Cover image
Sarah Browne with students from Killinarden Community School, How to Swim on Dry Land, 2017. Still from 2 channel HD video, 3 minute loop. Poem by Daiana Belcing and Kelly Healy.



It's Very New School

3 March — 22 April 2017

Gallery 1

Curated by Jennie Guy

Supported by Rua Red, South Dublin County Council, The Arts Council and Wicklow County Arts Office.

About Jennie Guy and Art School

Jennie is a curator and artist based in Dublin. Guy's practice embraces visual, textual, performance, and event-based output. She is interested in the rituals surrounding artistic production, seeking alternate modes of observation and response.

Guy is the founder and director of Art School, a platform that establishes new interfaces between contemporary art and sites of education. She develops workshop and residency programmes that unite artists, students, and educators in substantial research exchanges and partnerships, both nationally and internationally. Her projects generate collaborative art-works, exhibitions, screenings and publications, while remaining primarily invested in exploring artistic process and decisive interventions within educational curricula. Art School has initiated projects with Wicklow, Kildare, Roscommon, and South Dublin County Councils, as well as with the Grangegorman Development Agency in Dublin. In 2016 she also co-initiated Artists' Exercises featuring the works of over 50 international artists.

www.jennieguy.com

Events

3 March, 6pm — 8pm
Exhibition preview and opening introduced by Ruairí Ó Cuív, Public Art Manager, Dublin City Council and Maoliosa Boyle, Director of Rua Red. The event will feature a performance by Sarah Pierce and actors from Tallaght Community Arts.

4 March, 1pm — 2.30pm
Artist Led Workshop with John Beattie for families and children aged 9+. 5 euro per participant. Spaces are limited so booking is advised.

4 March, 3pm — 4pm
Artist Talks with John Beattie, Priscila Fernandes and Curator Jennie Guy
Join artists John Beattie and Priscila Fernandes, for a walk through of the exhibition where they will discuss their individual works and the themes that the exhibition addresses. Guy will also discuss her longer-term project Art School.

Open to all ages. Tickets are free but booking is essential.

6 April, All day
Artist Lectures with Mark O'Kelly and Sarah Browne. Throughout the day, Artists Mark O'Kelly and Sarah Browne will deliver lectures and workshop-sessions to the South County Dublin schools that participated in the residency.

These sessions are directed toward the participating schools but the Galleries remain open to the public.

8 April, 2pm — 3.30pm
Artist Talks with Maria McKinney, Mark O'Kelly, and Sarah Pierce. A three part discussion with the artists who have contributed works to the exhibition, followed by an open Q&A. Open to all ages. Tickets are free, but booking is essential.

8 April, 5pm — 6pm
Performance of The Square.
A performance by Actors from Tallaght Community Arts, working with artist Sarah Pierce. Open to all ages. Tickets are free, but booking is essential.

For further information and bookings call us on 01 451 5860 or online at www.ruared.ie

Gallery opening hours
Monday to Friday 10am — 6pm
Saturday 10am — 6pm

Bookings
For bookings or more information contact us on 01 451 5860 or at info@ruared.ie

Location
South Dublin Arts Centre,
Tallaght, Dublin 24.

Getting here by LUAS
Rua Red is located directly beside the Tallaght stop on the LUAS red line.

Getting here by Bus
Nearby routes include; 27, 49, 54a, 56a, 65, 75, 76, 76a, 77a.

www.ruared.ie

Comhairle Contae Átha Cliath Theas
South Dublin County Council

arts council an chomhairle ealaíon funding the arts artscouncil.ie

RUA RED
Ionad Ealaíne Áth Cliath Theas
South Dublin Arts Centre

John Beattie
Sarah Browne
Ella de Búrca
Priscila Fernandes
Mark O'Kelly
Maria McKinney
Sarah Pierce

Established in 2010 DoubleTAKE is an initiative by Tallaght Community Arts. The studio supports people with disabilities (18+) of all abilities, levels and experience to cultivate their creativity through and in the arts.

