

Creating Space Report

*An evaluation of the impacts of Baboró and Lifes2Good
Artist in School Programme 2023-2025*

Dr. Shirley-Anne Godfrey 2025

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Foreword

Baboró International Arts Festival for Children celebrates children as audiences and artists in Galway each October. Now in its 29th year, the festival invites thousands of children to enjoy engaging performances, exhibitions and workshops from across Ireland and the world with their schools and families. Baboró's purpose is to nurture children's innate creativity and curiosity for the world around them through their experience of the creative arts. Our vision is creativity at the heart of every childhood. Every child, without exception, has the right to participate in cultural and artistic activities, as established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which the Irish state is a party; realising a rich cultural life for all children and young people guides how we approach all our work.

We strive to create a festival that is playful and inclusive and safe, no matter the physical or intellectual challenges. We welcome children into theatres, galleries, and outdoor spaces, while also bringing the festival to their schools and local libraries. And we bring the festival and year round arts projects directly into schools and communities, deepening Baboró's creative interventions in the lives of children.

Creating Space was a long term creative intervention project with a cohort of school children and an artist, combining festival visits and creative workshops in the classroom. The project was several years in the making as its start was delayed by the global pandemic from 2020 to 2023. I'm grateful to Lifes2Good Foundation's unwavering support as we negotiated the stop/start nature of that time. And I would like to acknowledge the Baboró and Merlin Woods Primary School teams who ensured its success, from fundraising via Lifes2Good Foundation and the Arts Council, to delivery. When the project finally kicked off in 2023 it was expertly managed by Bryony Hussey who laid an excellent foundation for the design of the project, including the recruitment of multi-disciplinary artist Colm Ó Foghú, in collaboration with teacher Aoife de Paor. The careful, considered work at this stage was instrumental to the success of the programme. The project continued to be carefully managed by Kirsty Warren and Andrew Ormsby. I am enormously grateful to Paula O'Connor, Principal and teachers Aoife, Amanda and Melissa for their openness to this creative intervention in their school. We all know how busy and resource poor schools are, yet they shared our vision to enhance their classrooms with sustained creative stimulus over two years and welcomed us with open arms. Thank you to Dr Rita Melia for her early evaluation work and Dr. Shirley-Anne Godfrey for her research and evaluative report. To the parents and guardians for supporting your children. And last, but certainly not least, the wonderful students of Merlin Woods Primary School who brought their curiosity, brilliant imaginations, kindness and humour to this project. I hope that there will always be room for the arts in your lives.

Aislinn Ó hEocha

Executive Artistic Director

Baboró International Arts Festival for Children

Introduction

It's creating space for them to become who they are, the confidence, and the passion, with all the messiness that comes from being a human being- we're not all great at everything, but it's nice to give things your best go. I suppose that at the of it heart, is what I think Creating Space is.

- Colm Ó Foghlú, Artist.

Aims and Objectives of Creating Space

Creating Space, henceforth CS, aimed to remove barriers to access to the arts for children in a disadvantaged/underserved local community by reaching them through their school. In order to deepen the experience of attending Baboró, CS developed pre and post festival engagement activities with a partner school. By connecting a school who doesn't regularly engage with Baboró with an artist and building a sense of community with the festival, Baboró intended to demonstrate the positive effect the creative arts have on academic¹, social and emotional development in children. Finally, CS would develop a long-term intervention between 2023 and 2024 Baboró festivals to measure the impact of this engagement on children.

The original objectives for the CS project were:

1. An artist would engage two classes with multidisciplinary workshops and with arts participation at the Baboró Festival. This durational engagement would help the students develop their social and emotional skills so that they might process and communicate their feelings in healthy and constructive ways.
2. Artist, teachers, and students involved in the project would work closely and organically together so that the workshops and creative methodologies responded to the children's needs and interests. For example, students identified a strong focus on environmental sustainability which would then be incorporated into the sessions with the artist and their engagements at the Baboró Festival.
3. This unique, durational, small-scale project, following two classes working with one artist would ground research on longitudinal effects of arts engagement on childhood development, particularly children impacted by COVID-19 and social disadvantage. By conducting research over two years and sharing the learnings, they hoped to support further studies in the Irish arts sector on the impact of creativity and exposure to the arts in primary school settings.² [...] They would also enable children to experience world class performances in their local municipal theatres.

¹ The academic aspect featured in earliest iterations of plans and does not feature in this report. As the project evolved other elements were prioritised. Improvements in children whose L1 was not English were observed and valued, and CS helped identify language difficulties in children who had been masking their difficulties.

² Bryony Hussey, Baboró Project Co-Ordinator and Kirsty Warren, Schools' Co-ordinator, 30.01.23 Baboró Internal notes.

Stakeholders

MWPS Merlin Woods Primary School

Merlin Woods Primary School is a co-ed primary school of over 380 pupils, under the patronage of the Catholic Church, located in Doughiska, County Galway. It is characterised by its diversity with multiple nationalities and languages represented among the pupil body. While the school does not have DEIS³ status, it was chosen because the school community is comprised largely (though not exclusively) of migrant and ethnic minorities in an area with varying levels of socio-economic status. 45 children from 1A and 1B (first-class, 6-8 years old) participated.⁴ The class teachers from year one were Aoife de Paor and Melissa Donohue, and in year two (second class, 7-9 years old), the teachers were Aoife de Paor and Amanda Bayne.

Baboró The Baboró International Arts Festival for Children, was founded in 1997 with the primary goal “to inspire children to engage with the world through their experience of the creative arts, and to create spaces where children can deepen their understanding of themselves, the perspectives of others and the world around them.”⁵

Baboró C.S. Project Managers Bryony Hussey, Kirsty Warren, Andrew Ormsby

Lifes2Good Foundation a Galway-based philanthropic organisation and co-funder of the project.⁶

Múinteoir Amanda Ms. Baynes (Teacher)

Múinteoir Aoife Ms. de Paor (Teacher)

Ms. Paula O’Connor (Principal)

Colm Ó Foghlú Colm (Artist)

SG Dr. Shirley-Anne Godfrey (Evaluator/Researcher)

Intentions, Aims and Limitations of Report

The research objective mentioned above aimed at studying the effect of sustained creative interventions on primary school students, as originally conceived, was to have been delivered by Dr. Rita Melia of ATU.⁷ This report is not the research document as originally envisaged, but a necessarily scaled down evaluative component assessing the impacts of CS, and

³ DEIS Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools- allows schools to avail of extra supports for children in economic hardship and cultural exclusion, “Disadvantaged Status.”

⁴ See Baboró Narrative Report for more detailed information.

⁵ Baboró International Arts Festival for Children, “About,” accessed 1.08.2025., <https://www.baboro.ie/about>.

⁶ <https://lifes2goodfoundation.ie>

⁷ It became necessary for Dr. Melia to withdraw the research aspect, but she remains associated with the project.

gesturing towards recommendations for further development and future iterations.⁸ The intention of this report is to assess to what extent the stated aims and objectives have been met, and identify the impacts of CS on participants, and to make recommendations for the future development of such programmes. These findings and recommendations aim to inform lesson-planning, policymaking, teacher-training, and evaluation in Arts Education. Findings could also assist the development of best practice for artists in schools and for children's arts organisations seeking to engage more meaningfully with schools and the communities they serve. Baboró intends this report to inform the planning of future projects, and to help provide future stakeholders with more concrete information about the impact of projects like this on the children involved.

SG's data-gathering took place between the second week of February 2025 and the second week of June. The findings will be disseminated and presented at a panel discussion at Baboró, 16th October 2025. It is predominantly a mixed-methods qualitative approach relying on a number of traditional and non-traditional data-gathering techniques. SG analysed existing self-reported data from the artist, teachers, children and management and triangulated these with data gleaned from semi-structured interviews with the artist, teachers and children as well with in-class observations of the project in process. The children's voices are quoted directly here. This child-led evaluative approach prioritises the children's voices, insights, and experiences, mirroring their CS process to date.

One limit to the evaluation aspect is that the researcher had no personal experience with earlier aspects of the project, and very limited experience of observing the nitty gritty of the artist at work with the children. The report relies on reported information, and recordings of events and interviews with participants (2023-2024) a period prior to the evaluator's recruitment. Much of the information relied upon in compiling this research is self-reported by children, artist Colm O' Foghlú, teachers, and Baboró staff-past and present, as well as minutes of meetings between Baboró, teachers and Colm O' Foghlú, review documents and a narrative report from Baboró.

However, the key findings and recommendations presented here (unless otherwise stated) are based on data gleaned by SG, her observations, and extrapolated upon with respect to current scholarship, arts practice, and educational policy. This report was commissioned by Baboró, but part of a project plan funded by Lifes2Good, and therefore could be described as both an internal evaluation and an external one in that SG is not a member of Baboró staff.⁹

Finally, as one teacher said it is impossible to absolutely attribute some of the impacts to the process alone, because the children are growing up and developing all the time.¹⁰ Therefore, the report embraces the principle of measuring what we value, rather than valuing what we can easily measure, a core principle of Arts-based evaluation.¹¹

⁸ E-mail from Andrew Ormsby (CS Project Manager, 2025 onwards) to SG. 15.01.25. "As the project is in a late stage already, we understand that the depth of this study is not going to be as great as was previously planned."

