# Research Papers in Education

# Conceptualising arts-based learning in the early years

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# Conceptualising arts-based learning in the early years

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This paper argues that, because young children's response to the world is primarily sensory and aesthetic, early years curriculum should give due attention to the arts. There is an urgent need to better conceptualise ways of working with young children in relation to the arts. The paper is based on three key and permeating ideas: first, that human beings need the arts for holistic development; second, that there have been many attempts to integrate the arts with other areas of learning in the early years; and third, a more robust and clearly articulated conceptualisation of arts-based learning in the early years is needed. The paper critically reviews the international literature relating to these three key areas and concludes that: early childhood education must pay due regard to the innate human need for aesthetics in the design of curricula; on the whole, young children's experience in the arts has not been nurtured in ways which support their artistically-attuned development; and arts-based learning in the early years are not clearly conceptualised. The paper reports an example of arts-based learning involving professional artists working with children and aged six months to five years in preschool settings in England an outcome of which was a conceptual framework for arts-based learning. The paper identifies the need to provide children with greater '*recognition*' of their efforts in the arts and more adult '*models*' or users and makers of art. It further concludes that where arts-based approaches to learning are derived from research, and refined through embedded practice, children are able to learn in ways which are naturally suited to their human condition and therefore better equipped to take part in cultural and artistic elements of life as identified in the United National Convention on the rights of the child.

**Keywords:** the arts; arts-based learning; artists; early childhood education

## Towards a conceptual framework for arts-based learning

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31 states:

(1) That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

(2) That member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision

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of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity. (United Nations 1989)

This paper, which considers how through arts-based learning experiences, young children might be better equipped 'to participate in cultural and artistic life', arises from three key issues: first, human beings *need* the arts for holistic development; second, arts-based learning has yet to be widely articulated and developed in the early years; and third arts-based learning in the early years requires a stronger conceptual basis. This paper will first review the literature in relation to these three issues. It then moves on to report aspects of the *Daring Discoveries* project an arts-based learning initiative in England. Central to the paper is the explanation and justification of a conceptual framework for arts-based learning in the early years (based on earlier work by Hannon 1995) which focuses on four adults roles: providing *opportunities*, showing *recognition*, sharing *interaction* and being *models* of users and makers of art. Alongside these roles are four strands of learning and development in the arts: exploring *materials and experiences*, developing *imagination*, learning and practising *skills* and increasing vocabulary and understanding to enable children to '*talk about the arts*' which emerged from analysis of the *Daring Discoveries* data. The 'ORIM-Arts' framework is then used to review the extent to which recent arts-based projects and studies discussed in the literature review, might illuminate practices within such a conceptual framework. Finally, analysis of the literature in relation to the ORIM-Arts framework highlights the need for further work on *recognition* of children's achievements in the arts, and for more emphasis on children working with skilled *models* of users and makers of art.

## Discussion of the literature: humanity, curricula and the concept of arts-based learning

In this section I will draw on the literature to discuss three concerns: first, the centrality of the arts to human development and well-being; second, an overview of attempts to find a place for the arts in early years curricula internationally; and third, the need for a clearer conceptualisation of arts-based learning in the early years.

### Humanity and the arts

> Viewing the species *Homo sapiens* as it evolves and expresses a behaviour of art is a way of understanding ourselves and the modern *condition humaine*. (Dissanayake 1990, xi)

It is of course a truism that humans have always made an artistic mark on the world; from ancient times civilizations have left tangible traces of their own aesthetic relationship to their environments. The Arts are central to human life. People draw, sing, dance and tell stories because it is part of the condition of being human (Dissanayake 1990, 1995, 2000; Eisner 2002) and the arts can strongly influence the human affective (Charlesworth 1982). Historically we can see this in, for example, the paintings and intricately crafted artefacts of the Minoan Empire in the temple at Knossos, Crete; the cave paintings of Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc, France; Ancient

Egyptian paintings and artefacts; five thousand-year-old sculptures in the painted galleries of the *Hal Saflieni Hypogeum*, Malta; and the numerous depictions of the prehistoric Navajo deity *Kokopelli* – found in thousand-year-old rock art, in the south western deserts and mountains of the US. All these (and *so* many more), depict the battles, beliefs, fears, lives and loves of their creators. Outside of plastic art, storytelling too, is essential to the human condition, and traditions of storying have evolved in every single culture as a *sine qua non* of its identity [the Travellers of Ireland, the Native American Indians, the Aboriginal people of Australia and the folk tales of Norway are only particularly noticed in the plethora of countless examples]. Stories, often passing on guidance for dealing with life's challenges (however big or small) have been told throughout humanity's generations (Murdock 1945; Brown 1991). *'All peoples tell stories'*, and the passing on of those stories through generations has been an important factor not 'merely' in the existential creating and sustaining of cultures, but indeed literally in terms of actual physical survival (Sugiyama 2001, 235). Since the beginning of humanity, men, women and children, have used the arts – images, stories and music – to depict their lives, to confirm their human identity, to communicate with others, to face their fears, to celebrate their triumphs, to mark events in their lives and civilisations; indeed, some of the oldest known artefacts have aesthetic or expressive elements to them (The British Museum 2009; MacGregor 2010).