DoubleTAKE Supported Arts Studio is facilitated by artist mentors. It is a space where individuals are encouraged and supported to create their own work in a safe, open, friendly and creative environment. The studio's primary focus is on the individual exploring their own creativity independently. DoubleTAKE seeks to develop a sustainable programme to grow the cultural entitlement of people with disabilities over the long term.



Independence

3 March — 22 April 2017

Gallery 2

A Lived Activity,
Not an Abstract Pastime
Joanne Laws

It's Very New School seeks to address what curator Jennie Guy calls a 'crisis' in post-primary education. Using the stagnation of the Leaving Certificate Art curriculum and other perceived educational deficiencies as points of departure, *It's Very New School* asserts an important role for contemporary artists in society. Whether as a site of research-based and experiential learning, or as a vehicle to promote criticality and questioning, contemporary art has the inherent capacity for philosophical inquiry and imagining alternative realities. *It's Very New School* has found vibrant ways to transpose these assertions into the gallery setting.

Towards a Critical Pedagogy

Art-as-research is grounded in the notion that art making is a form of inquiry; a kind of open-ended, artist/researcher-driven learning process in which new knowledge is discovered or constructed. This re-framing of art practice as research represents a paradigmatic shift in the way we understand research, art and artists. (Marshall & D'Adamo 2011: 12)[1]

In his book *Developing Critical Thinkers*, British educational theorist Stephen Brookfield describes critical thinking as a "lived activity, not an abstract academic pastime" and suggests that critical thinkers are "actively engaged with life".[2] He makes a case for critical thinking as being central to personal development, civic life and a flexible, adaptable labour force. As well as denoting the ability to think in reflective and independent ways, critical thinking also describes a set of skills which allow a person to: understand rational connections between ideas; evaluate arguments; challenge the importance of context; detect flaws; highlight relevant material and reflect on their own values as part of a bigger picture of collective action. Central to the process of critical thinking outlined by Brookfield, are two main activities, namely a capacity to "identify and challenge assumptions" and the ability to "imagine and explore alternatives to existing ways of thinking and living". Brookfield highlights a lack of critical thinking across school curriculums, which fail to equip young people with the skills and tools for divergent and critical reflection. The role of an educator, Brookfield argues, is to encourage critical thinking by discussing, sharing, provoking, and questioning the foundations of our thoughts and feelings.

The artists participating in this exhibition display a range of different approaches to artistic research. Priscila Fernandes' research into the Modern School gathers together important theoretical strands which offer necessary historical context to the evolution of twentieth century education. *A friend in common* presents fictionalised correspondence between Spanish educator and anarchist Francisco Ferrer Guardia and prominent artists of early twentieth century. These intimate letters anchor the radical art movements within a politically turbulent era, when fascism was on the rise across Europe and World War I was on the horizon.

The Modern School pinpoints a fleeting, yet significant, period in history when attempts were made to create counter-cultures to the so-called 'factory model' of nineteenth century education. Established in Barcelona in 1901, the short-lived Ferrer schools aimed to educate working class children in non-coercive settings, with the aim of eradicating inequality, instigating social change and equipping young students with the critical vision and skills to lead a workers' revolution. Ferrer school were later established in America, where they formed part of broader socialist and labour movements.[3]

Reflecting a lifelong mission to educate members of the 'subaltern classes' (so that they might not remain on the periphery of political life), Antonio Gramsci's writings on 'the State' and 'Civil Society' strongly convey his critique of educational establishments. Gramsci believed that schools and other educational institutions are not 'neutral' but serve to cement the existing hegemony because they are intimately tied to the interests of the most powerful social groups, namely the bourgeoisie.[4] The politics of education in Western capitalist societies were central to Gramsci's formulation of the concept of Cultural Hegemony, and pivotal in his strategy for social transformation in all spheres of life. Drawing on Gramsci's belief that 'every relationship of hegemony is an educational one',[5] Paulo Freire developed a practice-based movement and educational philosophy of 'Critical Pedagogy', aimed at consciousness-raising by helping learners to recognize 'authoritarian tendencies', while making connections between 'knowledge and power'.[6]