⁹ Arts Council/Quality Matters, *Outcome Measurement Guidebook for Local Authority Arts Services and Arts Organisations*, 2024.

¹⁰ Interview with SG

¹¹ Gert Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement*. Boulder, Colorado, U.S.: Paradigm Publishers, 2010, 12.

Creating Space

Introduction

CS¹² was designed in collaboration with the teachers and principal of MES, Paula O' Connor, and Baboró staff. Meetings between teachers, principal and Colm took place between May and September 2023, and were chaired by Bryony Hussey and Kirsty Warren from Baboró, establishing the needs of the children at MWPS, negotiating appropriate timescales and working practices, designing, planning and recruiting a suitable artist. Dr. Rita Melia was involved in early documentation of the project. It is inspired by a three-year programme at the New Victory Theatre in New York and by its positive impacts on disadvantaged children.¹³ It began in the context of the post COVID period, in response to difficulties with language, social skills and confidence, identified by teachers. Baboró has also adopted the Lundy Model, which in summary ensures that children are afforded the space and opportunity to express a view, be facilitated to express their views, have that view listened to and be acted upon, as appropriate.¹⁴ The objectives are underpinned by Baboró's founding concept of the right of every child to access and participate in the Creative Arts as stated in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1992 and their commitment to making the Arts accessible to all children.

Children initially put forward environmental themes, which became more about home, dual identity and the sense of place. Themes identified by the school were social and emotional skills, mindfulness, food waste, Green Code and climate change, belonging, race and diversity, autism, and sensory support.¹⁵ Over the course of the project the emphasis shifted towards belonging and identity. Interestingly green issues and climate change reappeared significantly in the film *If I could change the world*.

The following activities were noted in term one: consultation: voting on which show they would like to see, acting and puppetry (sock puppets), imagining what the characters in the performance would act like, dramatising the themes of the show, TTT (time to think): consulting on themes/topics of the performance and preparing to attend the festival, mosaic tiles, singing and piano accompaniment, creating their own song, Media/IT : Green screen filming for creation of "1st class news," and the beginnings of their digital portfolio. The use of small groups working with Colm while the rest of the class was with the teacher was established early on and became the norm for the work, allowing more voices to be heard. The following table traces the timeline of the work and summarises the key interventions.

¹² <https://www.baboro.ie/projects/creating-space>

¹³ Lindsey B. Maliekal, Courtney J., Boddie, Dennie Palmer Wolf, D, Steven Holochwost. "Theaters for Learning: The NEW VICTORY THEATER SPARK Program." In: Finneran, M., Anderson, M. (eds) *Education and Theatres. Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education*, vol 27. Springer, Cham.2019.https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22223-9_13 <https://www.newvictory.org/about/research/>

¹⁴ <https://www.qub.ac.uk/Research/case-studies/childrens-participation-lundy-model.html> accessed August 5th 2025

¹⁵ Minutes of meeting September 2023.

Summary of Key Interventions

Date	Creating Space Interventions	Summary
Sep-Dec 2023	“1 st Class News”-Audio-visual Recording of children introducing themselves as they came out of <i>Polar Bear and Penguin</i>	In-School with Colm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Screen and Graphic Design • Sock Puppets-visual arts • Shadow puppetry • Mosaic Tile project • Christmas Performance “The Present” setting a poem to music with the children
17.10.23	<i>Polar Bear and Penguin</i> By John Currivan & Paul Curley.	Town Hall Theatre (Baboró)
23.04.24	<i>The Song of the Trees</i> a Branar and Music for Galway co-production, a Cellissimo commission	Town Hall Theatre
Jan-June 2024	<i>Common Ground</i> Process Identity Symbol Projects Designing symbols to reflect their own identities and how they see themselves	In-School with Colm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing • Studying logos/symbols • Keith Haring Inspired Frieze project • Digital design, editing
18-19 Sep 24	<i>Common Ground</i> Installation	Community, whole school event, in the ‘halla’
15.10.24	<i>Chotto Desh</i> Akram Khan Company	Town Hall Theatre (Baboró)
Dec-June 2024	Shibori (Japanese) dyeing fabric <i>River of Dreams</i> ’- fabric as a projection surface, with videos of children’s movement and recordings of their families talking about their hopes and dreams for their child and the world <i>If I could change the World</i> Process Black and White Portrait Photos Bookmaking	In-School with Colm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fabric tie Dyeing • Printing- a book of their ideas • Photography • Editing • Animation • Voice-recording
25.03.25	<i>When the Moon Spun Round</i> Fidget Feet aerial-dance production	Black Box Theatre, Galway <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-Performance Q and A with Chantal Mc Cormick
04.06.25	Exhibition and showing of <i>If I could Change the World</i> film	Atlantic Technical University, Galway

Overview of Creating Space Programme

TTT Time To Think

This emerged as a working principle for the entire enterprise, whereby Colm encouraged the children to take time to make their decisions, to consider their options, and to decide if they were happy with them. This lack of time pressure for children to come up with an answer on the spot allowed the children to take risks and to change their minds if something wasn't working as they had planned. As we are told by the children in the opening moments of *if I could change the World*:

time to think- so when you (Colm) tell us to think of something you say "time to think" and then we think 'cause sometimes when you do a drawing and you don't.. and you didn't think it will help your brain know what to do... time to think cause if you have more time to think then your idea will be a good bit better so you have enough time to think ..to have good ideas because if you just think of one idea straight away it may not come out in the best form...time to think of something good. ¹⁶

Shibori-Dyeing

While considering the idea of identity and flags the children learned about textile art in other cultures including Batik. The most popular was Japanese shibori. The children created personalised silk squares, and these were put together providing the backdrop on the stage at the Christmas concert. The children voted to take their individual scarves home afterwards. Shibori did not feature in the bigger sharings but was referenced many times by the children when reflecting on their overall experience. For some children this was their favourite experience.

1st Class News

1st Class News records the children's pre and post show reactions to their first Baboró show, *Polar Bear and Penguin*. 1st Class News was an audio-visual piece performed to camera with rolling news images in the background, presented by two "news anchors," with each child commenting on *Polar Bear and Penguin*. This piece was played on a loop at the ATU exhibition, allowing the children and parents to view the children from a distance of almost two years, and to reflect on their progress since then.

The Present

"The Present" was a poem by Christy Kenneally, a memory from Múinteoir Aoife's childhood. With Colm, the children put it to music and put shadow puppetry behind it as a backdrop. For Bryony Hussey, project manager, it was a key marker of successful collaboration and integration by Colm in choosing a poem significant to the teachers. "There was a palpable buzz in the school about how thoughtful this approach was. By the end of

¹⁶ *If I could change the World* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjegyHYE6Rs>

term, December 2023, every teacher I met in the halls who I had been seeing since May was more aware and excited about Baboró's relationship with the school."¹⁷

Common Ground

The *Common Ground* Installation represents the children's identity, language and culture by means of symbols invented by the children. Colm went to great lengths to get recordings by the parents in their individual languages. The accompanying soundtrack accessed via a QR code consisted of these recordings, explaining the meaning of each child's name in their mother tongue and why their parents chose that specific name. Parents were invited to examine a piece of floor art with a symbol on it and to see if they could recognise their own child's symbol. A photograph of each child artist inside a card revealed if they were correct. An outline of each child inspired by Keith Haring was traced, cut out of coloured paper and placed on the floor at each child's station.

If I could change the World (movie)

Forming the background to each on screen image is a subtle word-web representing each child's interests, particular concerns, hobbies, pets. A portrait photo of the child sits to the right of a quote from that child. Colm animated the children's drawings, and the viewer sees the children's drawings move and come to life across the screen as we hear the children's voices explain the change they would make and crucially why. The huge range of real-world issues touched upon include anti-war, anti-violence, homelessness, the housing crisis, poverty, animal-cruelty, nuclear-power, child -safety, cure for cancer, animal extinction, pollution, littering, swearing, smoking, and alcohol. Animals featured prominently in the movie both from the point of view of animal protection but also as beloved deceased pets or the desire that pets should live forever, be able to talk or indeed that dogs should "clean up their own poop." Other animal ideas were that people should be able to turn into cats or an animal of their choice, everyone owning a parrot, and sharks having legs. Other dreams of Premier League football success and meeting sporting heroes were also represented.

If I could change the World Exhibition

As families and young artists entered the ATU they were met with numerous TV monitors which were playing First Class news. Visitors milled around viewing individual stills, which were photographs of each child with their "If I could change the world" quote. Visitors, adults and children alike were also encouraged to write down how they would change the world on rolls of paper. Then the audience was invited into a lecture theatre, where Aislinn Ó hEocha welcomed the audience and congratulated the children on behalf of the Baboró team. Dr Rita Melia from ATU generously hosted the final exhibition offering warm congratulations and expressing the hope of many of the pupils of MWPS returning as students of ATU in the future. The movie was played, cinema-style with lights out, followed by words of thanks from MWPS afterwards, with a presentation to Colm from the children. The individual

¹⁷ Bryony Hussey, Baboró, CS Project manager.

photographs or stills of the children were made into a physical book for display in the school and each child received a framed copy of their portrait.

