "you want your mind to think rather than doing the same things all the time" (Child 3, 4th 1). NicCraith (2009) echoes this point by stating that a creative curriculum should offer children plenty of opportunity to take part in creative experiences. Edwards

(2014) agreed that these experimental creative activities are of the upmost importance when children are young.

Although some participants highlighted that teachers giving them too many instructions can impede their creative thinking some of the younger participants, in particular, discussed how help from their teachers can also have a positive impact on their ideas. "[My teacher] always gives us good ideas, because sometimes when we don't have ideas we just put up our hand and [she] comes over to us and [she] helps us a lot" (Child 5, S.I. 1). This is important to note as Edwards (2014) states that creativity in the arts does partially rely on the knowledge of the teacher. NicCraith (2009) highlights that this is not solely about artistic knowledge but, also, about how the teacher engages and inspires their pupils. Participants stated that their teacher might help provide them with an initial thought or idea but then they have the opportunity to "make it our own" (Child 6, 2nd 1). Robinson (2011) states that encouraging and facilitating creativity in others often requires creative teachers and creative approaches. Bloomfield and Childs (2013) assert that the role of a teacher is to cooperate, interact and respond creatively to, and with, their pupils and that a teacher's creative confidence can encourage creative growth in their students. Pupils need creative teachers who are willing to take risks and provide a balance of creative chaos and calm (NicCraith, 2009). It seems that when the participants of this study are struggling to come up with their own ideas, their teacher can step in and help to inspire them in their creative endeavours. From this research it appears that teachers' creative abilities can have a positive influence on their students' during creativity-based activities.

In a classroom the teacher is not the only person who can inspire an idea and throughout the interviews the participants repeatedly acknowledged the positive influence their peers can have on their creative processes. "I think your friends help you to make the idea" (Child 4, 2nd 2). Although someone's friends may have a positive impact on their ideas, in one of the 6th class interviews they stated that they sometimes worry about the implications of copying someone's ideas as "other people take offence" (Child 4, 6th 1). Jesson (2012) indicates that competition between individuals can negatively impact students' creativity as they feel pressure and worry about other's opinions of their work. During *The 30 Circle Challenge* there was evidence of some participants being influenced and inspired by each other's drawings e.g., in one of the interviews four out of six participants drew a bee as one of their circle-based pictures (see figure 15).

Although this may be seen as 'copying' ideas, some participants acknowledged that copying others can be beneficial as you can learn new skills or be inspired. "When you actually see how people draw with their hands, you start to kind of copy, and then yours looks as good as theirs" (Child 6, 2nd 1). Tan and Gibson (2017) highlight how copying others' work could potentially have a negative impact on a pupil's individuality, while also acknowledging how they can learn from others and improve their skill set. Learning artistic skills from others might aid students' confidence during art and a little copying or sharing of ideas can inspire ideas in others. At the end of one of the 4th class interviews one child expressed how, during the interview, he was inspired by another student's idea and a third student recognised the importance of this interaction.

> *I would think, because, you know the way (Child 2) got an idea from (Child 1), sometimes other people can help get other people ideas. So it would be important to be around people if you're doing art, because they could give you inspiration for something. (Child 3, 4th 1)*

Jesson (2012) states that giving children the time to think through the activity ahead and the opportunity to discuss ideas with friends and classmates, or to work as a team, can have very positive implications on a child's creativity. It seems some participants valued the creative interaction they had during the interviews and recognised how communicating and working with others during creative activities is of the utmost importance.