Understanding Complexity:
Looking, Playing, Questioning

Self-directed and reflective learning equips students with the resources needed to create a rich educational experience for themselves, while promoting ownership of the experience. Over the course of a residency at Blessington Community College, Sarah Pierce used experimental methods to prompt philosophical reflection among transition year students across a range of seemingly complex artistic concepts. The group discussed what it means to make an artwork and to put something out in the world that risks being misunderstood. Students were asked to carry out a self-directed group activity of painting a large black square without measuring. They later took turns in addressing this artwork with a chorus of chants – "you are patchy... you are black... you are a mistake...you are a rainbow... dark, dark, dark... you are not square". They made physical gestures in response to the utensils (rollers, tape, painting trays) and the actions used to paint the square, forming horizontal, twisting and vertical lines with their bodies. The group delivered a one-off performance, *The Square*, using methods borrowed from Brechtian theatre, including the use of signage, chorus, abstract scenic design and breaking the invisible 'fourth wall' which separates the actors from the audience. Such experimental approaches to learning encouraged intuitive and explorative activity in the students. In this way, Pierce could be best described as facilitator and co-conspirator in the learning process, rather than the holder of definitive 'answers'.

Introduction

It's Very New School is a group exhibition at RUA RED exploring how art can impact education, featuring work by John Beattie, Sarah Browne, Ella de Búrca, Priscila Fernandes, Mark O'Kelly, Maria McKinney, and Sarah Pierce.

This exhibition addresses a crisis.

The arts component of the Irish Leaving Certificate curriculum has remained largely unchanged for over 30 years. Students emerging from this program are effectively isolated from the language, modalities and potential of contemporary art. Thinking outwards from the parameters specific to this isolation, this exhibition advocates for change within much broader sites of education, producing a contagious effect that forces us to reconsider larger institutional deficiencies.

Participating artists have been asked to create work that considers these themes within the context of this gallery exhibition. The Art School platform often functions by staging artists within schools, so that the school itself becomes the site of production. It's Very New School is different; we are working outside of the school, bringing these themes from the school into the gallery.

For audiences of all ages.

The Student Body
Maria McKinney

During birth a baby's gut flora is seeded via bacteria encountered through the mother's birth canal. This intestinal community will develop over a lifetime in response to diet and environment and is entirely unique to its human host. Recent scientific research has named the stomach the second brain. It communicates with the actual brain, influencing its functionality and having a measurable effect on things like mood and emotions.

During her residency in Blessington Community College, McKinney worked through this idea of the second brain in relation to the student body. In these times of protest, exploring the potential of collectivity seems pertinent. The student body has the power to influence the host if they work together to communicate their concerns.

Maria McKinney is a visual artist based in Dublin. She recently completed a significant body of workthat considered the use of genomics in modern cattle-breeding, resulting in a solo exhibition titled Sire in the RHA (Dublin) and funded by the Wellcome Trust and Arts Council of Ireland.

The Square
Sarah Pierce

Sarah Pierce used Bertolt Brecht's experimental plays without an audience as a starting point for developing a new work with the students in Blessington which they would be the authors, the cast and the audience, resulting in a performance titled The Square.

The Square will be re-presented and re-performed with actors from Tallaght Community Arts in the context of the exhibition It's Very New School as an attentive consequence of repetitive acts such as teaching, learning, making and doing. The performance itself takes place during the opening of the exhibition, in the gallery space, as the performers interact and migrate around the opening among the visitors. There are no characters, no plot or other narrative devices. This is more of a roaming set of memorised chants and gestures that speak quite abstractly to ideas of learning and gathering, and what it means to act, make art and be together.

Special thanks to Tony Fagan, Adam Lynham-Clark, Charlie Webster, Cathal Dolan, Kelvin Akpaloo, Martha Knight, and Isobel Cummins.

Sarah Pierce lives and works in Dublin, Ireland. Pierce holds a PhD from Goldsmiths College, University of London and an MFA from Cornell University in Ithaca, NY and is a past participant of the Whitney Museum ISP in New York.

