

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

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FACULTY OF DESIGN AND DEPARTMENT OF CRAFT (CERAMIC'S)

DOES THE ENVIRONMENT AFFECT CHILDREN'S ARTWORK?

A CASESTUDY COMPARING TWO DUBLIN SCHOOLS:-1. CITY QUAY NATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOL. 2. OUR LADY'S TEMPLEOGUE PRIVATE SCHOOL.

"by"

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"SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF B Des in DESIGN."

MARCH 1992

"The right to a healthy environment is surely the right of every human. Children are dependent on a healthy environment to grow and develop....Children constitute one half of today's global population, and they will inherit the world we leave behind."

Unicef 1992



(Fig 1) Sarah, Kindergarten I, Our Lady's Templeogue.

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"I would like to thank both students and teachers of City Quay, National Primary School and Our Lady's Private Primary School, for without their encouragement and spontaneous drawings, I would not have a Thesis to begin with."

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines whether the environment affects children's attitudes to art production with special reference to the four to six age group. I chose two schools which were obviously different in certain respects, to illuminate the contrast between the two environments. The two schools represented were, Our Lady's Templeogue, (Private school) in the suburbs and City Quay National Primary School, located in Dublin's inner city.

My material is evaluated largely on the basis of personal judgement and on close observations. Experiments conducted were unfortunately restricted to a time-frame of only four months.

The purpose for writing this thesis was to highlight the importance and need for art in primary education, with specific reference to the freedom of creative expression to the young child.

This is by no means an art competition, or an in-depth criticism on teaching practices, it is merely a documentation on findings which might help to understand the role the environment plays, if any, on children's development in their artwork.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ENVIRONMENT



The Womb

In order to understand our environment we must first revert to the most universal compact capsule known, the womb. It is here that our needs are readily provided for, with such pure completeness rarely equalled again in life.

After the child is born, sustaining its life then becomes the responsibility of the parent or adult, who must cater for the infants welfare.

Unique personal behaviour stems from the biological, social, cultural influences and opportunities which evolve from the socio-econmic and home environment. Gradually, increased independence is obtained as the child embarks on communicating in signals and movements. These messages follow the pattern of the childs fundamental experiences of babbling to talking, crawling to walking, scribbling to drawing. These developments are encouraged through the learning processes and play, by exploring personality and self in the surrounding environment.

Social Environment

'It has been suggested before that a person's sense of identity is fostered by the places and things that are important to him.' 1

Even though these two sets of children from City Quay, National Primary school and Our Ladys, Templeogue, Private school only live in a radius of roughly nine miles, socially their lives revolve around a different axis of daily occurrences. In order to gain some insight into the children's different social backgrounds I use some extracts of recorded interviews from both schools.

City Quay

Stephen: aged six years old.

'There was a fire at the gate last night and they trun (threw) something at the fire-brigade and his hat, and some people said curses to the fire-brigade'.

Q: How did the fire start?

'Em! they trun a petrol boom in it, and it started, it blowed up, and the car is gone, the police took it.'

In this short extract <u>Stephen</u> tells of an event of the night before, he confidently uses the word 'petrol bomb' yet, he find it difficult to pronounce other words in his vocabulary, mostly substituting slang words for them. It is appropriate to tag <u>Stephen</u> along with some of his fellow pupils as being 'street wise'. This means that the child can fend for itself in and around the city environment, which toughens him up to some degree, by exposing him to the harsh realities of



life, educating him for practical survival in his society in ways which cannot be taught in school but experienced in the streets. Among the senior infants in City Quay, there is only a small percentage of children that live in houses, which are contained in Pearse Street, with the larger percentage of the class located in the flats of Pearse and Markiviez House. Unemployment is the norm in this community, single parents and separated families are common. Unfortunately, these problems seem to be part and parcel of everyday life in this area.

'Decaying buildings and garbage-strewn streets communicate a message of failure to the child. The constant view of such conditions, day after day, and the social pathologies that often accompany them, may very well lead a child to evaluate himself in much the same way as his setting.' 3

Our Ladys Templeogue Private Primary School

In comparison to City Quay, the social environment of these children lacks the closeness and unity which comes from being in touch with their community. These children come from predominantly comfortable and luxurious private homes, their lives are more sheltered from the social problems that the children of City Quay would be accustomed to. Unemployment is rare among families, with careers mainly in business or professional level.

Children attending the school come from Rathgar, Rathmines, Templeogue, Terenure, some travel from as far as Brittas Co. Dublin. There is a mixed bag of social events in their environment due to the socio-economic background they are born into.

Jenny: a six year old girl explains:

'Last year, I got a pony for Christmas his name is Burt. He's in a stable.'

Q: At home or somewhere else?

'I have him in a different place, up in Tobin's in my grannies house, cause we have no stable for him.'

'I got a saddle and a new hat and I went on a hunt on him". 4

The difference between <u>Jenny's</u> response and Stephen's to the simple question "Do you have any news for me?" highlightes the differing social environments from which the two children come and their contrasting attitude.