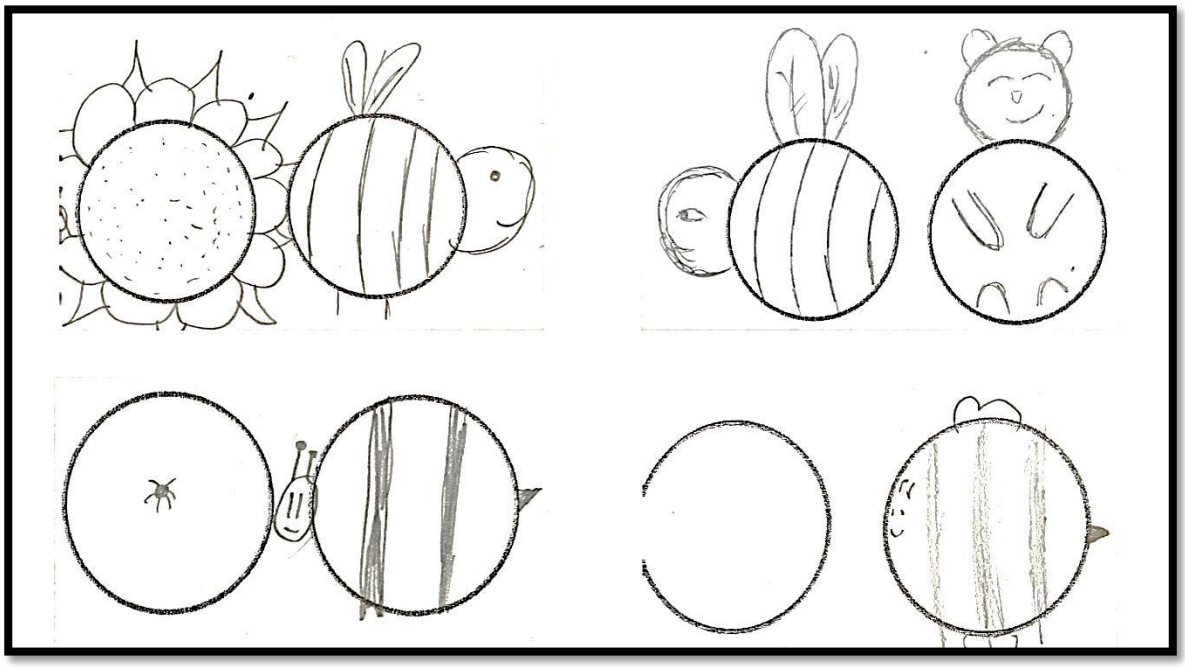


Figure 15: Some examples of participants copying/being inspired by their peers.

Summary of Findings:

NicCraith (2009) highlights how creative learning occurs naturally when people are engaged and excited about what they are doing or talking about. Prior to and during

all of the eight interviews the participants showed an eagerness to take part in the research. This was evident throughout as the participants eagerly engaged and offered valuable insights into their opinions on their creativity. Although there were some similarities and commonalities across the eight interviews there were also many contrasting opinions. Children of all ages were enabled to describe some aspects of their creative processes and some of the elements that, positively and negatively, influence their creativity. They were able to highlight what works best for them while thinking creatively during Visual Art lessons and were also able to think retrospectively and offer insights into what approaches may have helped them when they were younger too. This was an unexpected finding as, not only were they able to speak about their current opinions or views, but they could also come up with many creative solutions to the limitations they identified. Although Epstein (2001) asserts that children have a great ability to think about and acquire a greater understanding of their creativity, it was surprising to see the depth of knowledge they had on their creative processes. This sample of participants highlighted how, at their different ages, they may require varying approaches to creative activities and also expressed some universal influences that could positively affect creative learning during Visual Arts lessons. Throughout the interview process the participants not only had many clear insights to offer on their creative abilities but were also enabled to creatively inspire each other. These findings suggest that, given the opportunity, primary school children of all ages could offer valuable insights on how to enhance their creative learning experiences in Visual Arts lessons.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The basis of this research project was to explore, compare and contrast children's views of their own creative abilities in Visual Arts Education across a variety of classes in one Irish primary school setting. Through reviewing relevant research it appeared that there was a dearth of research on this topic which accessed children's views. Tan and Gibson (2017) outline how the majority of research surrounding Visual Arts Education is based on adults' opinions and views. This dearth of research involving children and the increasing need for creative thinking in our society (Creative Ireland, 2020) were the main rationales for this research project. Throughout the study I aimed to glean a greater understanding of the perspectives of children at different stages of primary education. I intended to gain an insight into creativity in Visual Arts Education and what factors might impact creative thinking from a child's perspective. The question I aimed to answer during this research was "How do children's views of their creative abilities in Visual Arts Education vary across the age groups in an Irish primary school setting?"