How to Swim on Dry Land
Sarah Browne

How to Swim on Dry Land was conceived in response to core concept of the exhibition, namely that the Leaving Cert curriculum does not currently address the reality of contemporary art's place in society. The current curriculum does not address the potential kinds of learning and discourse that can happen within the structure of an art class or an art practice. Through this short series of sessions the Artist aimed to introduce students to a variety of examples of contemporary art practices, particularly artist film and video. These artists, including Jillian Meyer, Martha Rosler, Emmett Kirwan and Mika Rottenberg, were prompts to consider art as a space of critique, questioning and learning as well as a means of personal expression. The group also explored the popular forms of instruction these artists often appropriated or parodied, such as TV cooking programmes, infomercials and YouTube tutorials.

Participating students are Daiana Belciug, Courtney Boylan, Jamie Byrne, Jade Carkey, Brittany Daly, Rachel Deegan, Orla Dent, Leanne Gallagher, Katie Guerrine, Kelly Healy, Karl Jones, Reece Kinsella, Shane Lee, Meagan Nibbs, Megan O'Keefe, Chloe Russell, Nikki Sullivan, and Chloe Tynan.

Sarah Browne is an artist based in Ireland. Her research-based practice investigates knowledge and invisible structures of power and how we experience both. Browne's sculptural practice includes writing, publishing, performance and public projects, encountered both within and outside gallery environments, as well as extensive collaboration.

"In the first workshop we explored two sets of historical photographs of education; the first, a set of images documented swimming lessons on dry land; the second, a set of photographs of blind children touching the bodies of preserved animals in a museum. These photographs were used to reflect on questions of how we learn, such as through the senses, through copying or mimicking, through listening, through demonstrating. Collectively the group generated a list of activities they wanted to learn, or unlearn. This list formed the basis for later workshops, where the group wrote structured poems and later developed improvised gestures in response. This culminates in a series of film-poems made with the group, describing their desired learning: We want to learn about art before everyone was poor / We want to learn about musical instruments (what gave people the idea?) / We want to learn how people exist / We want to unlearn social media."

Image of the self with and amongst others
Mark O'Kelly

Mark O'Kelly has been working collaboratively with Transition Year students and the Art Department in Our Lady's School, Terenure, to forge and to foster an understanding of contemporary art practice. A central objective of the project was to realize in the form of large scaled painting; a singular collective group portrait of the class of 20 students. The painting examines and expresses the dynamic image of the student group while simultaneously describing each individual and their role as a physical presence with the collective body of the class.

The group worked with studio tools, they used large brushes and participated immediately in assembling the stretched canvas; priming it and working directly onto the surface in large bold affirmative gestures until the collective image began to emerge. In making this painting, this project proposed to test out the power and the challenges for a group to re-consider identity in terms of the collective image of the group and the idea that 'the whole makes for more, than the sum of the parts'.

Participating students are Marie Bishop, Caoimhe Blaney Shorte, Shona Brady, Julie Bromwich, Emma Coffey, Katie Cowzer, Aisling Doyle, Saidhbh Duggan, Megan Giltrap, Miriam Hassan, Nicola Kelly, Rebecca Li, Aoife Lowe, Isabella Nash, Alexandra O'Reilly, Meriem Oukacine, Sinéad Richardson, Elaria Rossney, Marylou Ryan, Ellen Sweeney.

Mark O'Kelly lives and works in Dublin and Limerick. He is a lecturer in Fine Art at Limerick School of Art and Design. He is a graduate of the Slade School of Fine Art and of the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Exhibiting paintings, vitrines and installations, his work is the outcome of a practice of image research that explores the space between the photographic document and the cosmetic image.

We did not work from a pre-conceived design or plan, rather each individual's ideas, drawing and painted marks were thrown onto the surface to find a space of mutual accommodation through the process of painting directly. Decision-making was ongoing, subject to constant revision in the overall context of 'working through the painting' and was informed by making and by doing itself and following this by reflecting on the changing and evolving overall picture."