The Schools

City Quay National Primary School (Fig 2)

The school is situated on the southside of the Dublin Quay within a five minute walk from, the city centre. The streets are lively with cars, buses, and lorries, while overhead darts and trains chatter by. The air is on occasion choking with smog and pollution, with the noise from the builder's machinery echoing off the hollow walls of the rising office blocks. All of this sounds together to make one big orchestra of activity.

The school could be mistaken for a factory or warehouse, camouflaged by meshed windows and heavy-duty spiral barbed wire covering every corner and nook of the roof, in an attempt to protect the school from unwanted intruders. The school's exterior is a dull grey colour with little personality, it seems almost surprising at first glance that it could be a primary school. The only clue to its purpose is a small trace of artwork which is displayed behind the meshed windows. From inside, these windows stare across parked cars on to another building, which is almost identical to the school building. The large mesh covered windows also have a negative effect on the environment of the classroom, sacrificing sunlight for fluorescent lighting. The heavy lattice defects the purpose of having windows in the first place. At the back of the school

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Our Lady's Templeogue (Fig 3)

In contrast to the City Quay environment we have Our Lady's, Templeogue, also placed in Dublin's southside, but in the suburbs. This, was originally the estate of the Shaw Family, built in 1896. In 1951 Dublin Corporation bought the grounds and converted them into what is now known as Bushy Park. The manor of the estate and some adjoining fields were

sold to the Religious order of Christian Education in 1953, which now houses the primary school. 5

There is a steady flow of traffic on the main road outside the Private grounds, but these noises are smothered out and concealed by the grand driveway, with its scattering of old trees and briars. This vision aids as a backdrop to the adjoining Georgian house that awaits the onlooker in the distance. The manor house is fresh in its appearance with short trimed hedges setting it off against its white and sky blue exterior. The interior, decoration of the school attempts to preserve the identity of the previous occupents. Classrooms are smaller in width and length than City Quay yet the high ceilings create an airier atmosphere. The windows spread from the floor to the ceiling in a semi-circular manor looking out on to an unspoilt scenic view from the class of kindergarten II with bright beams of light flooding the room from all positions.

These children also have a concrete yard for playing and during the summer months picnics take place in the surrounding grounds. There is a sense of compelling beauty with nature bursting in through every panel of glass making it a daydreamers paradise.

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City Quay National Primary School (Fig 2)



Our Lady's Templeogue (Fig 3)

LITY QUAY NATIONAL PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Our Jady's Templeogue (Fig 3)

A Childs first visit to the classroom

At age the of four the child experiences changes in its original environment, it has learnt how to communicate and to some degree has been disciplined under adult supervision. Entering into a school room situation is an eye opener for the child meeting new challenges by learning and forming relationships with fellow pupils.

'He must learn to relate in a very personal way to a new authority figure, the teacher whose personality, values and system of discipline and their expression through the use of the environment may differ from those of his family. Punishment, for example, which might be a sharp word at home, may now be banishment from the class or the reverse may be true, with verbal control now substituted for environmental control.' 6

If the teacher can accept the child on a one to one basis, the communication skills can be built up with the child feeling safe and secure under this supervision. If on the other hand, the child feels threatened or insecure by this new authority, it could lead to communication problems not only in the present but in the long term. Therefore, both parties need a balanced and reciprocal growth of personal understanding to help break down the barriers of post-dated stigma's attached to studentteacher relationships.

The young children adjust themselves to the alien timetable rota. Various information is digested in 30 minute

blocks and the child like a vessel gradually expands in intellect. As art is a subject in school, it fits into the same time-table as basic reading and writing, however ! It is not given the same importance or regularity as these subjects. The usual classroom custom of saving art class for a Friday sometimes weekly or every second week is a regular trend in teaching practices. Art in my view, is considered as a "treat" or an "award" for weekly academic achievements, a half an hour interval before the "real" lessons commence.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER ONE

- 1,3,6, Ittelson/Proskiansky, Rivlin/Winkel, <u>An Introduction to Environmental Psychology</u> p.p. 144, 171, 185.
- Stephen, From an interview held in City Quay National Primary School, Dublin January 23rd 1992.
- Jenny, From an interview held in Our Lady's Templeogue (Private School) January 24th 1992.
- Mrs. Harley, Principal, from an interview held in Our Lady's Templeogue, Januray 24th 1992.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AVAILABILITY OF ART MATERIALS IN THE TWO SCHOOLS

Art in the Irish Educational Curriculum

'The new curriculum in Primary Education in 1971 emphasises a more child-centred approach and greater sensitivity to individual differences. Arts and crafts were also introduced and given importance on the official curriculum.' 1

The launch of the new arts and crafts curriculum may have been introduced as an addition into the mainly academic classroom environment to allow children a way to express themselves visually and to bestow upon them a creative outlook. However, this is still a long way from being implemented even after twenty one years. The fact is, arts in general are grossly neglected in relation to other areas of the curriculum and are usually the first to be hit if cut backs must be made.