Dissanayake (2001) goes so far as to suggest that infants are born with what she calls *aesthetic incunabula,* a sort of 'swaddling' which makes emotional effects of the arts discernible from the earliest months. The human need to seek out and organise through the aesthetic is what Clough (2002) calls an '*aesthetic attending'*, the way in which, as a condition of being in the world, we attend - through the senses - to the 'objects' we encounter:

> Aesthetic attending to something is not a special or a marginal case peculiar to (self-conscious) artists, but one which can be systematically developed…only because it is the very foundation of intelligence. (2002, 85)

Thus, the youngest of human beings engage with the world first through an innate *aesthetic attending*, through their senses: they seek the oral satisfaction of the breast, the physical comfort of touch, their mother's voice, her smile, her smell. Babies are sensory beings; open to sensory exploration of everything they encounter (Trevarthen 1984; Goldschmeid and Jackson 1999). We could say that, from birth, we must seek experiences which smell, or taste, or feel or sound or look pleasing to us, because each of our senses craves satisfaction. Beyond Maslow's (1968) first level in his hierarchy of need, beyond the basics of survival, where food (any food) is satiating to the hungry, we prefer to eat food which looks good, smells inviting and offers interesting tastes. Beyond the basic human needs, we seek out experiences (clothes, furniture, places) which please our senses. The thesis at work in this paper is that, because human beings carry such *aesthetic attending* through their lives, always with the need for the sensory stimuli and satisfaction which can be found in many of the arts; because of this, education must pay due regard to the human need for aesthetics in the design of curricula. The argument here is that what is needed to satisfy *homo sapiens' condition humaine* in the early years of learning is a place for the arts.

### The arts in early years curricula

> The arts and artistry as sources of improved educational practice are considered, at best, a fall-back position, a court of last resort, something you retreat to when there is no science to provide guidance. (Eisner 2004, 1)

Eisner (2004) offers a vision of how a pedagogy of the arts might inform education. He argues that the arts can offer six key features to a vision of education: the need to create qualitative relationships; an openness to uncertainty; the inextricability of form and content; cognition not being limited to the language with which it can be described; the relationship between thinking and materials: and, motives for engagement. He argues that education which has its basis in the arts can change the 'social vision of what schools can be' (13).

In recent times, however, worries in the US and UK the about pupils' under achievement in literacy and numeracy have lead to a demise of the arts in many schools, (NACCCE 1999; Chapman 2004). In the US, Chapman (2004, 4) commented that 'Arts education is atypical for young children...' and Bresler (1992) found that though teachers were of the view that arts were an expression of humanity and intrinsic to the 'self', few of them provided arts-learning experiences which connected with this view. Further, many teachers saw the arts as distractions from what they called 'the basics' that is literacy- and numeracy- related learning. Such was the concern in the UK towards the end of the 1990s that the Government introduced legislation to review the National Curriculum and pursue educational excellence which addressed concerns about standards of literacy and numeracy achievement, stating that:

> If we are to prepare successfully for the twenty-first century we will have to do more than just improve literacy and numeracy skills. We need a broad, flexible and motivating education that recognises the different talents of all children and delivers excellence for everyone. (DfEE 1997, 7)

This 'flexibility and motivation' in education was to come partly from a new emphasis on creativity in the curriculum. In 2005, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England, represented creativity as having four characteristics:

> First, they [the characteristics of creativity] always involve thinking or behaving *imaginatively*. Second, overall this imaginative activity is *purposeful*: that is, it is directed to achieving an objective. Third, these processes must generate something *original*. Fourth, the outcome must be of *value* in relation to the objective. (7)

Further, the QCA (2005) considered that pupils were thinking and working creatively when they were:

> questioning and challenging, making connections and seeing relationships, envisaging what might be, exploring ideas, keeping options open, reflecting critically on ideas, actions and outcomes. (10)

By this definition, imagination – or 'possibility thinking' (Craft 2002) is a central component. Further, Burnard, Craft, and Cremin (2006) see 'possibility thinking' as

taking place in an enabling environment where learners and teachers work together in a context which invites: questioning, play, immersion, innovation, risk-taking, imagination and self determination. Cremin, Burnard, and Craft (2006, 115) take this further, suggesting that 'possibility thinking' can be facilitated where teachers adopt pedagogical strategies which include: 'standing back, profiling agency and creating time and space'(113). This was found to be a useful model for the development of creativity and of creative pedagogies. It is also helpful in the context of this paper in identifying the clear distinction between the arts and creativity. Whilst the arts involve aspects of creativity, the arts as conceptualised in this paper, do not necessarily involve *all* the features of creativity as identified by the QCA or of the proponents of 'possibility thinking'. Creativity is much broader than the arts, and can reach into all areas of learning, whilst the arts, by their nature, include elements of creativity, but two are not synonymous. As Lin (2010) notes, in the case of drama:

> Cultivating children's creativity is often referred to as one of the educational objectives of drama, and behind this objective is the assumption that creativity can be developed. There is little doubt that drama is powerful in fostering creativity, although the relationship between drama and creativity has only recently been made explicit in studies of the impact of drama on creative performance, such as development in creative thinking and problem-solving skills, social skills and language development. (Lin 2010, 109)

The focus in this paper is on ways in which the arts can support early learning, and not on the broader dimensions of creativity or creative learning.

Developments in Scandinavia (Barratt 2006; Hopperstad 2008a, 2008b; Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2009) and in Northern Italy, (ReggioChildren 1995) show how a focus on the arts can enhance children's learning both in the arts and other aspects of their development. The widely acclaimed work of Reggio Emilia (Filippini and Vecchi 1996) has long-demonstrated how an arts-based curriculum and the involvement of experienced artists as well, as teachers, can give rise to many forms and foci of learning in the early years. Such projects promote sustained, shared thinking; and can foster children's learning *in community*. In Sweden a physical environment and adult involvement which stimulates and enables children's dramatic play has been shown to enhance young children's imaginations and involvement (Lindqvist 2001). Studies and projects in the UK have confirmed that the youngest children can respond to, and enjoy, involvement in the arts. Initiatives in art galleries and museums designed especially for young children and their parents have shown how artist involvement can open up new avenues for young children to explore and enjoy the arts (Hancock and Cox 2002; MacRae 2007; Eckoff 2008). The importance of talk and storytelling in early years settings has consistently, been shown to be central to all areas of learning (Thompson 1990; Harrett 2002); something the ancient civilisations and indigenous communities of Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Peru and the US for example, have long known. Recent arts-based learning projects[1] have shown that the involvement of artists can enhance the early years curriculum (Gillespie 2006; Brown, Benedette and Armistead 2010), and early years curriculum policy in England (up to 2010) as a matter of policy at least, acknowledged the place of the arts in young children's learning (Department for Children Schools and Families 2008). In 2008 (DCFS) the Early Years Foundation Stage focused attention on six areas of learning: Personal, Social and