The politics of representation as evidenced in the historical genre of group portraiture occupies a central concern of my practice as an artist. The depiction of groups and related individuals is an image-construct to which I have returned to in my work time and again. The history of this genre of painting; large scaled paintings depicting organizations, societies and guilds provided a point of discourse for the class to consider; how images and artworks have influenced and applied meaning to the formation of identities of commonality or shared purposes (ages, professions, classes, genders etc.) within the breath of contemporary society."

The Masterplan
John Beattie and Ella de Búrca

The Masterplan is a spoken-word opera presented as a surround sound installation which traverses the gallery space. A selection of students' answers are presented as the titles of books, a sculptural interpretation of the wealth of influences that inform each student's interpretation process. The books represent the base of knowledge from which the students derived their answers, and which in turn, these answers contribute to.

The Masterplan originally took place during May and June 2016, curated by Jennie Guy with artists John Beattie, Ella de Búrca and the 4th, 5th and 6th class students from The D7 Educate Together Primary School, commissioned by the Grangegorman Public Art Programme. The central idea was an examination of the purpose of school, not only in the past and the present, but also in future societies. One of the many research strands took the form of a spoken word opera, with each student repeating our core questions in unison; What is school for? What was school for? And, What will school be for?

Beattie's work centres on interrogating historical and contemporary representations of the artist, and the location of the studio. His practice explores new cultural meaning in the context of the social and private space, which the artist and the studio embodies. Beattie is originally from Co.Donegal and currently lives and works in Dublin. He has been artist in residence at Fire Station Artists' Studio, Dublin, 2006-2009; Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA), Dublin, 2010; Temple Bar Gallery & Studios, Dublin, 2011; and The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), Dublin 2011.

De Búrca creates visual juxtapositions between action and language, treating language as an object, and objects as languages. She works with subversion to unearth the subjectivity of memory and interpretation. Ella de Búrca is currently in residence at The HISK in Belgium. She was the recipient of the 2016 Next Generation Artists Award. Recent exhibitions include: 'Post Peace' Kunst Verein Stuttgart, Germany, 2017, 'Coup de Ville Triennale' Belgium, 2016, 'My Brilliant Friend' TBG&S, Dublin 2017, and 'Alternativa' WYSPA, Poland, 2016.

A Friend in Common
Priscila Fernandes

A Friend in Common is a newly commissioned piece by Priscila Fernandes, in which she imagines a correspondence between modern artists, such as Picasso, Matisse, Signac, among others, and The Modern School (La Escuela Moderna, Barcelona), between 1901 and 1909. Even though aesthetic education was not material covered in The Modern School at this early stage, there were several published articles in its monthly newsletters that pointed to the role of the artist in society and the advantages of including artistic activities in the learning process. Priscila crosses the ideologies of this particular educational program with the positions of the emerging artists, in a gesture that makes us consider the role of the artist in the shaping of an art curriculum.

Priscila Fernandes (1981, Portugal) is a visual artist based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. For the past few years, her installations, videos and paintings have been informed by an interest in art education and play, as well as 20th century artistic practices, such as neo-impressionism and the development of abstraction in art. Recent exhibitions include 32nd Sao Paulo Biennial with the installation Cuckoo Land and Other Futures; The Book of Aesthetic Education of the Modern School at Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona; Back to the sandbox: Art and Radical Pedagogy, Rekjavík Art Museum, Iceland; Playgrounds, Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; PIGS, Artium Basque Museum, Spain; Learning for Life, Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo; 12 Contemporaries, Serralves Museum, Porto; and This is the Time, This is the Record of Time at the Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam.