The availability of art materials obviously suffers drastically under these cut backs with the so called fullrounded education curriculum sagging in the middle, as discrimination sets in when financial choices are put to the board, with deductions on the "frills" (the arts). Art in the curriculum falls between two stools. On one side they believe it is important for children to take an interest in the arts, by participation and understanding, but on the other side there are no set handbooks supplied to teachers on teaching art unlike other areas of the curriculum. Ann Kelly (teacher in City Quay Primary School) explains, 'You get very little help
in this area from the Educational board'. 2 National schools, as well as private schools provide elementary education. Private schools are fee paying, receiving no state support, therefore they are not subjected to inspection by the education department. Our Lady's is run by the religious order of Christian Education and are associated to a state supported secondary school also run by the sisters.

In John Coolahan's book based on Irish Education, he states;

'Priority of access to these secondary schools is given to pupils from the private primary school and this often a factor in the parents' decision to send their children there, as well, as social exclusiveness which many of these schools reflect.' 3

I put this quote to Mrs. Harley, the principle of Our Lady's Primary School. Her reaction was one of disagreement.

'False.' 'This doesn't apply to our school, no child is given priority over another, acceptance into the secondary school is graded academically.' 4

Due to fact their funding the students of this school enjoy extra curriculum activities which are not available in City Quay Primary School. If such activities help to encourage academic success the private school system becomes a closed circle.

Facilities available in City Quay National Primary School

As City Quay School is under the National School curriculum, there is no enrolement fee to be paid. There is however a "Fee book grant". This scheme allows the child to rent out books for a small fee, which have to be returned at the end of school term. The school receives an 80% bursary from the government to cover the cost of books and materials. Art equipment also comes out of this percentage.

'Although in practice, a lot of families don't pay the book fee, so this must be supplemented by school fundings.' 5

This unneccessary dipping into funds dry's up the money available for other areas of education. This lack of funds continuously plays on the minds of those who must purchase art materials for the children. Having to work within the confines of such a tight budget the Bursar must manage his allotted money carefully. He must sacrifice quality for quantity when it comes to art, using for example; computer paper to draw on instead of the more expensive art shop paper with some children referring to the punched out holes as snowballs and including them in the story telling of their drawings. (Fig 4)

Friday's artclass involves the use of paints, crayon's and computer paper. The teachers abilities to direct the children to use these materials play a very important role in this

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artclass. Three-dimensional materials are virtually unknown and not covered on the list for school needs. Threedimmensional studies are invaluable in developing hand and mind co-ordination for children at this age and because these studies do not take place the childs instinctive sense of touch is not encouraged.



(Fig 4)

Even though varity and choice seems limited, the childrens art is held in high regard by the school itself. The <u>City</u> <u>Centre</u> gallery and cafe has helped by commissioning artists to work with children from the school on mural projects. These projects were grant-aided by the Arts Council and sponsored by local businesses who supplied paint, brushes etc. There are four painted murals in all, one is situated on the hoarding of a building site under Tara Street Dart Station. (Fig 5,6)

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It must be noted that only the 5th and 6th class students were allowed to participate in the painting of the mural. When allowed a free hand at drawing these murals, the children were very eager to take part, however when a visiting artist dictated the last mural to the children (Fig 9) they became bored and disillusioned with the mural as they no longer had any imput into the final design. As a result, the artist by her own interference had to finish the mural herself. 6 It was unfortunate that the younger children had no involvement in the painting of the murals, because they would have benefited equally if not more from the experience.



(Fig 5)



(Fig 6)

MUAALS ON HOADDING UNDER TARA STREET DART STATION.

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(Fig 7)











Although the murals are a positive factor for this environment and the children by allowing them "some" creative expression. I am of the opinion that these city centre schemes should place more emphasis on art in the classroom in order to actually help these children to develop. This could be done by inviting an artist, or qualified art teachers into the class to show new techniques to both student and teacher alike, on how to use the limited art materials to their full potential.

Facilities available in Our Lady's Templeogue

Our Lady's being a fee-paying primary school has a wider budget with families paying £700 in fees for kindergarten I and II (Junior and senior infants), while the remainder of the primary school students pay £850 annually. These fees enable extra curriculur activities such as sports, music, speech and drama to take place. These classes occupy a position in the time-table schedule along with the regular reading, writing and arithmetic. The fees pay for the materials for each class, there is no shortage. Art equipment consists of a wide varity of crayons, colour pencils, chalks, plasticine, paints, paper, glue and magazines for collage. 7 The children are also given their first introduction to print, in the shape of, potatoes and sponges by using blocks of coloured paints on paper. In

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this photograph (Fig 10) of the classroom environment, we are given a taste of how inventive the children can be (observe the surrounding walls) when they are left to their own devices with the materials described above. Note in particular the aprons that hang on the back wall. This shows that the children are frequently involved in artwork.

Children are given a 30 minute free period which they can spend in what ever way they like. I noted on one such occasion that over 50% of the class automatically went straight for the drawing materials, even when games and play objects were present. My theory for this is that due to the wide range of materials the children still enjoyed the challenge of using their imagination in a freely expressive way (Fig 11).