Evaluation Methodologies

Traditional qualitative research approaches including interviews with teachers, principal and artist were used. A combination of plenary group discussion, small focus group feedback sessions and questionnaires were used to elicit data from children. In practice short focused “vox pop” recordings were most useful. Short sentence starters or prompts were given verbally for example: “an artist is” or “I am proud of”. Richer results were gleaned by short bursts of game-like activities e.g. “Stand, Sit, Squat” (Children stand if they agree with a particular statement, sit if they disagree and squat above their seat if they are not sure). Children were also offered brief opportunities to express themselves through drawing, doodling and emojis. Drama style games were used to physicalise reactions, e.g. the children role-played attending a school reunion in 2075, as old people being interviewed by their grandchildren about their experience of CS.

CS is a longitudinal project, and while SG was not involved from the beginning, she extrapolated impacts over the duration of the project by comparing available pre-project data, mid-project data, and end of project data. Anonymised responses from children were facilitated so that pupils could freely discuss their experiences with the researcher. The impacts of the project are expressed both in relation to initial learning outcomes and in the context of non-behavioural outcomes such as children’s socio-emotional development, particularly in a post-Covid context. Therefore, both informal and formal evaluation elements (including small amounts of quantitative data) were used. To assess wider impacts of the project, parents of the children were invited to share their insights in an online survey.

Finally, the actual artworks produced by the children- the books, the *Common Ground* installation, the *If I could change the World*, exhibition, the movie were evaluated as research objects in order to represent the children’s voices, experiences and responses to Colm’s input.

Evaluation: Key Findings

Impacts

Based on the methodologies described in the previous section, this section identifies the observable, though not necessarily entirely quantifiable, impacts of CS on the participating children of MWPS, and articulates how they met the objectives of CS. The degree to which these impacts can be attributable to specific interventions and approaches adopted during CS is then discussed.

Social and Emotional Skills: Confidence

Improved social and emotional skills were commented upon by children, teachers and parents as well as observed in the children's interactions with Colm, teachers and myself. As múinteoir Amanda explains:

I know in the classroom situation sometimes it's like "come on" whereas the project kind of gave them confidence that you don't have to have the answer straight away and it doesn't have to be the right answer... you can come up with an idea and then you've got time saying ohh maybe that's not the way I'd do it and they've got like a reassurance in themselves that's there if they don't get it, if it's not, say the beginning of the project isn't what they hoped it to be that they can go and they can start again and it's not a failure.¹⁸

This confidence was partly created by an attitude of "not everything has to be perfect or finished." This gives permission for risk-taking and starting again, lowering the stakes, and encouraging children to have a go. It is also connected with not having to reach a standard or have your work compared with your peers. That is not to say that the children did not feel pride in their work, and a sense of competence and ownership, as one child commented: "I think I feel like I'm a master pro because now I want to be an artist to paint." A major highlight of the whole CS project was the exhibition. One child said:

I felt really important and like really happy when my picture came up, I was kind of like Oh my God I'm, I'm that's mine and I couldn't really believe it and and I just thought how lucky I was to have an artist coming in.¹⁹

CS contributed to self-confidence by creating the circumstances where children could experience a sense of achievement. In terms of seeing themselves as capable or of having agency, perhaps in the future, *If I could change the World* helped the children to imagine futures where things could be different both because of their decisions and because of their actions. As Colm explains:

I think it's also nice to give them a sense that they will be the people who will change the world, and everybody has the capacity to change, maybe not the whole global situation but certainly they'll be able to change their worlds that they have agency over that they can make decisions actually [...] and I do think it is lovely to give them that sense of empowerment that actually it will be that they will change their worlds, not to be waiting for somebody else to do it for you: sometimes you have to do it yourself.²⁰

¹⁸ Appendix C, 30

¹⁹ Appendix A, 28

²⁰ Appendix C, 35

Social and Emotional Skills: Imagination

In terms of imagining alternate realities, suggestions for *If I could change the World* included lollipop trees, money trees, a world made of fruit, a world made of candy, weather-appropriate food falling from the sky, a world where dinosaurs could return. An excellent example of strong visual imagination and neuro-divergent thinking was:

I would turn the sun, its shape as a star, because the star is like, a star is supposed to be shaped like a star you know, like three pointy triangles and our sun is not really shaped like it and it's- and people they call it a little star.²¹

A heightened sense of “what if,” so central to artistic creation, was regularly rehearsed in this environment resulting here in a strong visual image on the following time saving innovation:

I would put eyes on fingers because then, if you don't have to look with your eyes you can just put eyes on your fingers and then easily put your finger beside the word, and you'll be able to read five times quicker.²²

Social and Emotional Skills: Empathy

Many of the children's suggested changes to the world were designed to make other people or animals happy or safe. Particularly empathic was one child who wanted priests and holy people to be made cheerful and happy by being appreciated and thanked for all they do, showing the ability to imagine themselves in someone else's shoes. Even imaginative ideas like the lollipop tree had their own internal logic because the lollipop tree would be useful if you had a sore throat, you could just pick one and soothe your throat; the money tree could be used to give money to the homeless. Thought had been given to how dinosaurs could safely roam the earth again- (invisible gates). Through their artworks and in their interactions with each other, the children were, as per the objectives, “processing and communicating feelings in healthy and constructive ways.”²³ The children showed empathy and care for others and increased awareness of the impacts of their own actions in the world. The major world issues were expressed in simple terms but with an awareness of the effects of the issues e.g. recycling would help turtles and seagulls.

Relationships between the children also improved, teachers thought classes seemed more “gelled” than classes in previous years, had improved teamwork, and were really watch(ing) out for each other and treat(ing) each other kindly. From múinteoir Aoife's perspective:

They are just more open, they communicate, they're excited, it's hard to know these things as well, their development is bigger than just the project itself, it's had an impact on it, but their peer relations are very good and they seem to articulate themselves better, negotiate arguments better, understand it -but I don't know like if that's *all* the project, or is it that part of it is just kind of growing up? [.]They love giving feedback to each other and stuff, and they do it in a nice way you know.²⁴

²¹ 3 mins 42 secs in *If I could change the World* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjecyHYE6Rs>

²² 7 mins in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjecyHYE6Rs>

²³ Page 1.

²⁴ Appendix C, 30.

According to teachers, students with autism were beginning to “come out of themselves.” “You could see their wellbeing supported when they helped each other find tiles to create their piece.” Children were also able to show empathy to adults as Colm comments:

They are incredibly kind. One day they were doing their handwriting and I said “your handwriting is beautiful and my handwriting is awful,” and one of them said to me “your handwriting isn't awful, I mean it could be better you know what I mean, but like don't be saying your work is awful it's not like I can't read what you wrote, that's perfect.” So that kind of kindness [...] but it's also I think allowing them to be kind to themselves, to be kind to other people, to be more empathic you know to read the signs when somebody needs a bit of space and needs a bit of a push and that it's OK that every day isn't the 100% day.²⁵

Arts Participation and Local Access to World Class Performances

The aims of CS to remove barriers and to increase accessibility to world class performances for children have been achieved through funded theatre tickets and subsidised buses, meaning that some of the children had their first ever theatre experience due to their participation in the CS project. By the end of the project, they had attended and responded to four live shows, and the theatre is a location in which they are now comfortable.

There is a clear sense among the children of who and what Baboró is and that they see themselves as important to Baboró. The majority of children asserted that theatre was not just for adults in ‘Stand, Sit, Squat.’ The pupils of MWPS have undoubtedly experienced world class performances and are aware that these experiences were not afforded to other classes in their school and indeed to other schools. Furthermore, many of these children would not otherwise have had access to professional theatre for young people. “*I didn't, I've never gone to the theatre before and I love it now,*” is a comment reported by a teacher. In terms of arts participation children were exposed to varied and quality performances from abstract storytelling, to more traditionally scripted plays aimed at children, comical work, as well as world class dance-theatre and aerial performances, delivered by internationally renowned artists from Ireland and beyond in local venues like the town hall theatre and Black Box theatre, Galway.

Creating Community and Relationships

Parents' early feedback was very positive, and parents felt lucky to have their children taking part, but it still proved difficult to get parents involved at first.²⁶ *Common Ground* epitomised the ethos with which Colm approached the children, and his understanding that these children were living performatively through different languages. Reaching out to the parents to ask them to express why they gave their children the names they did in their mother tongue was instrumental in making direct connections between the families, the school and Baboró. It created a sense of community by celebrating linguistic and cultural diversity while highlighting the shared experience of naming your child. The *If I could change the World* exhibition built on the budding relationships formed at the Christmas sharing and *Common Ground*. This powerful moment of community validated the children and their work by

²⁵ Appendix C, 34.

²⁶ Review 12.06.24

Interventions

Despite the challenges of capturing moments of creativity and measuring them, as the Pisa report says: “what we cannot see is hard to improve, and what we cannot measure will fail to get deserved attention.”²⁹ While acknowledging it is beyond the scope of this report to absolutely causally link some of the impacts to the interventions discussed here, it should be possible to identify aspects associated with their successful delivery and give them deserved attention. Before discussing the major contributing factors to the impacts, it is necessary to preface them with an understanding of the overall ethos or operating principles observed in the work. If the interventions below were reproduced *without* the following attitudes or ethos in their delivery they are unlikely to succeed as well.