Thanks

Thanks to the artists who are participating in this exhibition; to the students from Killinarden Community College, Adrienne Whelan, (Principal), Sarah Edmondson (Art Dept); to the students from Our Lady's School, Pauline Meany (Principal), Andrew Kenny and Dee Maguire (Art Dept); to Tony Fagan and the team at Tallaght Community Arts; to Orla Scannell Arts Officer with South Dublin County Council, to the students from Blessington Community College, to Kieran Burke, (Principal) to Turlough O'Donnell and Tanya Twyford-Troy (Art Dept); to Jenny Sherwin, Arts Officer with Wicklow County Council: to Niamh O'Donnell (Director) and Mermaid Arts Centre; to the students of Dublin 7 Educate Together, Patricia Clerkin (Principal), and teachers Niamh Ní Chlochartaigh, Fiona Hyland, Eoin Vaughan, Ruth Fitzgerald, Paul Bermingham: to Jenny Haughton and the Grangegorman Development Agency; to Sven Anderson; the Designers at Distinctitve Repetition; to Fire Station Artists' Studios, to Molly Lambton; to Joanne Laws; to Ruairí Ó Cuív; to Laura Smith and especially to Rua Red Director Maoliosa Boyle and to Karen Philips, Joyce Dunne, Hugh McCarthy, Lorna Kavanagh, Orla McGovern, Isobel Rigby and all the team at Rua Red; and to the supporting partners that have made this work possible.

Of course, as in any area of philosophy, aesthetics is often a good deal more successful in posing questions than in reaching answers... But of course, this discomfort is part of genuine education: Aesthetic issues are not easy ones. After all, it is just this sort of questioning which may, ultimately, have a profound effect on the way in which a future adult views, creates and values art.
(Battin 1994: 103)[7]

John Beattie and Ella de Búrca worked with students of the Dublin 7 Educate Together National School in the Grangegorman area of Dublin. The artists used a range of experimental approaches, with the use of questions prompting significant reflections and dialogue within the group. School students tend to be least familiar with rhetorical or seemingly 'unanswerable' questions, possibly because they are accustomed to there being one correct answer, rather than a range of subjective possibilities.[8] The posing of subjective questions allows students to evaluate potential meaning in philosophical and open-ended ways. It allows them to reflect on potential answers, even if they cannot articulate them. The group developed *The Masterplan*, a spoken-word opera built around a chorus of questions – What is school for? What was school for? and What'll school be for? – which scrutinised the purpose of education in past, present and future societies.

Taking a different approach, Maria McKinney commenced her residency at Blessington Community College by presenting one of her existing artworks to the students. A sculpture from her body of work 'Sire' – which explores correlations between modern genomics and pre-Christian fertility rituals – functioned as a discerning teaching aid and prompted group discussions across a range of topics. Inspired by the complex structural patterns of DNA and new scientific research asserting the stomach as the 'second brain', the students performed *The Student Body* – a procession through the school grounds. As highly visible group formations in the public realm, processions have long been associated with various forms of civic collectivity, from cultural celebrations to religious rituals and political resistance. The processional formation is understood as an expression of egalitarian or democratic relationships, because it allows participants to experience camaraderie or connectedness by appearing alongside one another in some ceremonial or recreational way.

Notions of collectivity are common-place in political activism and the project alludes to the power students have if they present themselves as a unified body. The procession was adorned with the ephemera of pageantry, including several handmade banners and long nets filled with coloured balloons, which were held above the students' heads like buoyant rainbows. What is also interesting about this particular art project is the fact that there was a degree of cross-over with other subjects on the senior cycle curriculum, not least Biology, Home Economics, Agricultural Science and Civic, Social & Political Education (CPSE). However, such interdisciplinarity can rarely be prescribed or predicted and if it is, it can feel trite.

Into the Unknown: Visual Thinking & Experiential Learning

Probing similar notions of collectivity and collective representation, Mark O'Kelly worked with Transition Year students in Our Lady's School, Terenure, to examine the art historical conventions of group portraiture – a central and ongoing inquiry within O'Kelly's wider artistic practice. Following discussions on how images and artworks influence the formation of group identities within society, the group embarked on a singular, large-scale class portrait. Students were invited to proceed without a formal plan and decision-making about the work was very much informed by the process of painting directly. This 'performance of painting' empowered students to carry out quick and loose sketches, guided by immediate gauges, such as the scale of their own bodies. They were encouraged to "make a gesture and stand back and look at it" ushering a process of learning through doing, or more specifically, learning through *reflection* on doing, which is the benchmark of experiential learning that places learners in a constant state of creation and evaluation. This focus on the types of thinking that emerge through making art also produces sophisticated forms of metacognition, imparting important knowledge on when and how to apply certain problem-solving strategies.