The fact is that art appreciation is encouraged in the school the children are often brought on day trips to Art Galleries Museums and other places of National and Historic interest. This is backed up by prints of famous Impressionists and Renaissance artists such as Monet - "Waterloo bridge", Degas - "Two dancers" and Leonardo De Vinci - " The last supper", which hang ornately on the corridors of the old manor house. The aim of Our Lady's, Templeogue is according to Mrs. Harley (Principal) is:

'To put greater emphasis on the whole development of the person as opposed to purely the academic side, our mission 22.



(Fig 10)







being to draw on all the childs resources by making the child happy with him/herself as a full person.' 8

I think this quote by Claire Golomb, is more than appropriate in relation to City Quay than it is to Our Lady's, Templeogue. 'Since practice and freedom to explore the potential of different materials is crucial in developing creative abilities in children, lack of such experience will retard the childs performance, at least temporarily.' 9

For Example:

<u>Ita</u> aged five from Our Lady's (Fig 12). <u>Laura</u> aged five from City Quay (Fig 13).

In both of these pictures they were asked to draw "the playground". <u>Ita</u> tackled the problem using her paints by sweeping the brush in movements of confidence and control across the page. She showed a familiarity with the materials, displaying the figures in the centre of the page making it visually well balanced. <u>Laura</u> on the other hand, felt incapable from the beginning to represent the title given. Sheventured to symbolize scattered figures about the page, hanging almost in mid-air, showing little or no sense of space. Her choice of materials, was also paint, yet difficulty arose when deciding on colour application, leaving the picture sparse and visually unconclued.



(Fig 12)



(Fig 13)



It is glaring obvious from this overview of the situation in the two schools that art is of secondary importance in the National School curriculum. The National School curriculum does not emphasise the need and importance of art class. For this reason when a school such as City Quay survives on a tight budget, the first subject to suffer is art. It is equally obvious that in a school without these financial difficulties, the importance of the availability of materials is shown in the ease <u>Ita</u> has in using them as opposed to <u>Laura's</u> apparent frustration.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER TWO

1,3,	Collahann, John, <u>Irish Education</u> , p.p. 181,183.
2.	Kelly, Ann, Senior Infants teacher from an interview
	held in City Quay Primary School, November 28th 1991.
4, 7, 8.	Mrs. Harley (Principal) from an interview held in Our
	Lady's, Templeogue, January 17th 1992.
5,6	Gallagher Brendan, (Principal), from an interview
	held in City Quay, January 23rd 1992.
9.	Golomb Claire, Young Childrens Sculpture and Drawing
	p. 97.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE TEACHER AND ART.

THE AIM OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER.

The aim of the Primary School Teacher

'Lack of training in the arts for teachers is frequently mentioned as a serious obstacle to the development of the arts in primary school.' 1

As the young child must now come to terms with being dealt with as part of a group and not an individual as he/she was at home. In the classroom, certain leaning and behavioural practices must be followed. In other words, the child must now conform to the rules and regulations of its new environment and this will inevitably stop its natural creativity to a certain extent. Drawings are confined to a sheet of paper, the time-table rota and the teachers choice of materials. From the very first day, the teacher must impose authority on the class for without discipline and respect, their will be no cooperation from the children.

The teachers goal and interest lies fully in the class's welfare. They provide the young child with a foundation of Educational knowledge similar to a stepping stone of intellect, moving from one learning practice to another, all the time building up the childs supply of information and skill. Schoolwork offers challenges and problems, in contending with them the child develops towards its full potential. (Fig 14)

Teachers attitudes to art - City Quay

'If a teacher is not initially well-trained then, except from a very vigorous scheme of inservice training or 28. exceptional interest in the art form, the likelihood is that he will remain ill-equipped to teach the particular subject.' 2

On my first visit to the City Quay (Fig 15) the teacher, Ann Kelly confided in me;

'I find art class the most difficult subject to teach, to be quiet honest, I hated art when I was being trained to be a teacher, I nearly gave up the course because of it, I feel quiet inadequate.' 3

This negative attitude roots back to her own personal childhood experiences of art class in her primary school, she recalls 'never being good at art' 4 and remembers 'copying from a friend in school'. 5 Although, Miss. Kelly finds art difficult, she tries to approach it in a positive manner, even going to the trouble of attending a course dealing with "teaching young children Art". However, she disagreed with the instructors methods of teaching as in her view 'he did not allow the childrens creativity to dictate what they wanted to draw'. 6

Miss Kelly told me that she understands that freedom of expression is essential to the children, 'every child in the class enjoys it (art) and they get great pleasure, they really concentrate, its like as if they go into another world.' 7



(Fig 14)



(Fig 15)

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In both schools, there are the basic primary painting colours, yellow, red, blue, green, white and black along with the reliable crayons. During my visits I noticed, that Miss. Kelly used these two mediums in a very conservative way, with the paints she encouraged the children to paint pumpkins at Holloween, Snowmen and Christmas etc. Whilst, with the crayons they were directed to do rubbings of leaves. These methods were enjoyed but are somewhat limited. Art teaching does not require complicated materials, it does not have to be complicated, but it does require a certain amount of immagination and guidance. Resourcefulness is vital to both student and teacher in this situation.