Emotional Development; Communication, Language and Literacy; Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical Development; and, Creative Development. The six areas of learning were said to be:

> ...equally important and depend on each other to support a rounded approach to child development. All the areas must be delivered through planned, purposeful play, with a balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. (DCFS 2008, 11 para 2.5)

'Creative development' was defined in the EYFS thus:

> Children's creativity must be extended by the provision of support for their curiosity, exploration and play. They must be provided with opportunities to explore and share their thoughts, ideas and feelings, for example, through a variety of art, music, movement, dance, imaginative and role-play activities, mathematics, and design and technology. (DCFS 2008, 16 para 2.17)

There was no specific mention of the arts per se, and, as already discussed, '*Creative Development*' is not the same as experience and appreciation of the arts.

The arts enhance early years curricula, not simply by promoting children's ability in traditionally established areas of learning and development but also in those lesser mentioned, but centrally important, areas of life (Dissanayake 1990, 2000; Eisner 2004). Young children need the arts to help them learn central lessons in life (Gardner 1990; Eisner 2002) such as how to: communicate ideas, collaborate with others, persist with a problem, deal with disappointment, and enjoy the support of peers and adults (Nutbrown and Jones 2006).

The importance of the arts as nourishment for humanity is visible in examples world wide: the *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra* founded by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, is a testament to the hope that music made by young people can help to heal and bring understanding and tolerance of different beliefs and cultures; *Live Music Now*, a charity established by Yehudi Menuhin, the Russian-born virtuoso violinist and teacher, aims to bring the 'joy and inspiration of live music to those who have limited access to conventional music-making'.[2] The work of *Live Music Now* shows how music can support the social, emotional, physical and educational development of those (often underprivileged) children and adults who participate in its projects leading to: social cohesion, teamwork, participation, confidence, communication, positive mental and physical health and social justice.

Seeing the possibilities of song, dance, music, drama, paint, sculpture and storytelling for enhanced teaching and learning, is not a new concept. Valuing of the aesthetic can be traced in the work of Comenius, Rousseau, Froebel and Pestalozzi where rhyme, verse, song and storytelling were regarded as important to young children's development. Inclusion of the arts in curricula also helps young children to develop vital aesthetic tendencies which are so much part of their humanity (Dewey 1902; Gardner 1989; Dissanayake 1995; Eisner 2002). What a systematic use of the arts in the early years brings to children's *aesthetic attending* is precisely that: a 'system' which is able to speak to the child's own biological, emotional and cognitive systems because they share the same systemic structure. The art forms that young children thus encounter are 'merely' more sophisticated expressions which model and gently nurture their own striving to express, showing the nascent

artist how her early marks and mouldings and makings rightfully *belong* in the cultural world of which she is taking her place as a citizen.

Therefore, we could say that children engage spontaneously in the arts because it is a most natural thing for them to do. Their *Aesthetic Incunabulae* (Dissanayake 2001) mean that (barring impairment) babies suck, and grasp, and gaze, and move, and babble; toddlers readily dance to music, clap to a tune and speak with unmistakeable tunefulness in their voice (Marsh 2004, 2010; Lamont 2008). And they do these things because it is impossible for them not to; they are sensory beings, and thus need to learn and grow and develop in environments which satisfy such innate desires.

On the whole, in England, young children's experiences of the arts have not been nurtured in ways which would support their art-attuned development; these have been much neglected. As far back as the 1950s Kellogg (1955) noted the way in which drawing was devalued by kindergarten teachers. In the 1990s, Holt (1997) registered concern at the poor standard of art teaching and called for a new approach in the early years with 'a comprehensive pedagogy for art in the early years of education' (100). Children's schematic development through movement, speech and graphic representations has often been poorly nourished through a narrow and play-limited curriculum (Nutbrown 2006). Their opportunity to create from their own imaginations limited to small corners of their preschool settings known as 'the creative area' and their holistic development has often been stunted in the drive to promote literacy and numeracy to the detriment of the arts and play (Anning and Edwards 2003). And all this, it seems at the expense of a more holistic development which includes the arts as integral (if not central) to young children's development and learning.

Internationally, research into aspects of arts-based learning often focuses more specifically on the *practice* of elements of particular skills in the arts, playing an instrument or singing, for example, (Young 2005) and development of repertoire and skill (Barrett 2006, 2009; Young 2008) rather than the experience and more holistic development and understanding of music per se (Young 2008) for which they are 'wired from birth' (Trehub 2003, 3). We know little about the place of dance in early years curricula, (Bannon and Sanderson 2000) and the use of poetry, dance and graphic arts in the early years appear to be 'means to ends'. Such art forms are sometimes used as vehicles through which other things are taught and other educational difficulties solved, rather than experiences of learning in their own right (Brown, Benedette, and Armistead 2010). This is what Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2009) refer to as 'music for children' or 'children's music' rather than music integrated with other elements of the arts (Jordan-Deearbo and Nelson 2002), and was a concern identified in the early 1990s in the US (Bresler 1992). Central to this paper is how early learning can be supported by a clear conceptualisation of children's experiences of the arts. As Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2009) put it:

> The arts are foundational constituents of early schooling. They deserve to be taken seriously as forms of knowledge in themselves that children should be given opportunities for developing their knowledge of. Hence, we argue for the importance of helping children, thorough pedagogy, to develop domain-intrinsic knowing of the arts, rather than merely using the arts as means for developing art-extrinsic knowing. Learning in preschool and the first years of primary school cannot only be matters of mathematics, reading and writing. That is too limited a view of human capabilities and cultural life. (132)