Firstly, Colm’s approach involved occupying a “low status” position where he worked alongside the children, frequently modelling an “I don’t know” position, and challenging the idea that adults are experts on everything. This stance gives agency to the children, empowering them to be the experts in their own lives, encouraging them to “develop their own aesthetic, reshape narratives, challenge the status quo,” radically prizing their individuality and uniqueness.³⁰

Secondly Colm’s position as artist was less about demonstrating his own artistic talents and imparting them, and more about being an artistic presence fully available to the children, open and sensitive to their perspectives and then artistically curating what emerged and valuing each contribution as an expression of that child rather than valuing its artistic merit. None of this was to do with polished performances or excellent end products, it was about offering opportunities to the children to articulate *what* they wanted to communicate, to understand *why* these things matter to them and then helping them to work out *how* to use art to communicate them as successfully as possible.

Multidisciplinary Workshops

The multidisciplinary nature of the work was fundamental to the sustained success of the project. As principal Paula O’ Connor states:

that was a big bonus in the programme, that Colm was coming with so many strings as well, you know the digital media, the music, the visual arts, he had the whole package, in different skills so again you’re looking at meeting, kind of twinning the right artist with schools [...] I felt that that was a huge plus - and a qualified teacher (Colm).³¹

The wide variety of Artforms and professional practices experienced by the children through working with Colm, ensured long-term interest and investment by the children in the project. Children made puppets, engaged with shadow puppetry, created with clay, made their own name symbols, dyed handkerchiefs and created a wall display with them, sketched and animated, narrated their own images, experienced professional photography, Colm explains it thus:

²⁹ OECD. *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*. 2022,3.

³⁰ Colm’s Interview with SG

³¹ Interview with SG

I really dislike just making a project that is just about one facet that they were either going to be able to be good at or not being good at ..there's no other way to sing a song (for example) other than to sing it in tune and in time.³²

Durational and Longitudinal

Another major contributing factor to the success of the project was its duration. The extended duration of time allowed for significant and predictable periods of contact with the artist resulting in significant social, emotional and relational impacts on the children. The routine whereby Colm met the children twice a week every fortnight, allowed for more progress and momentum to be sustained, rather than one shorter session with a week between the next one.³³ The “luxury” of this amount of time had profound impacts on the quality of the experience and the potential for learning for the children. According to múinteoir Aoife

Without a doubt like, going forward if it's ever to be done again, you couldn't do it in any shorter amount of time to get the same results, I don't think. I think that the time it takes for the relationship building for the kids and for Colm and for us and with Colm and everything that it kind of meant that definitely the second year we could hit the ground running and it was just more kind of seamless.[.] I suppose like even what could be achieved in two years over what you know it gave us as Colm says time to think, it gave that space for something to be created in the year.³⁴

From Colm's point of view:

you have the luxury of having a two-year project; you take all that pressure out, and then it becomes- you really get to know the kids as opposed to you know the “good” ones and you know the “bad” ones and then there's 20 in the middle, and it's literally, it's Step 1, Step 2 Step 3.[.] It should be bespoke.³⁵

The “bespoke” quality of the design and delivery of the work, for these specific children, in this school, at this specific moment in time is another major contributing factor to its success. One teacher reported that in comparison to 2nd class she taught the previous year, the children “don't need as much guidance and don't need to wait to be told what to do, not as dependent on templates as other classes,” which points to developing resilience and self-reliance.³⁶

The durational aspect of the project is also connected with the investment of time in the building of the relationships as Colm explains:

I think that once you invest time in them and they see that, as you investing in it, and that genuinely that you like them, not because you have to like them but there's something very nice about that and actually, then the kind of rapport that develops, that's the product of investing yourself as a person into the project.³⁷

Working Closely and Organically

The interactions between artist, teachers and students were demonstrably close and operated organically, were visibly warm, collegial and trusting. Teething problems in marrying the

³² Appendix C, 34

³³ Appendix C, 32

³⁴ Appendix C,30

³⁵ Appendix C, 35.

³⁶ Baboró Review 11.11.24

³⁷ Appendix C, 33.

necessary artistic freedom to genuinely consult with children to identify their needs and interests with the arts curriculum and teachers' delivery of the curriculum objectives were navigated.

The organic aspect was visible in Colm's instinct and intentional practice of not coming in with a pre-planned series of workshops on day one. Instead, he invested time in getting to know the children and letting them get to know him so that there was no hierarchy of power. This meant that the children were enabled to communicate their needs and interests in a natural way. CS demonstrates how sensitive and important issues can be approached effectively in an oblique manner, rather than "head-on." Coming in directly, with named specific topics and pre-decided themes relies on untried assumptions about what matters to the children. This is important for avoiding stereotyped or knee-jerk reactions and allows for a more respectful approach to the children's concerns and issues. Colm did not want to impose subjects that were of likely concern but rather created the conditions where the children felt enough at ease to begin to express them.

In terms of decision making about the direction of the work, the trajectory of ideas is clearly traceable across the programme from project to project and were child-led.

Child as Artist

Though not a specific objective of CS, the concept of child as artist is at the heart of Baboró's mission and was hugely evident as an impact of this programme. CS or a similar project has the potential to enhance the child's sense of self as an artist independently of any artistic ability or lack of it. Colm and CS place the child's right to be an artist in the child's ability to understand about being a human, and to "claim the space to explore and discover themselves and their peers *through* multiple levels of creativity."³⁸

From the point of view of the child as artist the comment that "drawing should be as important as writing, drawing says more than words," reveals how one child-artist has managed to internalise this belief, despite being part of a school system that overwhelmingly prioritises the written word. Yet another child would, "be an artist and nothing else cause, I really like art, and I think that I can get better and better if I keep on trying and if you keep on trying you get better and better and then you can become an artist."

The following data, from the Children's Questionnaire which represents 39 children, indicate that ³⁹

Q1. 97% liked having an Artist working with them in the classroom.

Q3. 82% feel more confident working on Art projects.

Q6. 92% claimed to have made their own decisions about their Art-Work.

Q7. 82% expressed pride in their contribution to the exhibition.

³⁸ EPE Schoenenberger, "Deepening the Theatre Experience for Young Audiences-Mapping the Aims and Impacts of Extended Performance Engagement." Phd thesis, University of Galway, 2023, 117.

³⁹ See Appendix B, 29 for entire results from children's questionnaire.

Q8. Not one child said they were *not* creative, with 87% seeing themselves as a creative person.

The evidence gathered from CS showcases how the presence of an open-minded and sympathetic professional artist in a longitudinal context in a primary school offers the artistic opportunities that one might expect. However, in the context of a school with economic and social disadvantage, a project like CS provided access to what was for some pupils, a previously unknown world. As the principal said, “I think they (Baboró) opened up an awareness like a window into it -there's just there's a whole world of like possibilities for them,” múinteoir Aoife commenting:

[.] they're even saying about the interview, the Q&A with the director Chantal you know even opportunities like that, they're seeing who's behind the scenes in it and the actors came out and they got to talk to them, and they just loved all that.⁴⁰

The following comments made by starry-eyed, flush-cheeked, smiling children when asked at the end of the project how they imagined the arts featuring in their future lives show that the arts have become concretised for them. They have learned that Baboró could be a future employer-

“I imagine myself being on stage when I grow up in Baboró,”

that the artist’s individual imagination is more important than the internet -

“I think artists will be part of my life I want to try to get better at Art and not go on You Tube, and try to get my own ideas, like I did in my drawing

that artists must get paid-

“When I go to Merlin College (neighbouring secondary school) I will really work really hard to be an artist because I really want to be one and sell my pictures for money.

The following Graphic records the children's responses to the verbal prompt “an artist is...” It reveals as much about their regard for Colm, and their experience of working alongside him as it does about their new understanding of the role of artist.

⁴⁰ Appendix C, 30

An artist is.....



Figure 2 An Artist is.....

Conclusions

As evidenced in the discussion above, it is reasonable to conclude that the impacts of CS on the children of MWPS demonstrate that the objectives of CS have been substantially met and, in some cases, exceeded. By yet another measure, with the rubrics suggested by Creative Ireland for evaluating creative youth-work, we can conclude that CS has enabled success for the children in each of the following criteria:

ability to engage and collaborate with experts and peers, ability to develop and acquire competences and skills, ability to investigate and to challenge assumptions, ability to play with possibilities and take risks, ability to persist (especially in the face of difficulty), ability to generate original and innovative ideas, perspectives and artefacts.⁴¹

This report signposts directions for continued and sustained exposure to the arts in primary schools. CS is a useful example of how arts in schools can be led by non-Department of Education bodies and still make significant contributions to the arts curriculum as well as to children's well-being. The combination of regular contact with a professional artist from outside the school environment and increased exposure to world class performances, especially designed for children make CS an exceptionally rich intervention. The quality of responses from the children are related to the quality of the artist's input *and* the quality of the relationship and ways of operating adopted by that artist. While an exact modelling or template is unlikely to be drawn from this particular project, the evidence supports the potential of future long-term interventions between artists and schools mediated by artistically driven but child-led organisations like Baboró.