Implications of the Study:

Throughout the research the participants of this study regularly highlighted some of the influences and limitations that impact their creative processes during Visual Arts Education. They discussed how elements such as time, materials, artistic abilities and external pressures can impact their creative learning, in some cases highlighting how these limitations could be alleviated during Visual Art lessons. The following are some

suggestions from the participants themselves which they proposed could aid their creative learning and which could potentially be implemented in other learning settings.

- Time: The Creative Youth Plan (2018) emphasises the importance of providing children with the time and resources they need in order to be creative. Participants in this study stated "in school like we only have a certain amount of time" (Child 5, 2nd 1) and recognised their need for more time while they are creating. Extra time allocated to creative tasks would also mean that children have the opportunity "to go at a slightly more gradual pace" (Child 3, 6th 2).
- Notice: In conjunction with the time factor the participants also emphasised how advance notice of a creative task would provide them with more opportunities to think through their ideas. "If it's only like you have a five minute warning, it kind of like you can't really think and you're just focusing on, I only have this much time" (Child 2, 4th 2). Jesson (2012) also discusses how it can be difficult to be creative on demand and suggests that children should be given advance notice of their creative activity. Therefore teachers should provide children with adequate advance notice of upcoming creative tasks in order that they have time to come up with and think through all of their ideas.
- Materials: Some older participants in the research discussed how the materials chosen by the teacher can affect their creative processes. "It depends on the materials and what you have to draw" (Child 2, 6th 2). Edwards (2014) suggests teachers should provide a variety of different materials during Visual Arts lessons in order to aid children's creativity.
- Creative Tasks: NicCraith (2009) highlights how a creative curriculum needs to provide children with plenty of opportunities to be creative. This could involve

creative warm-up activities that encourage and reward creativity. The participants of this research highlighted the importance doing "more imagination games like [*The 30 Circle Challenge*] to focus our imagination" (Child 4, 6th1). They stated that these should be done "from a young age" (Child 2, 6th 1) so that they are more confident in their creative processes as they get older.

- Ideation: The Wallas Model of the creative process indicates the four steps of preparation, incubation, illumination and verification as being fundamental to the development of creative ideas (Edwards, 2014). During the research participants indicated that, when given time for the preparation and incubation phases, the illumination stage might strike at a time when they are not actually creating. Therefore, some participants stated the need for a "free copy" (Child 4, 6th 2) in which to record these ideas when they are feeling inspired. When these ideas are written down the children then have an opportunity to "look at them all and kind of judge what you're going to do" (Child 2, 6th 2) before actually creating. Providing a place for children to record their ideas would be a useful accessory in any classroom.
- Inspiration: Bloomfield and Childs (2013) discuss how a stimulus should instigate creative thinking in Visual Arts Education. The participants emphasised that they like having a theme or topic to work from while still having the opportunity to "make it your own" (Child 6, 2nd 1) and to not simply follow a given template. Teachers should provide a starting point, in the form of a theme or topic, and be careful not to limit the creative process with over-instruction.
- Motivation: Jones and Wyse (2013) highlight the positive impact that intrinsic motivation can play on a child's creativity. During the research some pupils

indicated that they are much "more reluctant" to create when they are told what to do and instead "like to come up with [their] own ideas" (Child 3, 6th 2). This echoes Edwards (2014) sentiment that during child-centred learning the ideas should come from the pupils themselves.