Instances of poor quality, or of low levels of importance being attached to learning of and in the arts is not a new phenomenon (Young 2005). Indeed, Bresler (1992) found that arts education in the US was a low priority in practice (even if theory argued for its prominence) and that elementary teachers were, on the whole, poorly resourced to teach the arts. Teachers in the UK have been said to lack competence in arts teaching (Pound and Harrison 2003), a view also supported in earlier research in the US (Bresler 1992). This is perhaps because, as Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2009) argue, many teachers do not themselves 'practice' any art form – be it painting, dance, making or listening attentively to music – they do not necessarily have these aspects of life experience to underpin their sharing with children. They argue that professional development is essential for teachers to teach the aesthetic arts meaningfully in order to promote instances:

> Where the arts, or aesthetics, are regarded as goals in themselves, and not just as means for something else (for example to achieve social ability or support emotional development)....and where meta-cognitive talk is brought into a learning situation. (Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2009, 127)

### The concept of arts-based learning

Alongside the commonly held belief that the arts are 'fun' and the sciences are 'work', one of the difficulties which early childhood education faces is a lack of clarity around what arts-based learning actually *is*. How do kindergarten teachers conceptualise the ways in which they offer experiences of the arts to young children? Do they see art for 'arts sake' or the arts as means of representing a self (MacRae 2007) or as integral tools of pedagogy, or as a way of addressing other concerns (such as the learning and development of children at risk) (Brown, Benedette, and Armistead 2010)? Of course, there is no real need to choose; all can be legitimate approaches to teaching and learning, and bona fide uses of the arts, so long as children experience arts *in and of their own right* as well as a means by which they also learn other things. What is important is that the parts of curricula categorised as 'arts' are clearly conceptualised. We also need to attend to what research tells us about children's learning encounters with the arts and how children's aesthetic appreciation of the arts also might support a range of learning.

Hopperstaad's (2008a) study of the relationships between children's drawing and peer interaction in drawing sessions involved children aged 5–6-years old in two Norwegian primary schools who participated in teacher-initiated activities which included drawing. Taking Kress' (2003) semiotic perspective on drawing, Hopperstaad suggests four categories of interaction around the drawing of signs: informing each other about the meaning; solving difficulties with the drawing; exploring and making judgements. Hopperstad argues that drawing in educational settings encourages peer interaction where 'talk about ways of drawing' (136) could be categorised as: planning, naming, explaining, asking questions, seeking help, offering help, narrating, dramatising, associating, evaluating and instructing (136). Hopperstad (2008a, 2008b) also identifies peer support in the development of drawing skills and solving difficulties in relation to their drawings by asking others 'how I can draw a ...'. and evaluated their drawings by saying things like: 'it's cool, 'that's nice', 'that's weird' and other critical appraisals. A study of children in England talking and drawing (Coates and Coates 2006) emphasised that teachers often found

it difficult for to see children's drawings through anything other than 'adult eyes' (222). Coates (2002) and Coates and Coates (2006) argue that if teachers listen, much can be learned from children while they draw about their interests, enthusiasms and capabilities. They stress the importance of listening to what children say *while* they draw as well as *about* the finished product and on the important role of the adult in valuing children's talk as part of their imaginative, creative and conceptual development. Similarly, a study Dutch study of the narrative elements of children's drawings identified the importance of talk and storying (van Oers 1997).

Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2009) focussed largely on teachers' interactions with children around skills in three elements of the arts: music, dance and poetry. Writing from a Swedish perspective, they note:

> The aesthetic subjects have always had a place in education for children in the early years. Teaching and learning for children in preschool, kindergarten and primary school have relied upon the creative subjects in making children aware of the world around them and of their own creative and artistic competencies – even though emergent reading, writing and mathematics have lately been seen as more important. (119)

Pramling Samuelsson et al. (2009) argue for a theoretical framework for teaching the arts based on developmental pedagogy. They note that empirical studies on learning music, poetry and dance in the early years are lacking. Their study includes talk as part of their tripartite developmental pedagogy framework – with stress on the importance of engaging the child in *meta-talk* (126) – and examples of teachers creating opportunities for children to imagine. MacRae (2007) argues that 'we should not be afraid to use "art language" with children, but we should not insist on pre-specified vocabulary as evidence of their knowledge' (169). Indeed, Haydon and Daly (2008) demonstrate how sustained opportunities for children to draw in partnerships with residents of a home for senior citizens, and to communicate their ideas to each other, can bring benefits to both the children and their collaborating elders.

In a study of children's invented songs, Barrett (2006) demonstrates the potential of providing children with opportunities to imagine through the invention of songs and stresses the value of interaction with children as they sing their invented songs. Barrett (2006) argues that invention of song is intrinsic to young children's development yet, 'The improvisatory nature of young children's invented song is often discounted as an inability to "fix" a musical idea, and a sign of musical immaturity' (218). Whereas, Barrett argues, 'fixing' is not a priority for young children whose focus is the 'invention' and exploration of ideas. In a further study of music in everyday lives of two-year-olds, Barrett (2009) highlights children's use of known and invented song and music-making and the importance of interactive music-making with parents and other family members, a point also emphasised by Creech and Hallam (2003) who stress the importance of parent–child interaction in the development of musical skill.

Our understanding of children's skill in invention and representation is also extended in Matthew's (1998) insightful analysis of children's representational drawings where he argues that:

> What we represent, the forms this representation may take and how far societies support the growth of representational and expressive thought, are pedagogical, social and political issues. (105)

Matthews also points to the importance of children having opportunities to interact with adults in the development of their skills of graphic representation, a strategy adopted by Frisch (2006) in a study of teaching drawing skills to Norwegian children, and further recognised by van Oers (1997) in a Dutch study which took a Vygotskian perspective on the development of sign and the importance of shared talk.