In the City Quay, the children paint with brushes allotted to colours, no child has their own brush. This means that there is no freedom of the play element of mixing the colours and "splashing out" as the child must wait for the available brush and colour. I feel that their paintings reflect the clinical way in which they are taught to use their paints. The 'one colour one brush rule' was kept so religiously, that I once saw a child scrutinising a brush, he then turned to me and said 'what colour do you think was on the brush before it was washed'. (Fig 16) When this habit was attempted to be broken, the children were given a brush each to use the paints at random, yet, all the children couldn't comprehend this sudden change. Resulting in the children being totally confussed but



(Fig 16)

*



(Fig 17)



still carrying out the new request for their teacher, with the children harking back to their paintings later, as "mistakes" or "I didn't mean do to it that way" and "it's not right". The play element is lost, due to control inflicted on them in the beginning. (Fig 17)

I observed, the children in City Quay tired easily and lost interest eventually abandoning painting for the want of something better to keep their active minds occupied. The children in City Quay spend very little time working out their ideas in painting.

Teachers attitudes to Art - Our Lady's Templeogue

In order to obtain relevant information in the time span given, I split up my studies into two classes dealing with the five year old children in kindergarten I and both five and six year olds in kindergarten II.

Kindergarten I

'Obliviously the aestethic development of primary school children depends on the training received by their teacher.' 8

The children attending Mrs. O'Hallorans class were well prepared for my visit wearing plastic aprons and old tee shirts

over blue and pink smocks protecting original clothing from mishaps. Mrs. O'Halloran proudly admits that she has a passion for the arts, but adversely lacks the creative urge in herself. She feels that painting and drawing are important in developing personal expression. She holds her art class on Friday mornings, 'I would of course like them to paint more often, as it is exciting and therapeutic, it also gives them another way of expressing themselves.' 9 Mrs. O'Halloran prefers to encourage the children to paint what they want, she says 'I never interfere with their artwork, I like to give them the freedom to do as they please'. 10 (Fig 18) Although Mrs. O'Halloran does not interfere, she provides the children with new ideas in simple guide lines, providing the information yet letting the child discover the experience for themselves e.g. potato printing and paper folding. The children in Kindergarten I, used the paints with ease and confidence by dipping their paint brushes into all colours provided, swirling and swivelling them around the page in total fascination, as they are engrossed in leaving "their mark". (Fig 19, 20)



(Fig 18)

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(Fig 19)



(Fig 20)

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(Pts 20)
Kindergarten II (Fig 21)

Art participation is combined with acedemic learning in Sr. Enda's kindergarten II. Instead of confining art into a painting or crayon colouring blocks. She integrates art and reading and writing practices, which she appropriately calls "Word Drawing". Word drawing enables the child to take a number of letters from a box and construct a word. (Not all the children make up words on their own, some copy words which hang on the classroom walls in the form of alphabet charts with a picture and printed words underneath a letter). Having chosen a word the child then proceeds to draw an illustration depicting the image of the word. (Fig 22) This word drawing routine is also adapted when sentences written by the teacher on the blackboard, are transcribed and interpreted through These illustrations are placed alongside the illustration. recorded day's event. (Fig 23) In practice, these children may encounter some difficulty arising from structuring sentences, yet, they seemed to undertake the pictorial composition in an inventive and individual way.

'The first step is so fradgile, so delicate, that a touch can make it vanish again, like a soap bubble, and with it goes all the beauty of that moment. The teacher, now, must be most careful. Not to interfere means not to interfere in anyway. This is the moment at which the teacher most often goes wrong.' 11

Sr. Enda believes that art comes into everything, however she constantly informs the children that this and that is wrong

in their paintings and as such she's unaware that she interferes with the childs art, effecting what they perceive to be their finished work, a work that they are happy with.

On one occasion I noticed a child proudly announcing that she had completed her painting but Sr. Enda thought otherwise, saying "thats not finished, look its bare there (pointing to an area on her page), paint something in there like a good girl. 12 Bewildered with this comment the child picked up the paint brush and dabbed dots in the area that was "at fault". This interference by the teacher was totally foreign to the child and one she could not comprehend. (Fig 24)



(Fig. 21)

in that, reintings and as such she's univare that the officerecod with the shifts art, effecting what they perceive the thair finiate work, a work that they are happy with.

on one occasion I noticed a child proudly apmorning that and had incoliced her patheling but St. Some chare (pointing to saving 'smar not finished, looksi's 'mre there (pointing to area of were bage), oning something in these like a cool sich. (2) sedilatere with this someant the child picked up the order organ and doubed dots in the scale of 14 picked up the order intenderence or the technology and the child picked up the order intenderence of the technology and solarly 'social to the order intenderence of the technology and solarly 'social to the child intenderence or the technology and solarly 'social to the child and one she could not comprehend. (Fig 24)



(Fig 22)



(Fig 23)





(Fig 24)



Observations of teaching practices

Not alone were materials a limiting factor in the childrens artwork and creativity but also the attitudes of the teachers were often restrictive, for example Sr. Enda said 'not all children are good at art' 13. While input and direction is important in the classroom situation, the teachers own ideas should not become an obstacle to the child's personal development. The function of art classes in primary schools is not to create artists. It is instead to encourage the personal development of the child.