This is an urgent priority in Arts Education in the context of the new Leaving Certificate Drama, Film and Theatre Studies course. This course, as currently conceived, by the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) can be taught and assessed by any registered secondary school teacher of any subject who attends a three-day CPD course. The likelihood that secondary students will access professional artists in their schools seems remote.⁴² This in spite of the fact that the authors of *Arts Alive* advised the NCCA that “Visiting teaching artists bring a deep passion for their specialist area into the classroom, and similar to Kerin’s (2019) co-teaching model, work in partnership with teachers in schools where each partner contributes to a comprehensive arts education for all children .[.] Supported through collaboration with different stakeholders, in different environments, they promote personal fulfilment and achievement.”⁴³ Furthermore, they assert that “collaborative partnerships between artists, cultural organisations and classroom teachers were found to

⁴¹ Carmel O’Sullivan and Lisa. O’Keeffe. *The Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027: Evaluation Guidelines. Creative Ireland Programme*.2023, 19. The teachers and Colm have articulated all of the above abilities and I have observed the same- apart from the challenging the assumptions one and I would likely have observed that with more time.

⁴² <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/drama-film-and-theatre->

This is being piloted across the country in 100 schools and is due to be rolled out nationally from September 2026 to any school who can staff it and has the physical infrastructure to accommodate it. The department of education will pay for each student to attend one theatre performance over the course of their Senior Cycle.

⁴³ Elaine Clotworthy, Carmel O’Sullivan et al. *Arts Alive: A literature review to support curriculum specification development for the area of Arts Education*. NCCA, 2023.72. This advice appears to remain unheeded by the NCCA in the development of the new subject.

enhance student achievement and understanding through the integration of art and cognitive learning processes and was shown to play a valuable role in developing the wider school culture and links with local communities.”⁴⁴ This position resonates strongly with the entirety of the CS project.

Having stimulated the children’s appetite for this work, for arts participation and having inculcated a sense of belonging and relationship with Baboró, it is incumbent upon Baboró and the school ensure that the children have some hope of interaction with other arts providers or events to look forward to in the future. As múinteoir Aoife says, capturing pupils’, colleagues’ and her own passion:

Arts is an important thing in the school, but it doesn't just drop now that this is over, yeah? They're still getting kind of an inside look into various different disciplines, and you know artists, poets, drama, music or whatever, just because you've opened it up for them you can't just now while they're really for it like starve them all of a sudden and go “that was a taster there,” not when they’re hungry.⁴⁵

This seems like an urgent responsibility.

To conclude, the overall success of the project is due partly to the consultation between Baboró and the school *prior* to the commencement of the project, where teachers expressed their sense of in-school need and specified the types of engagement required, and to the immediate buy-in of staff and the principal.

Baboró aspires to be led by the Lundy model and has demonstrated its commitment to it, by ensuring that the children were consulted on as many aspects of the project as was appropriate to their age. Their movie embodies this spirit of the Lundy model entirely.

Recommendations

EPE Extended Pre and Post Show Engagement

While some excellent thematic links were made with the shows attended, the opportunity to fully capitalise on that precious opportunity of getting the children to the theatre, may not have been fully realised. An increased focus on pre- and post-show engagement could address this to some degree.⁴⁶

Extended pre- and post-show engagement for children with Baboró shows would allow for what Heidi Schoenenberger has recently defined as “extended performance engagement,”⁴⁷ or EPE. EPE includes “Wrap-around educational and artistic activities, lobby displays, Q&A, pre- and post-performance workshops, teacher resources,” designed to extend the experience and after-life of a performance and “making space to reflect on themes or moments from that performance, extending learning to process story and connect materials to their own context.” For example, the Q&A with Chantal McCormick of Fidget Feet Aerial

⁴⁴ Clotworthy and O’Sullivan et al. *Arts Alive*.143.

⁴⁵ Appendix C, 33.

⁴⁶ For online adaptable EPE resources see <https://www.imagine.org.uk/ontap/pre/activities/0/1>
<https://www.imagine.org.uk/ontap/resources/about-ontap>

⁴⁷ Schoenenberger, “Deepening the Theatre Experience for Young Audiences,” 11.

Theatre company after *When the Moon Spun Round* demonstrated the children's heightened understanding and enriched vocabulary. Chantal commented on the quality of their questions. The children's questions and their responses showed the group's familiarity and ease with experiencing performance and discussing and questioning what they saw.

EPE is recommended to maximise both the fun and entertainment elements of performances as well as possible learnings about the aesthetic. It would help continue the positive gains back in the classroom and in the family home. EPE becomes even more important in the context of disadvantaged schools particularly the pre-performance work can work powerfully to acclimatise the young person to the theatre environment, particularly if the EPE accommodates sensory needs, neurodiversity and cultural diversity. While it was noted by múinteoir Aoife that post show engagement seemed more productive than pre-show engagement, pre-show engagement is recommended as a means of priming the children for the experience which might enhance the longevity of its effects. e.g. if a child has already been introduced to a character or a theme, they may be more invested in their plight. Some companies create resource packs which can be adapted by the school, or schools could ask Baboró to assist them in scheduling a backstage tour, or to meet the actors. Ideally artists would have the children make something in response to the show or inspired by one element of the show.

Relationships

Given that the relationships between the children and artist as well as between the artist and the teachers, were crucial to the success of this project, it is essential that the recruitment process continues to involve the teachers and where possible that continuity of staffing or at least a comprehensive handover is maintained. In effect it is agreeing to co-teach with another adult for a long period of time, and the potential for people to "butt heads" is enormous.⁴⁸

This chimes loudly with the *Arts Alive* recommendations to NCCA that "co-teaching models, where subject experts partner with classroom teachers, result in increased confidence among teachers, professional collaboration, and enhanced learning opportunities for children, [...]enriching the classroom experience, promoting deep learning through overlapping experiences, concepts, and skills." They rightly caution that teacher-artist partnerships require time, trust-building, joint planning, and reflective practice to be effective."⁴⁹

Consideration should be given to preparing very young children for the departure of the artist, at the end of the programme. Many children expressed sadness, that they would miss Colm and might never see him again. "*I feel sad that Colm is going to leave us forever.*" Future projects might plan predictable interactions with the artists or opportunities for children to send them examples of their later work, perhaps a secure, supervised blog.

Liaison Role for Baboró

The teachers and the principal strongly emphasised how essential Baboró's role as liaison or intermediary with the artist is. As múinteoir Aoife elaborates:

⁴⁸ Teacher Interview, SG.

⁴⁹ Clotworthy and O'Sullivan et al. *Arts Alive*.143.

I think Baboró are the key buffer there [...] if I was going on ahead, I think that working directly with the artists, which I have done before, can be trickier.⁵⁰

Teething problems were resolved at regular meetings and concerns could be related from both sides through Baboró, particularly at the early stages of the process where it was not yet entirely apparent what the direction of the work would be. Through excellent communication and the development of mutual trust, a balance was successfully struck between Colm's process, and the teachers' needs to meet curriculum objectives in art. In the other direction, Baboró can mediate with the school for the artist, ensuring that all sides are heard. Managing expectations with extremely clear memoranda of understanding could be helpful. e.g. Teachers can cope with being unclear about the direction of the work for a period of time, but they will need to know in advance if the entire class, a small group, or individuals will be withdrawn so they know what to prepare for their classroom. Similarly, artists might not want to do lesson plans (they are not teachers) or record their work in a pre-determined way, but they will need to articulate their process in some format for the funders.

Even with exceptional good will and professionalism, which were all present here, a culture clash between a busy classroom and overloaded curriculum, an artist's perspective, and the arts organisation's need for accountability is almost inevitable and needs to be carefully planned for.

The "connector" as described by Schoenenberg in EPE is a useful touchstone here—where an artist, or teaching artist, or other creative practitioner can effectively advise both the school and the artist, "bridging the gap between artistic and educational experience."⁵¹ Space does not permit a full discussion here, but it is highly recommended that the role of "connector" be given serious consideration.

Scaling and Future Practice

While artist and teachers agreed that attempts to replicate this project *exactly* would be neither desirable nor successful, it has been possible to draw a series of conclusions about practices which might improve the experience for all concerned. It should be acknowledged that the range of skills offered by Colm may not be readily available from subsequent artists, therefore it is recommended that a variety of approaches be used within the one art form so that there is a degree of interdisciplinarity and multiple possibilities of connection with the arts curriculum and arts education provision in schools.

Teachers did feel a similar project with a different artist should be possible, and there is abundant evidence to suggest that a similar process could be used with children in 3rd to 6th class and perhaps have even more potential for cross-curricular links. An evaluation of this project with older children would give further insights, given the limitations in how much children of this age were able to articulate and indeed to recall.

⁵⁰ Teacher Interview with SG

⁵¹ Schoenenberger 270.

Potential Pitfalls

The extra workhours put in by artists in collating and curating children's contributions e.g. Colm's editing of the movie, composing music, and animating the children's illustrations, editing voice recordings and photos were very time-consuming and could become problematic over time. The practical management of sessions in MWPS allowed the artist to work in small groups while the teacher had the rest of the class. This might not be possible in all school environments due to timetable constraints and depends greatly on communication, planning and genuinely being on the same page. i.e. the historical model of a drop-in, once-off artist visiting or delivering a workshop and liberating the teacher is not how this project functions. Flexibility and the ability to improvise in the moment are necessary skills here.⁵²

Finally, the potential flip side of long-term access to the same artist at an impressionable age is if the children perceive this artist as the *only* possible arbiter of art. It might be difficult for these children to begin a similar process with a different artist, as the following exchange, my final one with the children, shows:

SG	Do you think the Arts/Art will be in your life? In the future?
PUPIL	Yes, A LOT!
SG	How do you see that happening?
PUPIL	Colm.