Bowker and Sawyers (1988) identified the importance of children's exposure to high-quality art and 'ownership' of such art through the hanging of prints of paintings in their own homes and involvement in choosing art (from a 'high quality' selection) for hanging in their preschools – essentially their recommendation was that children should be exposed to examples of 'high quality' paintings which were good examples for them to look at and respond to. That children have good adult models to demonstrate skills and to tutor them is crucial, as can be seen in the example of Reggio Emilia; a pedagogic approach to the arts in the early years means that children have the best of opportunities to make art alongside good models. The skilled *atelierista*[3] and pedagogues of Reggio Emilia understand that to work with young children in the arts is to nurture their humanity and their place in community. Similarly, Nyland, Ferris, and Dunn (2008) report a study of a music programme based in an Early Learning Centre in Melbourne, Australia, which promoted the arts with the aim of supporting and promoting the image of the child as 'creative, capable and inquisitive'. Nyland et al. describe the programme thus:

> drawn on the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Rudolf Steiner, Howard Gardner, and on the work of Reggio Emilia projects, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (drawn from Piaget and Erikson) and 'High Scope'... the resulting approach to learning is a 'responsive curriculum', a child-centred program involving children in problem-solving, experiential processing, creative expression through artistic endeavour, and in development through constructive relationships. (Nyland, Ferris, and Dunn 2008, 75)

What the Melbourne-based Early Learning Centre and those in Reggio Emilia offer are ideas and practices which are helpful in articulating a theoretical basis for children's arts-based learning. What early childhood education needs is a thorough conceptualisation of such an approach, and for arts-based learning opportunities to be conceptually grounded so that children's learning in such contexts can flourish.

## A conceptual framework: opportunities, recognition, interaction and models

### The ORIM-Arts framework

A UK study has suggested that adults can provide four things in order to support children's development, by providing *Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction* and a *Model* for their children (Hannon 1995; Nutbrown, Hannon, and Collier 1996). Adults provide many *opportunities* for children to do things, in everyday life they offer: events, materials, toys, equipment, space and time. We can see such opportunities as a set of 'permissions' to do things. Children need *recognition*, acknowledgement of their achievements, and adults show recognition in many ways: praising efforts, telling others what the child has done, celebrating their successes, taking photographs, taking an interest in and displaying their work. Children need *interaction* with adults who to spend time with them, supporting, explaining, endorsing, talking about what they are doing and challenging them to move on from what they know about to do more. Adults interact with children in many

different ways: by talking, demonstrating, tutoring, involving children in real tasks and projects and playing games. Through such interactions adults can enable children to progress from what they can do now with help to becoming more independent in the future (Vygotsky 1978). Adults can act as powerful *models*; children imitate what they see in everyday life. Awareness, and healthy exploitation, of the power of the adult model is important. Young children learn through the adult models they see, family members, adults in preschool, television characters and personalities, to name but a few.

These four adult roles (opportunities, recognition, interaction, model) were originally conceptualised in the *ORIM framework*, first developed in relation to parents supporting their children's early literacy development (Hannon 1995; Hannon and Nutbrown 1997; Nutbrown, Hannon, and Morgan 2005). It has since been used in practice to support parents of young children who wanted to do more to help their young children's early literacy development. By focusing on the four key roles parents can play, alongside elements of early literacy, the ORIM framework helped to make more explicit, the support parents' could offer their children. This framework has since been usefully adapted to focus on other aspects of learning: in relation to the training of early years practitioners, the development of self-esteem in young children and adult community literacy (Rigo-Toth and Ure 2000; Roberts 2001; Fagan 2000). Most recently, it has been adapted as a tool for arts-based learning in the early years (Nutbrown and Jones 2006). The four adult roles that make up *ORIM* can be explored and exploited in relation to adult roles beyond those of the parent and in relation to the arts; combining these together with key strands of development in the arts gives the ORIM-Arts framework.

The *ORIM-Arts* framework (Figure 1) maintains the four key adult roles, adapting them for settings and artists whereby they can provide *Opportunities, Recogni-*



**STRANDS OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARTS**

| | *materials and experiences* | *imagination* | *skills* | *'talk about the arts'* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Opportunities** | | | | |
| **Recognition** | | | | |
| **Interaction** | | | | |
| **Model** | | | | |

ARTISTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS CAN PROVIDE

Figure 1.   The ORIM-Arts framework.

*tion, Interaction* and a *Model* of artists and users of the arts. The next section, sets out the aims, methodology and outcomes of a project which developed and used the ORIM-Arts framework.

## *Daring Discoveries*: an example of arts-based learning in the early years

### *Project context*

The *Daring Discoveries* project (Nutbrown and Jones 2006) was one of many education projects funded during the first decade of the twenty-first century by the Arts Council in England. The work carried out by artists in residence and in partnership with early years practitioners in six group settings identified the contribution of arts-based learning to all aspects of children's early learning and led to the development of a framework which can be used to conceptualise arts-based learning in the early years. This section reports the methodology of the *Daring Discoveries* project, an example of the many rich initiatives which can be provided for children in order to enhance their arts-based learning.

### *Daring Discoveries: research design and methodology*

#### *Project aims*

The project aimed to:

- Involve professional artists in providing enriching arts-based experiences for children aged six months to five years in six early years settings.
- Explore and document the learning experiences for the children.
- Identify features for successful involvement of artists in early years settings.
- Conceptualise the process and content of the arts-based learning being adopted.

#### *The early years settings*

Six settings in a market-town in Northern England were selected for the project, chosen because they were typical of the varied forms of early years provision available in UK at the time, and because they expressed a willingness to collaborate with artists to develop work in their setting. One group (0–3 year olds) met in a community library, another on a purpose-equipped mobile 'playbus' (0–3 year olds); one local authority nursery class (3–5 year olds), one school entry class (4–5 year olds) and two private fee-paying day nurseries (0–5 year olds).