Art education should introduce a subject which combines the elements of play and learning. It is important in the development of visual and tactile awareness. Art education should allow the development of personal expression. It is often an important medium in solving emotional problems and it allows the child to make decisions and use its own judgment. Art classes break the ongoing routine of formal education, allowing the child to develop at its own pace.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER THREE

- 1, 2, 8 Benson Ciaran, The place of the Arts in Irish Education, p.p. 33, 68, 30.
- 3, 7, 14 Kelly Ann, Senior Infants teacher, from an interview held in City Quay Primary School, November 28th 1991.
- 9.10 Mrs. O'Halloran, Kindergarten I teacher from an interview held in Our Lady's Templeogue, January 21st 1992.
- 11 Montessori Maria, The Absorbent Mind p. 255.
- 12,13. Sr. Enda, Kindergarten II teacher from an interview held in Our Lady's Templeogue, January 24th 1992.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE UNIVERSAL TRENDS IN CHILDRENS ART.



Schematic Drawing

The senses and the motor movements are awakened in the child from the beginning of life. This motor movement is a signal from the mind to the body over which the young child has no control. It is evident when a child swings its arms and legs, or crawls aimlessly around the floor, finding a crayon, sucking on it, then continuing on its travels dragging the crayon all over the walls and furniture. This is not the child making a statement on the environment as there is no recognition of the damage caused, nor is art their first The crayon is merely a new coloured object that intention. leaves marks behind. Unfortunately for the parents, this is probably one art class they could do without, so in order to contain these sudden outbursts, they provide the chid with some sort of facility which will cater for that purpose. This comes in the form of a piece of paper which is limiting, especially for the ambidextrous child, who between the ages of two and four may find difficulty in restraining the motor movements of both hands into one single page. 1 The child perhaps receives pleasure from the movements that are being repeated in lines and marks, which merge the "scribble" into a pattern. These marks mostly consist of straight strokes. Soon the scribbles contain more spirals, curved lines and partially closed circles. (Fig 25). These circles have a sense of space and after several circular movements, these become a closed form.



(Fig 25)



(Fig 26)

Zig-Zag's and crossed lines then follow (Fig 26). 2 All scribbles are closely linked to the childs fundamental experiences of crawling, standing and walking activities which are also perpendicular and horizontal. These drawings have a connection with space and gravity, just like when the child crawls around in circles.

A child is responsive to its body with the tendancy to draw from just the act of breathing. Drawings are therefore inspired by the rythm of breathing in and out. They are a signal from the mind to the movement of the arms, unconsciously combining with the breathing pattern. 3 These drawings are abstract to our eyes and may only take a few minutes if not seconds to draw, but to the child the drawings are a record of present experiences, as a child has no concept of time.

'Each stimulus received from the outside world is recorded by the mind, and when the same stimulus is received again on a subsequent occasion, the mind again makes reference to the original recording.' 4

These breathing drawings are repeated in a sequence with is connected to the motor movement. These shapes do not represent "objects" because at this early stage no associations are possible, it is simply the clockwork combination of body and mind as the whole body operates in this motion.

The Universal Trend of the Four to Six year old child.

The use of symbols is the universal norm of children in western and non-western cultures alike. At the age of four to six, the child moves from unruly scribbles to simple picture making, incorporating the Global symbol of the circle into most drawings. A big circle or oval can stand for the person, including the head and body in a sweeping enclosure whilst smaller circles can represent eyes, nose, mouth and bellybutton. (Fig 27) Flowers, animals and the sun are all conveniently represented by circles also.



(Fig 27)

This transformation from the scribble action to the first intelligible form represents a turning point in the childs

The Universe. Stead of the Bout in Six year of child.

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development and reveals a progression in the capacity for symbolic processes. Within a few months the child moves from scribbles to the rudimentary man and in doing so creates order where once chaos reigned. The child learns to control his whirls and zig-zags, using them to represent something, usually a person or an animal. By creating forms and symbolizing them they become to the child, true representations of everyday people or objects. The child now starts literally from scratch and produces recognizable forms.

Over a period of time the circle begins to shift and vertical lines protrude, now the circle becomes the sole territory of the head and face whilst these vertical lines descend making up the body and legs all in one (Fig 28).



(Fig 28)

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over astion of this and clock being to the solute to the and version of times contrate, not the storic become the solut territory of the head and take which there will the because of making as the body and secarate in one (do 20). Sometimes between the age of four and six a child begins to demand better "art appreciation". Some attention is paid to the differences in the sizes of the people within a drawing and the first distinction between male and female figures is made in terms of hair and clothing. The more experienced child can easily draw the main outline of a figure and is ready to go beyond this simple form by adding accessories such as, eyelashes or coat bottons. The next stage in a child's development is when it enters the school environment and begins to create images under the guidance of the teacher.