- Process -vs- Product: During one of the interviews a child highlighted how taking part in "simple activities [and] not anything that's going to go up on the wall" would positively impact their creativity. Instead of a focus on the end-product, and art that may be publicly displayed on the walls, more attention should be placed on the creative processes throughout an art lesson. This, in turn, could add more individuality and quality to a child's work (Department of Education and Skills, 2012).
- Mistakes: Edwards (2014) encourages educators not to set unattainable standards for their students but rather allow them to make mistakes while being creative. "Sometimes the first thing you think of is kind of weird and then you think it again and it's not weird" (Child 1, S.I. 2). This highlights how children need time and space to make mistakes during the creative process.
- Teacher Influence: Robinson (2011) indicates how teaching for creativity requires a delicate balance between teaching skills and inspiring students to independently develop their own ideas. The participants indicated that although they like to be independent in their creative thought, sometimes they need creative input from their teacher. "It just starts our ideas and then we'll know the next ones" (Child 4, S.I. 1).
- Peer Influence: Throughout the interviews participants frequently highlighted how their peers can often inspire them and have a positive impact on their

creativity. Jesson (2012) echoes this point by saying that during the creative process, children would greatly benefit from an opportunity to discuss their ideas with their peers. "So it would be important to be around people if you're doing art, because they could give you inspiration for something" (Child 3, 4th1). It would be preferential that educators do not underestimate the value of peer interaction and the opportunity to talk through and share ideas.

Throughout the research process the children who participated in this study continually expressed their enjoyment and willingness to take part. "[I felt] happy…I liked doing the thing that we're doing" (Child 4, S.I. 1). Not only did they enjoy participation in the process but they also had many valuable insights to offer into their creative abilities. Epstein (2001) emphasises children's capability to think about and discuss their art and their creativity in order to develop a deeper understanding of the process. Throughout the research I found this sentiment to be true and continually witnessed the participants' ability to be both reflective and critical of their own creative learning experiences. Lewis (2002) reminds us that we must heighten our awareness of the contribution children can make and that we should make every effort to access their views. This supports Dahl's (1995) research on the voice of the child being critical to understanding their school experiences. As both a researcher and a teacher, I found it invaluable when speaking to the participants and listening to their opinions and experiences. Although this study may not be generalizable, it did show the significance of what these participants had to offer, which emphasises the importance of talking to pupils about their creativity. The Creative Youth Plan (2018) highlights the value of listening to children and giving them the opportunity to make creative decisions that will impact their education and the society in

which they live. Including children in the development of their own creative learning during Visual Arts lessons can not only aid their creative thinking skills but also give them the confidence to continue making creative decisions as they grow up. Therefore it is essential to not only include children in research regarding their own creativity but to also ask questions and look for their input into their own creative learning.

Limitations of the Study:

The investigation has a number of limitations that must be considered. One such limitation is that the data was gathered from a relatively small sample of pupils with just 48 children taking part in the interview process. The children all attend the same primary school and live in the same locality. Focusing on one sample of children from one geographical area elicits limited perspectives. The use of purposive sampling to choose participants with high self-efficacy means the sample of participants "does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.113). Therefore the findings of this research project may not be generalisable. Further investigations focusing on larger numbers of pupils and expanding the data collection beyond one geographical location would help to provide evidence regarding the generalisability of these findings. The implications of Covid-19 also limited this study, to some degree, as the data collection methods were limited.

Recommendations for Future Research:

This study was a small-scale research project which was affected by aspects such as time constraints and Covid-19 implications which limited the choice of data collection methods and the research environment. However, this research could lend itself to many further explorations of creativity in the arts and the investigation of children's views of

their creative abilities. Although the findings of this research may not be generalizable, the children who participated in this study showed a great aptitude to express their opinions and views. They offered many valuable insights and demonstrated the importance of accessing these views. Future research could further explore the views and opinions of children on this topic to garner a greater understanding of their creative processes. By expanding the research across various schools in a variety of different locations a more accurate picture could be obtained. Further explorations and more in-depth studies into the influences and limitations of the creative process in Visual Arts Education would also be beneficial.