#### *Artist involvement*

In Phase 1 of the project, each of the 6 settings had 18 'artist sessions' spread over 18 weeks, and the artists worked within limits of the environment of each setting. Phase 2 consisted of work in one setting where more intensive artist involvement was possible with two artists working together in the setting for a full week (20 'artist sessions'). Whereas the settings in Phase 1 were chosen for their variety, the Phase 2 setting was chosen because it could provide the best environment of the six original settings, including: dedicated work space, materials and equipment could be left undisturbed for the whole week, most of the children attended on a

full-time basis, a large outdoor space, children aged 6 months–5 years. Together, Phases 1 and 2 comprised a total of 128 'artist sessions', amounting to over 250 hours artist engagement. Data from Phase 1 were used to develop the ORIM-Arts framework which was then tested in Phase 2.

## Ethical issues

As with all research involving young children as participants it was important in this project to ensure that the all ethical issues were identified and addressed, both at the beginning of the project and throughout. The use of photographs as a form of data and as illustrative of observational data meant that issues relating to anonymity, protection and confidentiality had to be carefully discussed with parents and practitioners. Prosser (2000) identifies visual methods as having 'no established history of ethical protocols' though these are now developing for as Pink (2007) suggests, ethical practices are culturally defined and collaborative research designs are more likely to be ethically sensitive than those which treat participants as 'objects'. Visual methodologies, offer new opportunities to researchers and generate exciting possibilities of newer forms of data which do not rely solely on the written word (Rose 2001; Pink 2007, 2009), and in so doing they bring new ethical challenges – mostly relating to participants' privacy. Flewitt (2006) recommends carefully negotiated permissions for all images used, something which was done on an individual basis with parents (and children where appropriate) in the *Daring Discoveries* project. However, in this project Flewitt's recommendation of '"fuzzing" of participants faces' (559) was not followed because the expressions on the children's faces were an important part of the data and much of the meaning would have been lost if their faces were obscured (Nutbrown 2011). The children in this project were *participants* first and foremost, but they were also the *subjects* of much of these data. (Nutbrown and Jones 2006; Flewitt 2006; Pahl 2007; Clark and Moss 2008). One issue which was of concern was what Latham (2008) calls an inevitable 'Othering' of children something which Christensen and Prout (2002) might see being addressed through the achievement of an 'ethical symmetry between children and adults' where shared values need to be worked out. Balancing issues of 'protection' with the importance of doing justice to the portrayal of children in research are matters for constant discussion (Danby and Farrell 2004) within the contexts of the research. In this ethical and moral context, and in a climate of concern for the protection and well-being, informed consent was obtained for children's participation in the work with artists and, separately and additionally for the use of agreed images in the development and dissemination of the project. This requires a certain level of careful guardianship of the images on the part of the researcher to avoid the inclusion of images and vignettes which might later embarrass or harm the children. As with all projects involving young participants, the duty of care in this research project lasted well beyond ethical approval to conduct the research and continues throughout the dissemination process. All images in this paper are included with full permission of parents.

## Data collection

All sessions in Phase 1 were documented (by observers using note books and cameras). Observations were carried out by two early years professionals who were

experienced in making observations of children in early years settings. On some occasions both observers observed the same session, mostly they worked independently. Co-observation was used for checking on the types of observations being made and the focus of those observations. The observers discussed how they selected the specific foci for observations and their strategies for capturing what happened and what was said separately from their own judgements and interpretations of those events. The observers used an open format for documenting the sessions and worked their notes into a narrative form with accompanying photographs which they had also taken, after the session was over. This amounted to over 250 hours of observational data and some 6,000 photographs. The following observations from data-documentation, chosen because they illustrate the types of activity, a spread of age range and different artist and child involvement, show the style and content of the data collected in Phase 1.

*Observation 1: Tabitha and the glue* . Tabitha (aged three years) worked with the glue and black sand for about 40 minutes (Figure 2). She chose several tools to apply the glue, watching it trickle from each one onto the paper. There was a small amount left and she asked Moya (the artist) 'Can I have some more water?'

| | |
|---|---|
| Moya: | 'It's glue Tabitha – I'll get some more' |
| Tabitha: | 'It's trickily like water' |
| Moya: | 'It's sticky – can you feel' |
| Tabitha: | 'Looks like water – it's not paint' |
| Moya: | 'It's glue – you can make things stick to the paper with it' |
| Tabitha: | 'It makes patterns' |



Figure 2.    Tabitha and the glue.

Tabitha continued to explore the glue. One by one, and time and time again, she dipped a piece of card, a glue spreader and a large paint brush into the tray of glue. She watched the glue fall from each onto the paper. She resisted any suggestion that she might use the glue to stick anything onto the paper on which she was kneeling. The grains of black sand were nearby and she scattered some onto her glue, seemingly surprised when some of the grains stuck to her glue patterns. 'Oh! It's gone now' she remarked as the sand covered her glue.

*Reflection:* In her exploration Tabitha seemed to have two questions in her mind; *'What is this?'* and *'What can I do with it?'* She was immersed in discovery, absorbed in trying out, patiently watching, repeating her experiments – thinking. In this opportunity-space created and sustained for her by Moya, her curiosity and individual pursuit was understood, respected and facilitated. Tabitha's agenda, Tabitha's ideas, Tabitha's curiosity took over. Moya patiently watched and waited until she was needed. Though Tabitha's exploration was mostly solitary, she was diligently supported by Moya whilst other children also engaged in their art making in parallel, Tabitha however, seemed oblivious to their presence.

*Observation 2: Rosie and the paint.* Rosie (15 months) was supported by an adult as she joined in with the body painting (Figure 3). Whilst some of the older boys ran up and down the large sheet of paper, daubing paint on themselves, each other and the paper, and two of the older girls sat on the periphery slowly and cautiously painting their toes and their tummies, Rosie sat on the lap of her close adult.