Art Produced at City Quay and Our Lady's with reference to Universal Trends

According to much of the literature on the subject, children the world over follow the universal trends. To see if this was true, I conducted corresponding tests in both schools. Due to the lack of time, I limited myself to just two tests: 1. Where do you live?

2. What would you like to be when you grow up?

<u>Note</u> It was important throughout my tests to phrase what I required carefully and not to give the child too much information, in order to let them use their own imagination.

Where do you live?, City Quay School 1.

This test was carried out by fourteen children out of these fourteen, thirteen live in the surroundings flats and one lives in a house. When the children were asked this question eleven of them reverted to the universal symbol of a house, which is, a square box, door, windows, roof and chimney.

Maria aged 6 (Fig 29)

"Is this where you live?" Q.

- A. "Yes".
- "What is it?" Q.
- "It's my house?" Α.
- Q.
- "Where do you live?" "Markeivic house" (Flats). Α.



(Fig 29)

L. Mare do you live?, City Duay School

This tess was carried out by fourteen children out of fourfour-teen, thirteen if ye in the succounting: flats and one liver in a bouse. When the children were asked this question cleven of the reverted to the universal symbol of a name, which is, a square box, door, windows, roof and chinney.

MICLA DRUG 6 (FLC 23)

"Is this whete you itye?"
"Yes".
"Tat is it?"
"It's ay house?"
"It's ay house?"
"It's to you "ive "

Was this a denial of her social environment? The answer is no! because she uses the symbol of the house to represent her home. The child feels safe with these symbols even though they are pursuing something that is not visually correct. Such images seem more visually pleasing as a picture. Art is an act of play, it allows the child to escape from the realities that surround it.

Where do you live? Our Lady's

This question was put to Our Lady's kindergarten I and II. They too used the universal symbol for a house, however, they paid more attention to the painting, encorporating extra features within their environment. For example Rowena (Fig 30), when asked to paint "where she lived", did not see this as just a house. She chose to show the environment where she lived, which included her neighbours house, town and fathers work each depicted by a single building. This shows that Rowena is not satisfied with settling for the symbol of a house but that she extends her imagination by linking important aspects of her environment together. The other children displayed no general difference except in creative approach or individuality.



(Fig 30)

2. "What would you like to be when you grow up", City Quay.

The reason for this question was to see did the children evaluate themselves in relation to their social environment, that is, did the children in City Quay have less expectations for the future than those in Our Lady's?

When this question was put to the children of City Quay, their paintings and answers took me by surprise. I expected them to want jobs like a Train Driver, or a Fireman. However,



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their printing quastion was put ab and quildran of City Gars, their printings and answers bouched or ranotist. I arrested then to rant done like a roug driver, or strange boxyer.

William Aged six (Fig 31)

- A. "I want to be a cleaner, like me dad".
- Q. "What does your Daddy do?"
- A. "He's working in our house, cleaning and washing."(Pointing to the right hand yellow figure)

I later found out that William's Daddy was unemployed. From this example alone it is obvious that the social environment of the children has a definite effect on what they perceive can be achieved, as most of the children labelled themselves under their role model with paintings of dockers, builders, and corporation workers being preferred.



(Fig 31)

(12 gif) ofer bey anality

- . "T want to be a cleaner, like he do".
 - D. Marat doas your Paid dog"
- C. "Referencing in our nouse, claaring and vestigs." (Pointies to the tight hand vellow flowes).

2. What would you like to be when you grow up? Our Lady's

When this question was put to the children in Our Lady's the drawings and answers dipicted were what I would have originally expected from both schools. Answers such as Footballers, Nurses and Firemen.

Daniel aged five (Fig 32)

"What is this?" Q.

Q.

"It's a Fireman." Α.



Α. "Yes."

"Why do you want to be a Fireman." Q.

Α. "I don't know, I just want to be one."

In this interview Daniel involves himself in romancing about his future ambition. This Fireman was probably seen in a book, or on a television programme which he adopted to cover the question asked. This career was therefore, sparked off by an outside source, not relating to his own role models. This was common among the children in Our Lady's, substituting imaginative careers instead of choseing their parents job as a role model.

When this desitor vas out to the collater in our baly' the dradings and anarous dipicted vare what I sould have originative expected from both schools. Answers such as footballers, Nursea and Firenon.

Daniel ared five (Mir 32)

- "Veidd ai gadW" .
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- "Is that what you must to be wien you noon un?".
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 - C. "The do you want to be millinead."
 - A. "L don't know. I just what to be one."

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SUMMARY

In each test the children of both schools used universal symbols, however, it must be realised that children of the same age can be at different stages of development depending on positive or negative growth, as with Rowena (Our Lady's) who not only painted her house but also, her environment (Fig 30), or William (City Quay) who due to his surroundings painted a picture of what was familiar in his home environment (Fig 31) yet his painting technique was substituted with a verbal explanation as he had problems in representing it visually.

William was very willing to describe for me in great detail his home environment. But, his discomfort with the medium of expression lead to a tense scribble on the paper.