However, the skills and experience gained during CS mean that the children of MSW are more likely to be able to articulate their needs and interests and participate confidently in new projects with other artists

Recommendations for future Evaluation

- Colm commented that the children's natural eagerness to please can obscure their actual responses. This should be borne in mind, in particular with very young, vulnerable participants, especially working through a second language.
- Artists/teachers/Arts Organisation must be aware of their cultural, and other privileges, such as class, ethnicity and gender, or even just as an adult "expert" in the room.
- The "domino" effect in responses in a whole group/plenary discussion setting, where one child repeats the previous comment and sometimes amplifies it for the sake of it means that opportunities for smaller group feedback become important
- Timeliness and ongoing formative evaluation, as opposed to summative terminal reporting. Because SG was asking children about experiences of up to 12 months ago and more, some interactions became more like memory tests, which put children under unnecessary pressure.
- Detailed and longitudinal evaluation requires opportunities for appropriate unobtrusive observation by the evaluator/researcher. Self-consciousness can be

⁵² Appendix C, 32.

mitigated against if the evaluation work is integrated into the process from early on and children become used with the evaluator in the room.⁵³

- Written responses are unsuitable for this cohort and yielded minimal results. More familiarity with the children would have allowed for more nuanced differentiation within the evaluation to allow for SEN and second language issues.
- Integration of creative evaluation methodologies⁵⁴ and Drama in Education work, whereby the protection of a given role means that children can express themselves more freely. <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2023/12/20231219-Creative-Youth-Evaluation-Guidelines-2023-2027.pdf>

Final word from one of the children:

A message to Baboró

I want to say a compliment to them I really like how there is so much imagination in all the things that Baboró has done, Colm has done, and everyone who works there.

⁵³ Colm preferred visitors to participate rather than sit out and evaluate/observe. This points to the natural tension between the artist's intention and the evaluator's intention, and points to the need for excellent communication between both, in agreeing access to the group. (SGs' fieldnotes and Baboró meeting notes 11.11.24)

⁵⁴ <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2023/12/20231219-Creative-Youth-Evaluation-Guidelines-2023-2027.pdf> Carmel O' Sullivan and Lisa O'Keeffe. *The Creative Youth Plan 2023-2027: Evaluation Guidelines. Creative Ireland Programme.2023.* (p.9-13)

Appendices

Appendix A Children's Transcript Extracts

Colm

- *I really like his own creations that he makes*
- *I think Colm is a great artist because he is really fun, and he comes up the ideas and ways to make us happy.*
- *Colm is a very creative artist, he teaches lots of things and also his he is very kind, and he is the and he puts his efforts in all his art work*
- *Colm teached us TTT and that means Time to Think, so that means, helped us think about our creativity, ideas and nice ideas*
- *Back in First Class we did an exhibition in the halla, Common Ground and this year we're doing an even bigger one in the ATU college. Colm has made me more expired (inspired) in my work*

The ATU Exhibition

- *I felt super embarrassed when my one came on the screen, and like I had a jumper and I hided it under it, I mean I saw my noodles but then I just did this I was like pretending to not be there and beside me when it was his turn he hid under the table so nobody could see him.*
- *When I saw my photo, I think I became really shy because my voice does not even sound like me at all*
- *nervous and happy because it felt good to see a small movie of myself.*
- *Good kind of bad because I didn't really like what I put on the screen and I liked for my drawing to be on a mini movie, I liked it*
- *When I saw my picture, I was a bit embarrassed really because I didn't think it was as good as I thought it would turn out*
- *I felt also very embarrassed because when the picture was all I just hided and I yeah, I was very embarrassed*
- *I wasn't there but my friends were, keep on telling me mine was like the iconic and so it was a dinosaur one and everyone was cheering*
- *happy and a bit nervous when my picture showed up because everyone keeps on looking when the picture of the person shows up. I was also very happy that my*

- *friends were there and excited because I finally went to ATU where my brother goes and one brother works there and two still go there*
- *I felt really important and like really happy when my picture came up, I was kind of like Oh my God I'm that I'm that's mine and I couldn't really believe it and I just thought how lucky I was to have an artist coming in*
- *I was so nervous at the start and then I wasn't that nervous and I'm so happy we had Colm coming in for our school and he is a very good artist. When mine popped up I felt like X (previous comment)*

Family Reactions

- *my mom was very surprised that I said that, so nobody was litter in the world*
- *I felt really happy and proud of me for working with Colm an artist and also he (my dad) was really proud of me of doing that big thing because he normally would not expect like at 8-9 and seven-year olds to do all of that.*
- *so, my dad made a video and then when he showed my mom she was laughing out loud.*
- *In a moment after the exhibition I felt really happy and I felt really important like X said and my mom was really happy with me and got me a treat, like a chocolate chip cookie [...] because I did really good work and after the art exhibition at the end of the day with all of our work on the wall she felt really happy with my work, Y's and Z's work and she was really happy ..I don't know if it was on the blog, but my mom took photos and sent it to my dad and then my dad was really happy and gave me a big hug when I got home. [...] At the start of the exhibition I was really nervous and then I got really chilled at the end and it was really so much fun.*

Final Feelings

- *I feel very excited because we have loads of memories with Colm, like when we did like our shibori and other stuff, and we got our pictures and our frames.*
- *I think I feel like I'm a master pro because now I want to be an artist to paint.*
- *happy excited and like an artist*
- *I'm little bit sad because Colm's going to be leaving soon*
- *It was very fun time having Colm to do art with us and Colm usually taught us very nice things and he does fun projects with us and make us feel happy and he put his hard work into something to make something new.*

- *I feel proud that I did it*
- *I feel sad that Colm is going to leave us forever*

The future

- *I imagine myself being on stage when I grow up in Baboró*
- *I think artists will be part of my life I want to try to get better at Art and not go on You Tube, and try to get my own ideas, like I did in my drawing*
- *When I go to Merlin College (neighbouring secondary school) I will really work really hard to be an artist because I really want to be one and sell my my pictures for money to get this very good I look out for the moon cards*
- *I want to be an artist too because I love painting and coloring*

Appendix B Children's Questionnaire

(expressed as per centages) <i>Please tick one box for each statement.</i>	Yes	No	Not Sure
1. I liked having an Artist working with us in the classroom.	97	0	3
2. I am looking forward to the exhibition.	79	0	21
3. I feel more confident working on Art projects.	82	0	18
4. My opinion of my work is important.	79	5	16
5. I can express my feelings through making art.	62	8	30
6. I made my own decisions about my Art-Work.	92	0	8
7. I am proud of what I made for the exhibition.	82	5	13
8. I am a creative person.	87	0	13
9. I felt safe to try new things and to make mistakes.	74	5	21
10. I know when I am happy with my work.	74	5	21
11. My work matters.	82	5	13
12. I am more aware of Art outside of school, in the real world.	69	10	21
13. Nobody can make work exactly like mine.	69	15	15
14. I want Art to be part of my life as I grow up.	61	18	21

Appendix C Adults' Transcript Extracts ⁵⁵

Longitudinal nature of the Project

Without a doubt like, going forward if it's ever to be done again you couldn't do it in any shorter amount of time to get the same results I don't think. I think that you know the time it takes for the relationship building for the kids and for Colm and for us and with Colm meant that definitely the second year we could hit the ground running, and it was just more seamless. I guess we understood what it took and I suppose having the same teacher was a good thing - I know Amanda wasn't the same teacher but just having someone who understands the artist and how they work and their approach and stuff that took time to understand and at least you know if you have one teacher that understands that, year one, that can explain it to a new teacher year two, that was really good and then I suppose what could be achieved in two years; it gave us as Colm says times to think, it gave that space for something to be created in the year.

Confidence

I think it was very obvious even when they did the exhibition clips t at the beginning they had 'a time to think' when they said the spoken part and you could hear them. I think 'it's time to think' that phrase itself has like really resonated with me so much, like in the whole it's within the whole school year that they know that they have, you can hear them thinking now. I know in the classroom situation sometimes it's like "come on" whereas with that, the project kind of gave them confidence that you don't have to have the answer straight away and it doesn't have to be the right answer.. you can come up with an idea and then you've got time saying ohh maybe that's not the way I'd do it and they've got like a reassurance in themselves that's there if they don't get it, say the beginning of the project isn't what they hoped it to be that they can go and they can start again and it's not a failure.

Social and Emotional Development

They are just more open, they communicate, they're excited, it's hard to know these things as well, their development is bigger than just the project itself, it's had an impact on it, but their peer relations are very good and they seem to articulate themselves better, negotiate arguments better, understand it - but I don't know like - the project is that part of it- is that just kind of growing up? - but they are brilliant but I feel like they've always been brilliant and as infants as well like, they love giving feedback to each other and stuff, and they do it in a nice way.