She had a small daub of lime green paint on a plastic dish. She dipped her finger in and smeared it onto her tummy – a look of deep concentration on her face. She lifted her finger to the adults face, 'It's green Rosie, green paint, on your tummy and on your finger!' Rosie touched her chin, leaving a green daub of paint



Figure 3.    Rosie and the paint.

there too. Later, with her feet on the paper and having been given a pot of yellow paint and a brush, Rosie continued to explore the paint (Figure 4).

Rosie worked with the paint for almost 30 minutes – touching it tentatively at first then using a paintbrush with some confidence.

**Reflection:** The look on her face seemed to say *'What is this stuff!'* And she expressed some delight when she transferred paint from her own hand to that of the adult. This opportunity to explore paint included: sustained support from her close adult; materials ready to hand and in quantities sufficient for her to handle; 'permission' from those around her to participate; uninterrupted time to explore at her own pace.

*Observation 3: Ephraim's 'first mark'.* Ephraim (11 months) had been playing with the pastels and paper for a while, moving them around on his tray (Figure 5); but he seemed to be getting frustrated with the process. I put a folded fresh piece of paper on his high chair tray and gave him a chunky blue pastel. He made a mark on the paper with the pastel (Figure 6), he seemed to be surprised – jumped slightly – it could have been his first mark! He took his dummy out and, smiling, shouted 'Yey!'

**Reflection:** It was the close observation of the adult which created an opportunity for Ephraim to move from exploring materials to seeing what he could make them do. The timing seemed right, and Ephraim was very satisfied with the experience.

These examples, and many others from arts-based approaches to early years curricula (Deans and Brown, 2005; Reggio Children 1995), illustrate children's engagement in arts-based experiences and also show how Eisner's (2004) six features of arts-informed education mentioned earlier can permeate teaching and learning in that they: provide children with opportunities to '*create qualitative*



Figure 4.   Rosie and her close adult.

Figure 5.   Ephraim.



Figure 6.   Ephraim makes his mark.

*relationships*' as they engage in arts processes; allow children to explore, so encouraging '*openness to uncertainty*'; demonstrate how '*form and content*' in the children's explorations and products were *'inextricably linked*'; show how the children's cognition was not limited to the '*language with which it can be described*' – even though some children were very young, their thinking was not constrained to the vocabulary they had; showed the '*relationship between thinking*

*and materials*' – in that the materials supported further thinking: and, provide examples of children's '*motives for engagement*' as they became involved in arts experiences and processes.

However, as will be seen later, this paper is arguing for much more than an archive of fine examples of such learning encounters (though such an archive is needed). A conceptual framework for arts-based learning in the early years will provide clearer understanding of young children's encounters in the arts. The approach to analysis and the resulting outcome takes this aspect of the work forward.

### Analysis

All observations from Phase 1 were first entered into the qualitative data analysis programme NVivo. They were then systematically coded thus: (i) the extent to which artists were providing *opportunities* to engage in arts experiences; (ii) ways in which artists were showing *recognition* of children's efforts and achievements; (iii) *interaction* with children around the arts; and (iv) artists acting as being *models*, themselves, of users and makers of art. These four themes were taken from the work of Hannon (1995) and (Hannon and Nutbrown 1997) discussed earlier. Each of the coded sets of observations were analysed for content using the following questions: What were the children doing? What were the children saying? Who were the children with? What were the artists doing? What were the artists saying? Who were the artists with? This process resulted in the identification of four strands of development in the arts: (i) *materials and experiences; (ii) imagination; (iii) skills;* and (iv) *talk about the arts* – which, as the review of the literature in the earlier part of this paper has demonstrated, are key aspects of development and learning in the arts. If the studies reviewed earlier are plotted onto the ORIM framework (Figure 7), it is possible to see where research and practice are focussed.

It is clear that those cells where least work has been reported (marked with an asterisk[*] in Figure 7) relate to where adults show *'recognition'* of children's achievements and also (with the exception of modelling specific *skills*) to their provision of *'models'* of users and makers of art. The ORIM-Arts framework is therefore useful in identifying areas where further studies and practices need to be developed. It is also apparent that few reported accounts of work with children in the arts cover content related to *all* the cells in the ORIM-Arts framework (Figure 7). Work involving students of performing arts in early years settings (Meiners, Schiller, and Orchard 2004 – number 14 in Figure 7) appears to have touched on 9 of the 16 cells in the ORIM-Arts framework. They report that through sharing the performing arts with children the gains for children include:

> . . .development of skills and understandings that will make them articulate and confident consumers and participants in the arts; development of the capacity to think creatively, imaginatively and inventively; gaining access to experiences that will help them to understand the important place and role of the arts and the arts industry in Australian cultural life; gaining access to effective arts learning programs both within and outside of the school environment. (Meiners, Schiller, and Orchard 2004, 470)

Deans and Brown's (2005) report of the arts-rich curriculum of the Melbourne Early learning Centre (number 19 in Figure 7) appears to touch on all 16 cells of the

**STRANDS OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARTS**

|  |  | *Materials and Experiences* | *Imagination* | *Skills* | *'Talk about the Arts'* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ARTISTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS CAN PROVIDE** | **Opportunities** | 5, 8,9, 10, 13,14,16, 19 | 2, 3, 9, 13,14, 19 | 9, 13,14, 15,16,19 | 5, 8, 9, 13,17,19 |
|  | **Recognition** | 7,9, 13,*19* <br><br> * | 4, 9,13,19 <br><br> * | 6,9, 13,*19* <br><br> * | 9,13, 17, *19* <br><br> * |
|  | **Interaction** | 8, 9, 12,13, 14, 16,19,20 | 1, 3, 8,9, 13, 14,*19* | 1, 2,7, 9, 11, 12,13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, *19* | 1, 2, 4, 8,9, 13, 14, 17, *19* |
|  | **Model** | 9, 13, 14, *19* <br><br> * | *9, 13, 19,* <br><br> * | 2, 9, 11, 13, 14, 18,*19* | 2, 9,13, *19* <br><br> * |