This study has shown that the children of this age have little or no concept of social barriers. Their perception of themselves is based on what they know about their environment. Children from both schools wanted to be ninja turtles for instance. The kind of environment influences which come to play are more direct than this; not being able to use its resources freely can creatively and the preconceived ideas of adults are the two more important factors which I have observed.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

- 1, 3 Grozinger, Wolfgang <u>Scribbling</u>, <u>Drawing</u>, <u>Painting</u> p.p. 48-50, 51-56.
- Plsarfino, Edward & Armstrong, James <u>Child & Adolescent</u>
 p. 202.

4. Lovell K. An Intorduction to Human Development p. 4

CONCLUSION

When asking "does the environment affect children's artwork?" we must first accept the "environment" is a very broad term which includes many different premutations. In other words, it is impossible to talk about the environment in this context without including such things as:

- 1. Social background,
- 2. Availability of materials.
- 3. Teachers attitudes.

'In terms of spontaneous art, every child is a "born artist" who should be allowed to scribble without oppressive guidance in "art education". As Viola says "the aim of art is not to produce artists, but to encourage rather than suffocate the innate creative capacities of children for art. (Viola, 1936, p. 34)." The main value of spontaneous art is not the product but the doing of it.' 1

I believe, the environment has had a definite affect on the art produced by these two groups of children. The effect is not always a positive one. Restrictive practices in relation to painting such as the provision of only one brush to one colour can hinder the children's creativity and freedom to express themselves. The effect this environment has on the children's art is all too apparent when any picture produced by children in the City Quay is considered. These children lack the opportunity to mix colours (Fig 33) and cannot therefore, enjoy art to the same degree as Our Lady's students, who freely explore the creative side of mixing (Fig 34).



(Fig 33)



(Fig 34)



'The teachers role is to help children "look outside themselves, as well as inside, for ideas". Compare, relate, organise - in this way you can teach children to see richly and aesthetically. (McFee, 1961, p. 89).' 2

Equally, Sr. Enda's interference in regard to telling a child when her painting was not finished may have been detrimental to a child and in extreme case can turn the child against art because in the childs opinion it is her painting and it was finished.

The second point that must be made is that without art materials an art class cannot take place. So it follows, that with a limited supply of art materials and very little primary teacher training in the arts, only a limited amount of art can take place in the school, a prime example of this would be City Quay. Once again this has the affect of curtailing the children's in-built desire to make "their mark". (Fig 35)

In contrast to this, Our Lady's with its abundance of art material and the teachers' positive attitudes to the arts allow the children to express their creative freedom to the full. The students painted pictures which had more detail due to their control of the medium, this control only comes from experience and continuous use of the medium. (Fig 36)


(Fig 35)



(Fig 36)



Thirdly, there is the social environment to consider. In mostcases, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to separate the social and physical effects of an environment. Although, it has not yet been established that the physical environment of the inner city are the primary causes of underachievement in relation to learning. It seems quite possible that growing up in an area of ill repaired and disused buildings instills a feeling of failure in the child.

It is necessary for art to be seen as an axle around which other subjects revolve. The art class experience could be of great benefit to other areas of the curriculum if it was taken as seriously as other subjects. Art facilities need to be improved in Irish National Primary Schools. Teachers' awareness of the importance of art is essential. The school curriculum must be constructed and funded to improve facilities and aid the teachers in the area of art education. 3

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSION

1, 2. Kellogg, Rhoda, Analysing Children's Art p.p. 266, 150.

3. Benson, Ciaran, <u>The place of the Arts in Irish Education</u>

p. 39.

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3. Look at my hands, Part 2. 20 minutes.

 Dublin Street Carival. Animated cartoon made by school children.

5. Clay 30 minutes.

Interviews

 DONOGHUE, Helen, Museum of Modern Art. Background: Director of Video's 1-5, 5th November 1991. Topic: Children Art.

2. City Quay, National Primary School,

Senior Infants: One hour interview taped with children.

Date

20th October 1991 8th November 1991 15th November 1991 28th November 1991 9th January 1992 16th January 1992 23rd January 1992 <u>Time</u> Two Hours Two Hours One Hour One Hour Two Hours One Hour 30 minutes Three Hours

3. KELLY, Ann, City Quay National Primary School Background: Teacher of the Senior Infants 28th November 1991

Topic: Teaching Practices.

4. GALLAGHER, Brendan: City Quay National Primary School, 23rd January 1992 Background: Principle of City Quay. Topic: Funding and murals.



5. Our Lady's, Templeogue, Private Primary School, Kindergarten I & II, one hour interview taped with children.

	Date			Time	
10th	January	1992	Two	Hours	
17th	January	1992	Six	Hours	
21st	January	1992	Two	Hours	
22nd	January	1992	Two	Hours	
24th	January	1992	One	Hour	

- MRS. O'HALLORAN: Our Lady's, Templeogue.
 Background: Teacher of Kindergarten 1, 21st January 1992.
 Topic: Teaching Practices.
- 7. SR. ENDA: Our Lady's, Templeogue. Background: Teacher of kingergarten II, 24th January 1992. Topic: Teaching Practices.
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 Background: Principle, 17th January 1992.
 Topic: Funding and availability of materials.