Conclusion:

The process of creativity development is an ever-changing one and we all experience increases and decreases to our creative abilities over time (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2019). Throughout this research the participants showed that not only is their creativity continually fluctuating but their opinions on their creativity also vary at different stages of their lives. Although opinions at varying ages differ, participants at all of the age levels had insights to offer into their own creative abilities and their own creative needs. Creativity in Visual Arts Education goes further than simply just focusing on the art as it also relies on how children are captivated and inspired in their learning (NicCraith, 2009). Creative learning also requires that children are provided with the time and resources necessary to engage with their own creativity (Creative Youth Plan, 2018). The children who took part in this research offered many creative ideas into how they could be inspired and ultimately how their creative development could be encouraged. Fumoto, Robson and Greenfield (2012) emphasise how children are more motivated to

be creative when they develop their own tasks and that this self-motivation to engage in creative experiences can have positive implications on their self-worth. Therefore talking to children about their opinions and views of their creativity can potentially improve a child's self-confidence, creative thinking abilities and creative learning experiences. "Children are naturally creative. They see the world through fresh, new eyes and then use what they see in original ways" (NicCraith, 2009). There are so many different ways to see and view the world around us that gathering varying insights of children on their creativity could encourage more creativity in Visual Arts Education as a whole.

"But the little boy said...

There are so many colours in the rainbow

So many colours in the morning sun

So many colours in the flower and I see every one"

Chapin, H. 1978

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Appendices

Appendix A — Letter for Principal/Board of Management

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS MARINO INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

An Associated College of Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

10th January 2021

A Chara,

As part of my Masters in Visual Arts Education in Marino Institute of Education, I am conducting a research project entitled: "How do children's views on their creativity in Visual Arts Education vary depending on their age in an Irish primary school setting?". This study explores children's creativity in a Visual Arts Education setting and their own creative potential. I am very interested in this area and hope that my work will bring me to a better understanding of this complex topic.

I am asking permission to conduct some of my research in your school. The research would involve a series of group interviews with children from a variety of different ages in the school. Ideally, the interviews would be carried out with two groups of six children from each of the following classes: Senior Infants, 2nd, 4th and 6th. These group interviews will begin with a creative drawing task. The

purpose of this task is to put the children at ease prior to commencing the interviews and also to inspire discussion around the topic of creativity. The purpose of the interviews is to ascertain the children's opinions and views on their own creativity and general creative abilities in Visual Arts Education. The children will be asked about their creative drawing task and where they got their ideas from and they will also be asked about their views on their own creative potential in Visual Arts Education in general. I will also be seeking consent from both the children involved in the study and their parents prior to commencing my research.

Strict confidentiality is central to my research and, in order to protect participant confidentiality, I will ensure that no identifying details will be revealed in my project. Neither will the name of the school nor any geographical details be disclosed. I will also ensure to keep all data (consent forms, photographs of the drawing task and interview voice recordings) safe at all times in a locked box or password -protected laptop. The data will be kept for 13 months in these secure locations and then disposed of appropriately.

I appreciate that schools are very busy places and I would be deeply grateful if you could accommodate me in my research study. Please don't hesitate to get in contact should you have any further queries.

Yours Faithfully,

Cristín Kelly

Contact Details: XXXXXXXXX

Appendix B — Acceptance Letter from Principal

13th January 2021

To whom it may concern

I am delighted to give approval for a member of our staff, Cristín Kelly, to conduct her research within our school building. This includes the group interviews, drawing activities (photograph of same) and the field notes that she has proposed to do with a group of children from various classes in the school.

I understand that throughout the interview process all Covid 19 guidelines will be strictly adhered to in accordance with HSE and Department of Education Guidelines. Participants and the researcher will adhere to social distancing guidelines and the interview space will be sanitised prior to and after each interview. With regard to the drawing activity all participants will be given their own individual worksheet and pencil.

When the interview is over the participants will take the new pencil with them in order to prevent any cross contamination of resources.

Should you need to contact me in this regard please do not hesitate to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Principal XXXXXXXXXXX

Appendix C — Parent Information Letter

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS
MARINO
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

04/03/2021

Dear parent/guardian,

As part of my Masters in Visual Arts Education in Marino Institute of Education, I am conducting a research project entitled: "How do children's views on their creativity in Visual Arts Education vary depending on their age in an Irish primary school setting?". This study explores children's creativity in a Visual Arts Education setting and their own creative potential. I am very interested in this area and hope that my work will bring me to a better understanding of this complex topic.