Relationship with Baboró

The children without a doubt, one of the kids turned around and goes "I didn't, I've never gone to the theatre before and I love it now," so I think that the kids have.. from going to theatre in the back and they're even saying about the interview with the, Q&A with the director Chantal you know even opportunities like that, they're seeing who's behind the scenes in it and the actors came out and they got to talk to them, and they just loved all that.

Paula I think they opened up an awareness like a window into it -there's just, there's a whole world of possibilities for them [.] In terms of the Baboró relationship, I think people are really positive .. there's a genuine interest in getting the children involved. [.] I think it has been

⁵⁵ Comments in this section with no name are teachers' comments, and Paula indicates the principal's comments.

very professionally run and maybe it's kind of covered already but I commented at the time, Bryony at the start just being really impressed with her, the professionalism I suppose she had, but I liked the organisational skills. As a project coming in this is a big privilege for our school but a big ask in terms of curriculum time, but she had the vision, the creative vision and the artistic side of it which she really had and actually the practicalities -meetings had an agenda, they had a purpose they didn't go off in every tangent, as can sometimes happen when it's very arty yeah and I realised she had a fabulous balance. [...] They wanted to make it work there's a lot of investment from their side for it to work yeah, so it's impressive

Baboró as liaison/mediator between school and artist

Paula It depersonalised it, it meant in the discussion around the project we weren't having to say to Colm "we're not sure on that". You could have those conversations, but it depersonalised it a little bit [...] like having a chairperson at a meeting or something like that ..having them as the middle people, leading, that it wasn't us as such.

Paula We had to trust in the process, because it was a challenge. We had conversations going "this has taken longer to start getting into it than we anticipated, this is taking longer." It was a case that the fact there were review meetings, regular review meetings with Baboró that we brought those concerns, and they were addressed, they were voiced [...] but there was definitely a sense of it coming together and we went ah OK- you do kind of have to trust the process!

.....

That was definitely a challenge, probably in September the first year that we didn't quite understand what the direction was and like when you say about the curriculum objectives that we still have our plans to do so I guess when we did it was that kind of maybe narrow mindedness of like "I don't see an art lesson and I have to take an art lesson out of it" and there was a lot of - it was more like an oral language lesson. There was communication we did back with Bry and explained just that we know ahead of time what the lessons are or what kind of direction they were. Then for me the big eye opener was the first, the Christmas show that we did, you just saw all the pieces of the jigsaw come together.

I think what was really important actually is the connection that we have with Baboró because I think that when you're establishing the relations particularly with teachers and the artists at the beginning and trying to figure out what works for us timetabling, and like how do we communicate how often do we communicate, you tell us about what you're actually doing in time for us to know is it a whole class lesson, or how you take it in groups that we need to still be teaching or have a lesson organized. I think Baboró are the key buffer there that I think that for me if I was going on ahead, I think that working directly with the artists which I have done before can be trickier. I think having someone and Bry, I remember at the beginning was so brilliant at it, like you know you could just kind of feedback and any issues that her role- not even issues, but teething problems, you felt like you have that buffer ...you're not offending anyone.

Relationship with Parents

I think that the exhibitions were important for that home school link for the parents to understand what was being done in the school and then they bought in [...]I've had excellent relations with the parents and I'm not saying that that's all down to what's gone on in the project but no doubt it has helped [...]the attendance at the exhibition, all of them showing up to that -I think that's a huge thing [...]like before you be kind of asking parents to come in for

Maths week asking them and just no one would take the bite you know? We had an art exhibition here and we asked for volunteers to hang up the canvases and there were parents from our classes that volunteered.

Relationship with Colm

Just overwhelmingly positive .. you can tell that as soon as Colm walks in, the kids are all excited - "Colm is here, Colm is here." I think his idea of having the twice a week every fortnight was kind of good as well in the sense of if he started something on a Tuesday he wasn't waiting another week where the kids might have forgotten it, they had two days to think about it, finish it off and come up with more ideas and stuff, and there was just a big trust there and a vulnerability that the kids gave to Colm that they felt they could say anything, do anything, explore anything with him and it was OK so I think yeah definitely the relationship. But that was quite instant [.]. So I think Colm was just great from the get-go at talking their language getting down on their level, listening to them, taking their ideas on board so like as far as the project is concerned if you if you had that dynamic with the kids- the relationship in my idea didn't take two years to build. It was there from the get-go but it strengthened, strengthened and strengthened you know.

Flexibility

Flexibility ..[.]because with the curriculum and planning, and because often it is child centred, there can't be, it can be organized to a certain extent but because you can't plan it too far ahead it means that we have to kind of just be on the board to say "OK, well we didn't actually get the art lesson done this week it went more in the oral language direction so we have to scramble for something else," so yeah definitely flexibility I'd say is important as well.

Child as Artist

I certainly think so when you were in with us the last day Shirley-Anne someone said .. "well you can't get art wrong, you can't do this wrong or you can't do it the wrong way" so I think even that ... even at the exhibition they definitely felt huge ownership and they knew everyone was there for them it was their work and it was their journey you know, so I think yeah definitely they can see themselves as being an artist

I think at that age they're so creative anyway that that mindset of I'm not an artist doesn't happen until they get older, so they naturally think of that as themselves, but it has prolonged that feeling of 'I am good' and I think that also it's showing them that in every class there's the kids in particular that have the knack, that can draw and colour and have these fantastic pictures but I think what the project has shown them is that that's one type of art; there's loads of different types of it. [..] "well actually you're really good at digital media." Everything he did had an element of like digital media in it and he took their work he digitized it he could do audio and visual and stuff so I think for those kind of kids that maybe can't sketch [..] or whatever that they realised that actually well they can't do that part but- 'I have the ideas and he puts my ideas into the work'-because some of that happened which was really nice, that he took what they said and animated it, so I think that was a big thing for some of the kids.

Going Forward

It's the continuation of it (relationship with Baboró) would be, still getting the exposure and the continuous exposure to going to the theatre, having visiting artists coming in from various different disciplines and stuff. I know we're privileged in the school that we are creative

cluster school. Arts is an important thing in the school but that like it doesn't just drop now that this is over yeah? They're still getting a kind of an inside look into various different disciplines and you know artists, poets, drama, music or whatever, just because you've opened it up for them you can't just now while they're really hungry for it starve them all of a sudden and go "that was a taster there," not when you're hungry.

Transcript Extracts from Artist Colm O'Foghlú

Guiding Principles

I suppose for me, really the only thing that really excites me about working with young people, is if they are given an opportunity to express themselves, express their concerns, their dreams; you know what makes them anxious or whatever but because without that part I don't think that you can call stuff Art really.

Non-Expert stance

They'll come up with questions "I wonder what if," and "what if"- it's lovely and sometimes I have to say "I don't know, I'll have to think about that and next time I'm down will you ask me that question and hopefully I'll have a better answer for you" [.]it's fine to say "I don't know but I'm going to go find out". [.]following a fixed model means that you've already decided what you're doing week 1 to week 4, year one, year two and that doesn't ...allow for...that that makes you the expert in the room and that's taking all of that lovely stuff out of it the .. if you've planned it all out obviously you do know so then it doesn't really matter what kids you're meeting, they're just interchangeable with any other kids.

Relationship

I think that once you invest time in them and they see that, as you investing in it, and that genuinely that you like them, not because you have to like them but there's something very nice about that, and actually, then the kind of rapport that develops, that's the product of investing yourself as a person into the project.

Confidence

I think they are more confident at being themselves. [.]who you are at any age it is a kind of a malleable thing, so actually as you are introduced to new concepts some of them being like a magpie you take them, and you go "I like that" and other things "not so much." [.] for the kids to have the healthiest version of what it is to come to school and alleviating some of the parents' nervousness around them coming into the school, because it should be a dialogue, it's not a one-way conversation. I suppose that at heart, is what I think creating space is- it's creating space for them to become who they are, the confidence and the passion and with all the messiness that comes from being a human being. We're not all perfect we're not all great at everything but it's nice to give things your best go but it's also OK to say, "I hate brown clay so don't put it in front of me because it gives me the icks."

Empathy and Kindness

They are incredibly kind. One day they were doing their handwriting and I said "your handwriting is beautiful and my handwriting is awful," and one of them said to me "your handwriting isn't awful, I mean it could be better you know what I mean but like don't be saying your work is awful it's not like I can't read what you wrote, that's perfect." So that kind of kindness and but it's also I think allowing them to be kind to themselves to be kind to

other people to be more empathic you know to read the signs when somebody needs a bit of space and needs a bit of a push and that it's OK that every day isn't the 100% productivity Day

Interdisciplinarity/Use of different Art forms

You know everything is open I, I'm a composer and musician, I'm a graphic artist, I've worked in theatre I've worked in drama and movement so like the whole kind of spectrum of the arts, if you like within the curriculum, they're all at our disposal. But really what is it we want to say? and how do we want to say it? and so that's really, the kind of starting point for it. [...] I really dislike just making a project that is just about one facet that they were either going to be able to be good at or not being good at, and there's no other way to sing that song (for example) other than to sing it in tune and in time.