*Key to Figure 7    (numbers in cells indicate the main relation to ORIM as indicated in the key studies cited)*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Hopperstad (2008, 2008a) | 11. Frisch 2006 |
| 2. Pramling Samuelsson (2009) | 12. Haydon and Daly 2008 |
| 3. Barrett (2006) | 13. Author  (date) |
| 4. Coates and Coates (2006) | 14. Meiners, Schiller and Orchard (2004) |
| 5. MacRae (2007) | 15. Thompson (1990) |
| 6. Matthews (1998) | 16. Youn g (2008) |
| 7. Barrett (2009) | 17. van Oers (1997) |
| 8. Eckhoff (2008) | 18. Nyland (2008) |
| 9. Reggio Children (1995) | 19. Deans and Brown (2009) |
| 10. Lamont (2008) | 20. Barrett (2009) |

Figure 7.   Studies relating to aspects features in the ORIM-Arts framework.

framework. This is probably because 'The children were demonstrating enhanced cognitive performance, social learning and connectedness when engaged in arts-rich programs' (Deans and Brown 2005, 342). Together with the many examples from the Italian Reggio Emilia Centres (Cavallini et al. 2011) where children worked with artists and their teachers on an arts-inspired projects, and the Daring Discoveries project (number 13 in Figure 7) (Nutbrown and Jones 2006) are the only three which touch all 16 cells of the ORIM-Arts framework. That the examples of both the Melbourne Early Learning Centre (Deans and Brown 2005) and the Reggio Emilia preschools (Reggio Children 1995) cover the whole of the ORIM-Arts framework is not a surprise. For these, amongst all those studies reviewed in this paper, are clear examples of long-term, embedded, arts-based approaches to early learning. As Deans and Brown (2005) express it:

> Several interlocking themes are explored in relation to young children and the arts, including: a changing image of the child; arts-centred inquiry-based learning; artist/teacher pedagogy; and the significance of culture and context. (Deans and Brown 2005, 350)

And, speaking of Reggio Emilia, Malaguzzi (1998, 40) said:

> ... we place enormous value on the role of the environment as a motivating and ani-
> mating force in creating spaces for relations, options, and emotional and cognitive sit-
> uations that produce a sense of well-being and security. It has been said that the
> environment should act as a kind of aquarium which reflects the ideas, ethics, attitudes
> and culture of the people who live in it. (Malaguzzi 1998, 40)

These three examples (Deans and Brown 2005; Reggio Children 1995; Nutbrown and Jones 2006) demonstrate how arts-based learning can be developed to ensure that key roles of adults and four strands of learning and development in the arts receive attention in holistic child-focussed curricula. High-quality, research-informed approaches to learning can ensure that children experience the arts in all cells in the ORIM-Arts framework. However, some practitioners and practices are less well developed than those discussed above. In such cases, the ORIM-Arts framework can help to conceptualise and support a broadly based arts-based approach. The ORIM-Arts framework can be used as a guide, to help structure and plan, with a clear focus, any work involving artists or arts-based learning. Each cell of the framework highlights potential arenas of learning. It can be used to generate ideas and also to evaluate practices. Planning and reflection using the ORIM-Arts framework can help to identify aspects of developments in the arts, and adults' roles where more work might be needed. Following the Phase 1 analysis, the ORIM-Arts framework was tested in Phase 2 to ascertain its usefulness to practice in the ways stated above. It was used to structure and plan arts experiences for children so as to ensure that the children had *opportunities, recognition, interaction* and *models* in all four strands of development in the arts exploring *materials and experiences*, developing *imagination*, learning and practising *skills* and increasing vocabulary and understanding to enable children to '*talk about the arts*'. Figure 7 shows that all cells of the ORIM-Arts framework were addressed through conceptualising arts-based learning in this way.

## Conclusion: towards embedded arts-based approaches to learning

This paper has drawn on the literature to argue that, because young children's *aesthetic incunabulae* make their responses to the world aesthetic, (Dissanayake 2001) and because the arts are central to human development and cognition (Eisner 2002), so early years curricula should give due attention to the arts. The paper has argued the need for a clear conceptualisation of arts-based approaches to learning in the early years, based on the premise that, as the literature suggests, the arts are central to humanity and play a crucial role in children's holistic development. Though limited in scope and size, the paper has identified a potential gap in young children's arts-based learning. The need for projects which have a long-term, embedded approach to working with in the arts is clear. The analysis of projects within the ORIM-Arts framework suggests a need to show children greater '*recognition*' of their efforts in the arts and provide them with more adult '*models*' or users and makers of art. Of course, because this study is based on work with six settings, further research is needed to examine this finding further. The ORIM-Arts framework needs further testing to determine its usefulness as a framework for artists working with children in the early years (in the same way as the original ORIM framework (Hannon 1995) was tested out in practice in different situations and locations). Further research which examines the usefulness of ORIM-Arts as used by artists in

collaboration with early years practitioners will provide an opportunity to learn how work with children in all cells of the framework can contribute to effective arts-based learning in the early years.

Finally, the UN Convention on the rights of the child, Article 31 states:

(1)  That every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
(2)  That member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Where arts-based approaches to learning are derived from research, and refined through embedded practice, we can see that children are able to learn in ways which are naturally suited to their human condition and better equipped to 'participate in cultural and artistic life' (UN 1989).

So far as teaching and learning in the early years is concerned, this surely means that it is necessary to develop and work within a clearly conceptualised approach to the arts which is derived from research and embedded in practice. One way in which governments can seek to ensure that *all* children participate fully in cultural and artistic life and experience opportunities to artistic activity, is to ensure that the arts have a secure place in early years curricula of their respective countries.

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## Notes
1.  See for example, those funded by Creative Partnerships in the UK which have sponsored many arts-based learning projects www.creative-partnerships.com
2.  http://www.livemusicnow.org.uk/
3.  Teacher trained in art education (artist in residence) who works in the art studio (*atelier*) supporting and developing arts based learning on projects with groups of children.

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