I am writing to ask your permission for your child to take part in a group interview with other children from their class as part of my research. These group interviews will begin with a creative drawing task. The purpose of this task is to put the children at ease prior to commencing the interviews and also to inspire discussion around the topic of creativity.The purpose of the interviews is to

ascertain the children's opinions and views on their own creativity and general creative abilities in Visual Arts Education. The children will be asked about their creative drawing task and where they got their ideas from and they will also be asked about their views on their own creative potential in Visual Arts Education in general. I am also asking for permission to take photos of your child's creative drawing task which may be included in the final study and will be used as part of the data analysis process. All Covid 19 Guidelines will be followed throughout the process as per HSE Guidelines.

Strict confidentiality is central to my research and, in order to protect participant confidentiality, I will ensure that no identifying details will be revealed in my project. No names will be included, neither will the name of the school nor any geographical details be disclosed. I will also ensure to keep all data (consent forms, photographs of drawing task and interview voice recordings) safe at all times in a locked box or password-protected laptop. The data will be kept for thirteen months in these secure locations and then disposed of appropriately. I would also like you to know that participation in the research is not mandatory and you, or they, can withdraw consent at any stage.

When the research is complete I intend providing the school with a copy of the research. I will endeavor to ensure that all aspects of my research will be conducted in a secure and non-stressful environment for your children. I will also look for assent from your children and would be very grateful if you could chat to them about this prior to commencement.

I would greatly appreciate if you could fill out the consent form below and return it to the school at your earliest convenience. Please do not hesitate to get in contact if you have any questions or concerns.

My email address: xxxxxxxxxxx or you can contact me through the school at any time.

Yours Faithfully,

Cristín Kelly

Appendix D — Parent Consent Form

Child's Name: _____

Class: _____

	Yes	No
1) I give permission for my child to take part in a group interview:	☐	☐
2) I give permission for my child's work to be photographed:	☐	☐
3) I understand that my child's name will not be used and and strict confidentiality will be used throughout:	☐	☐
4) I understand that I can withdraw consent at any time:	☐	☐
5) I understand that all data will be kept in a safe place for 13 months post completion of the research:	☐	☐

Signed: _____

(Parent/Guardian)

Appendix E — Child Participant Information Letter

06/03/2021

I am looking for permission for you to take part in a study that I am doing. I am very interested in your views on creativity and your confidence in creating during art lessons. I will be doing this study with different classes of varying ages within this school. I hope to find out if there are any different views of creativity across the ages. As part of the study a group of children in your class will take part in an interview with me. The interview will begin with a small creative drawing activity. We will then have a chat about your views on creativity. I would also like to take photographs of your creative drawing activity. There is no pressure on you to take part in this research and you can drop out at any stage. All of your data will be stored in a safe place.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to ask. For those who wish to participate I hope to make you feel as comfortable as possible throughout. Please let me know below if you would like to take part.

Thank you,

Ms. Kelly, Room XX

Appendix F — Pupil Assent Form

INSTITIÚID OIDEACHAIS
MARINO
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

An Associated College of
Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin

	Yes	No
1) I am happy to take part in the creative drawing activity:		
2) I am happy to take part in a group interview:		
3) I am happy to have my work photographed:		
4) I know my name will not be used in this project:		
5) I understand that I can withdraw my consent at any time:		
6) I understand that my data will be kept in a safe place:		

Signed: _____

Class: _____

Appendix G — Interview Schedule

1. Tell me about what you have just done…

   Prompts:

   a. Where did you get your ideas from?

   b. Did you like the ideas that you have come up with?

      - Why?

   c. How do you feel about what you achieved today?

   d. Is there anything you would change/do the same if you were to do the activity again?

      - Why?

2. Where do your ideas usually come from during Visual Arts lessons?

   Prompts:

   a. Do you usually find it hard/easy to come up with your ideas?

      - Why?

   b. Are you normally happy with these ideas?

      - Why?

   c. Where do your ideas from in a usual art lessons?

      - Where would you say you have your best creative ideas?

   d. Does your teacher help you come up with ideas?

- What was different about today's drawing task?

e. Is there anything you think that would help you come up with more ideas during Visual Art lessons?

3. Do you think your creative ability/ideas have improved as you have gotten older/will improve as you get older?