Along with the traditional family photo album, the genre of group portraiture has declined in the digital age, in favour of the seemingly omnipresent self-taken portraits that are circulated online via social media platforms. Named as Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year in 2013, the digital 'selfie' phenomenon has been accused of manifesting superficial, narcissistic and impulsive behaviour. In contrast, the finished group portrait, entitled *Image of the self with and amongst others*, is deeply contemplative, authentic, generous (in its acknowledgment of the individual's place within a group) and is the product of rich and durational processes.

Extending this concept of experiential learning, Sarah Browne carried out the project *How to Swim on Dry Land* with students to explore a range of inquiries. In one session, Browne showed students examples of contemporary art, with an emphasis on moving image work, particularly ones that parody popular forms of televisual and digital broadcasting. Such works posited contemporary art as one of the few remaining democratic spaces for critique and questioning. The group also explored the multi-faceted ways in which people learn, which can variously include: through peer interaction, self-reflection, visual media, verbal or non-verbal sounds, motion, touch, elicited performance, the printed or spoken word and the use of realia – tangible, everyday objects that enhance motor and cognitive skills.

Temporarily instilled with autonomy over their own education, the students compiled a list of things they want to 'learn or unlearn', which provided the basis for subsequent activities including a series of pantoums (structured poems), improvised gestures and Avant-garde-style film-poems. These statements also generated a range of far-reaching sub-questions which straddled the complex territories of Existentialism (We want to learn how people exist: How was space created? How was the sea formed?) and Cultural Anthropology (We want to learn about musical instruments: What gave people the idea? out of boredom; to lift depression; to help motivate work?), while alluding to challenges for the Millennial Generation (We want to unlearn social media: The judgement needs to stop; We don't do anything unexpectedly anymore; We need to learn to interact without it). Arguably this last statement is both distressing and heartening: it describes the modern condition, whereby our nervous systems are so overstimulated that our capacity for human interaction, absorption, even boredom, is now under attack; yet it simultaneously offers hope that we will someday transcend the commands of capitalist cyberspace.[9]

Nuanced Encounters

Despite the fact that young people are living in a fast-paced, highly technological world, the current models, ideologies and mechanisms of education have remained largely unchanged for decades. If we are to equip young people with the skills to cope with the uncertainties of modern life, we must fundamentally transform how we think about learning.[10] Rather than 'teachers', the artists participating in *It's Very New School* could be more accurately described as guides, facilitators or provocateurs of artistic research. In these school settings, the artists prioritised conceptual skills and research, with an emphasis on open-ended, self-guided and grouped-based inquiries motivated by student interest. However, such sensitive, nuanced and unmediated encounters do not just happen. In this case, they are the result of long and trustful working relationships between schools, staff, funders and project curator Jennie Guy, whose ongoing curatorial platform Art School has established a reputation for excellence among educators and the arts community alike. As producer and mediator of these encounters, Guy's contribution is imperative: she consistently demonstrates discerning judgement in pairing leading arts practitioners with schools who are willing to take risks by participating in highly ambitious and experimental contemporary art projects.

Returning to Brookfield's theorisation of critical thinking, it could be widely argued that as students, teachers and citizens, we need to continually challenge what we learn. Critical thinking gives us the theoretical tools to examine what we are learning with critical intent. It is a process based on the promotion of problem solving. As we have seen, the artists participating in *It's Very New School* advocate methods that embody experiential learning and explore new ways to be creative. Learning in groups can be a healthy and effective strategy for young people, as they learn to be more democratic, more inclusive and aware of other people's views. Questioning is also another important device that broadens participation and encourages philosophical reflection. We can see how the multi-faceted strategies of artistic research have challenged assumptions (about the purpose of education and the role of the artist), encouraged more active involvement from students and prompted them to imagine alternatives, evident in their confessed desire to 'unlearn' the all-encompassing habits of social media. We don't always have to be content with the structures that exist; rather, as the exhibition suggests, we can use critical reflection to question these structures and to bring about change.