Common Ground/Identity

I became aware very quickly that they have (the children) this kind of performative version of themselves that they're, if they're at home and it's a Polish household that they're Polish and when they come in here to school that they're kind of Irish, so when we made "Common Ground" the idea was that the symbols the Shamrock and the harp and what defines that kind of idea of symbols of Ireland didn't really resonate with them, didn't really have any value [...] So the idea was that that they would find out what their name meant fundamentally why their parents chose that special name for them. When we're looking at the idea of identity a lot of times we're isolating the things that are the markers of difference whereas actually for all of the children the parents thought about naming them, why they named them and the meaning of that name. I asked them (parents) to record it in their in their mother tongue and then maybe in English afterwards and it was quite emotional I think for the parents to come in and to hear Polish language and Lithuanian and all of the different languages because when they come to the school there's a kind of presentation of themselves that they give rather than being their authentic selves and I suppose a lot of them would be traversing that in their second language there mightn't be the same level of fluency so actually there's a kind of an inequality there almost.

If I could Change the World

I think it's also nice to give them a sense that they will be the people who will change the world, and everybody has the capacity to change, you know maybe not the whole global situation but certainly they'll be able to change their worlds that they have agency over that they can make decisions actually [...] and I do think it is lovely to give them that sense of empowerment that actually it will be that they will change their worlds, not to be waiting for somebody else to do it for you: sometimes you have to do it yourself.

Uniqueness

I think these kinds of projects are so personality-led, so this project is very me. I'm not sure you can clone this project because it is so unique to the components within it. [...] But definitely the one thing that you would hope people would get from this project is when you give the luxury of having a two year project you take all that pressure out, and then it becomes- you really get to know the kids as opposed to you know the good ones and you know the bad ones and then there's 20 in the middle, and it's literally the it's Step 1, Step 2, Step 3 and that will be rolled out in every school and there's actually nothing- I hate replicating anything because

if I haven't come up with whatever it is that we're doing specifically because of working with those kids then I haven't done my job right.[.] It should be bespoke.

Child as Artist/Consumer of Art

I suppose when we're making things the objective of making it isn't for artistic purposes, that's the tool we are using, yes. The reason we're doing this is because they're expressing something; it's the expression that's really valuable, and not really have they gotten much better at Art. They have yeah (gotten better at Art) but the other thing is their critical thinking, that higher order all that lovely stuff the whys and then kind of evaluating and comparing and classifying things and determining importance- there are all of these skills now that haven't been taught it's just they've had an opportunity to absorb different concepts and therefore they have that in their toolbox now when they go to look at a play.

Appendix D Parents' Responses

Note: Responses are anonymised here with the use of "They" pronouns, removing names, and son/daughter changed to child. Minor redactions have been made for the published version. Some of the respondents are working through a second language, so I have only made corrections where there is a challenge to comprehension.

Q2. Have you have noticed any changes in your child since their work on this project? If yes, please explain here.

I found that my child was more eager to work on their projects than they normally would.

My child has dyslexia and learning difficulties, so they built their confidence through that, it helped them to feel better and that they are not worse than others. Their art skills are really good, so they were proud of themselves.

More confident and excited about art.

They are more interested in different types of performances/shows that are available to go see & are more open when explaining how they feel and why they think they feel a certain way

They seem more confident & expressive

My child has suffered [.] We have noticed their confidence soar this year and their friendships deepen considerably. We credit a large part of this to working with Colm. Colm had a wonderful approach with the children that was calming and nurturing. Our child is known to have lots and lots of questions and Colm always made time to answer.

I'm proud that my child's talent was noticed and it helped them to be more confident

Q3. Which activities and/or performances do you think affected your child the most? e.g. If I could Change the World, Shibori dyeing, Baboró performances, e.g. When the Moon Spun Round, illustrating, Common ground, why were these activities important?

If I could change the world

All

If I could change the world definitely, because they were expressing themselves with art and working and they can show presentation for everybody it was amazing! Myself get so emotional it was fantastic

Shibori dying was the activity they spoke about the most. They want to try at home. And the drawing and colouring techniques used in change the world.

It's hard to pick one as my child really enjoys any sort of art activities and engagement.

They were all important as they helped them in different ways, more interest in how to understand other people's thoughts, different ways to express themselves through art are just two I can think of straight away

I think they all had a big importance to them & they loved everything that they did & loved coming home to tell details other than parts he was keeping "secret"

Common Ground built friendships and celebrated similarities and differences. Theatre experiences built on their experiences in school. The performance together at Christmas last year celebrated and brought the two classes together. "If I could change the world"- showed how much confidence the children had in expressing themselves. A wonderful way to show the growth the children experienced.

Q.4.What was your experience of the exhibition and seeing the movie like?

It was brilliant

Absolutely fantastic great effort put in

Emotional, didn't expect that some kids have those issues; it was really eyes opening

Very exciting, we were very proud and such a fun opportunity for everyone.

It was great to see the work everyone put into and especially the kids reaction to the movie.

It showed different things that the children in the class & they were thinking & the way they look at the world, I really enjoyed it

It was really emotional seeing kids so young my own included having thoughts on some of the major issues all over the world

Emotional/Pride/Gratitude

I really loved the project "if I could change the world"

Is there anything else you would like to say about the project or any future suggestions you would like to make?

Would love to take part in project like that more often

Thank you to Baboro and the teachers involved. Such a great project!

It would be great if projects like this were available to more kids & kids of all different ages to see how their thought process changes over time

It's definitely something I think should be rolled out as part of school curriculum in all schools & probably all the way thro their school years, the rapport they built up with Colm & the love they had for him & what they done was proof of that

I only wish my other child could have the same experience! I said to my colleagues that I wish every child in primary school could have the same experience.

I would be grateful and happy if Colm would continue working with our children. His projects are interesting and extraordinary

Appendix E Biographies

Artist Colm O'Foghlú

Colm Ó Foghlú is an Irish composer, director, and producer whose career spans music, theatre, film, and education. A graduate of UCD (M.A. in Drama & Performance) and DCU (PME), he has held residencies at St. Patrick's College, Marino Institute of Education, and with Baboró International Arts Festival for Children. As Musical Director of Riverdance, Colm toured internationally and has since composed for opera, theatre, and orchestral settings. His operas *Eoghainín na nÉan* and *Íosagán* (after P. H. Pearse) premiered in Dublin. Through Ember Productions, he co-developed acclaimed site-specific works such as *Stones*, *Bones* and *Beckett* and *Frozen Music*. His commissions include works for RTÉ, Busch Gardens, and the Australian Film Board, while his 2022 album *Returning / Filleadh*—featuring Ireland's top musicians—was chosen as Lyric FM's Album of the Week. Other projects include *The Island Lullaby*, commemorating the Blasket Islands evacuation, and *An Uile Bhealach Abhaile/All The Ways Home*, inspired by his Connemara upbringing. Colm's Christmas Oratorio *The Star of Bethlehem/Ceol ar Snámh ón Spéir Anuas*, commissioned by RTE Raidió na Gaeltachta (funded by BAI), has received numerous

broadcasts on RTE RnaG and RTE Radio 1 and live performances since its premiere in 2012. His music has been performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Berne Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, City of Hong Kong Chamber Orchestra, The Orchestra of Ireland, Musici Ireland and his work has been premiered and commissioned by choirs such as New Dublin Voices, Mornington Singers, Laetare, Cantando and Cuore Chamber Choirs. His work is regularly performed by the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. In film and media, he wrote and directed the award-winning short *Suanscéal*, formatted and mentored on TG4's series *Pitch Perfect* and was head judge/mentor on TG4's recent series *Curfá*. A passionate educator, Colm has led numerous school and community arts initiatives, especially in the Irish language. Rooted in his Connemara home, Colm continues to weave traditional heritage with contemporary artistry, shaping Ireland's cultural landscape across stage, screen, and sound.

Evaluator/Researcher Dr. Shirley-Anne Godfrey

Shirley-Anne Godfrey (Bonner) holds an MA and a PhD in Drama and Theatre Studies, from the University of Galway. She developed feminist theatre practices to recover the legacies of marginalised Irish women writers. Her research includes the use of Drama in Education in primary school as a feminist research and learning tool.⁵⁶ She is currently evaluating programmes for Galway Music Residency and Sligo Youth Baroque Opera. She is a former teacher, co-founder of the Frances Brown Literary festival and a playwright. A rehearsed reading of her first play *In My Mind's Eye* (2021) was performed in the Lyric theatre Belfast, at the American Irish Historical Society, New York, and An Grianan, Letterkenny. Dramatisations include Brown's ghostly *The Legends of Ulster* (2021), Balor Theatre, Ballybofey, and The Abbey Arts Centre Ballyshannon. *The Tale of Fairyfoot* (2023) was performed in promenade style in the woods of Drumboe, featured storytelling, music, and aerial dance in association with Fidget Feet. A further adaptation of Browne's *The Tale of Merry mind* also in collaboration with Fidget Feet, will be performed 11th-12th October. As a theatre scholar her special interests are feminist playwriting, dialect in playwriting, Irish women playwrights, in particular Lady Gregory and marginalised women writers. She is also fascinated by language and dialect in drama. She is an expert on Frances Browne, "The Blind Poetess of Ulster," 1816-1879, who also hailed from Shirley-Anne's native Stranorlar, Co. Donegal. She will feature in an upcoming Lyric FM documentary about Browne, having previously contributed to a programme on Winifred Letts' plays. She has appeared on BBC Northern Ireland and BBC Radio Ulster talking about Frances Browne.

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