Joanne Laws is an arts writer and Features Editor of the Visual Artists' News Sheet.

1 — Julia Marshall and Kimberly D'Adamo, 'Art Practice as Research in the Classroom: A New Paradigm in Art Education', Art Education, Vol. 64, No. 5 (September 2011).

2 — Stephen D. Brookfield, Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

3 — A decade after the execution of Ferrer in 1909, Rudolf Steiner established the first Waldorf school in Germany, with the aim of devising a pedagogy for holistic, practical and artistic development. This new focus on creative play, artistic expression and critical reasoning influenced a range of other philosophies focusing on human potential. These included: the post-war Reggio Emilia approach (with a focus on self-guided curricula); the philosophy of 'unschooling' or natural schooling, developed by American educator John Holt in the 1970s; and the groundbreaking Theory of Multiple Intelligences, proposed by Harvard Professor Howard Gardner in his 1983 book Frames of Mind, which outlined a model for education based on the principle that learners have unique capabilities and skills.

4 — Peter Mayo, Gramsci, Freire and Adult Education, Possibilities for Transformative Action, (London: Zed Books, 1999).

5 — See Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, trans. Q. Hoare, & G. Nowell Smith, eds. (New York: International Publishers, 1971) p.350.

6 — Henry Giroux, Schooling and the struggle for public life: Critical pedagogy in the modern age, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

7 — Margaret P. Battin 'Using Puzzles to Teach Aesthetics to Children' in 'Aesthetics for Young People' ed. Ronald Moore (University of Illinois, 1994).

8 — Questioning is a highly-undervalued teaching method that, if used with dexterity, can not only test levels of recall and comprehension, but can broaden the parameters of the learning experience. For example, classification-style questioning can prompt learners to consider their own knowledge-base, experiences and observations of their changing visual environment, thus demonstrating a capacity to formulate complex comparisons. Conversely, analytical questions allow young people to make inferences in the absence of concrete answers.

9 — Mark Fisher 'No One is Bored, Everything is Boring', Visual Artists' News Sheet, May/June 2014.

10 — Ellen McCabe 'Leaving Cert fails to equip young people for a post-truth world', Irish Times, Feb 21, 2017.

Cover image
Classroom exercise in Dublin 7 Educate Together, as part of The Masterplan; artists John Beattie, Ella de Búrca curated by Jennie Guy. Photo by Louis Haugh, copyright The Masterplan.

Independence exhibition, Engagement programme

The independence exhibition Engagement Programme will offer a guided tour of the exhibition and then a workshop experience in the 3rd floor studio to make a creative response to the exhibition and thoughts and feelings around 'empowering through the arts'. Workshop materials will be provided. This will be available to school, college and service provider groups.

The aim is to give participants the experience of responding to the exhibition theme and content via expression with arts materials rather than verbally.

The workshop will take place within the artist mentored Double TAKE studio environment and will aim to assist workshop participants to connect and identify with many of our artist members who have to find other ways of being heard.To book contact Rua Red on 01 451 5860.

Tallaght Community Arts

Tallaght Community Arts is a participatory arts organisation that creates opportunities for artists and the people of South Dublin County to explore together the transformative and celebratory power of the arts for the wellbeing of all.

Workshop Dates
Friday 10th March — 2pm
Tuesday 14th March — 2pm
Tuesday 21st March — 2pm
Friday 24th March — 2pm
Tuesday 28th March — 2pm
Friday 31st March — 2pm
Tuesday 4th April — 2pm
Friday 7th April — 2pm
Tuesday 11th April — 2pm
Friday 14th April — 2pm
Tuesday 18th April — 2pm
Friday 21st April — 2pm



Comhairle Contae Átha Cliath Theas South Dublin County Council
the arts council an chomhairle ealaíon funding the arts artscouncil.ie
RUA RED
Tallaght Community Arts