

CIDREE - Effective Resources to Support  
Arts Education  
CIDREE Arts Expert Group (Irish survey)

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# Introduction

The aim of this research study is to gather information on primary teachers' approaches to teaching the Arts in school. For the purpose of this survey, the Arts are taken to be Visual Art, Music, Drama and Dance. The rationale behind this work has developed over a number of meetings held by the Arts Expert Group on behalf of CIDREE, since 2016. The Arts Expert Group is made up of representatives from Ireland, Scotland, France, The Netherlands, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Estonia. At previous meetings, the arts expert group had identified a significant common challenge facing primary teachers, namely that of accessing suitable arts resources that could be used effectively to support their teaching and build their confidence.

This research study is the direct result of a proposal to CIDREE immediately following the Dublin meeting of the Arts Expert Group in September 2018.

This research study was planned to take place during the 12 months between the last group meeting in Dublin, in September 2018 and the next meeting in Sarajevo, in September 2019. It had the Arts Expert Group design and implement a qualitative study (incorporating an online survey and interviews) to identify resources that are effective (and effectively used) in building confidence and supporting teaching of the arts in primary education. The group will interview a small sample of respondents from each country based on their survey answers. The survey will identify:

- The arts areas in which teachers are less confident.
- The resources they use effectively to support their teaching in the arts.
- How the resources are used and their impact on the teachers' practice.
- The common features of these resources that are applied effectively.
- The needs that remain.

The purpose of the study is both to identify helpful resources and to understand how primary teachers have used them effectively to support their teaching of arts subjects in which they are less confident.

# Executive summary

This summary endeavours, in a relatively short space, to combine the findings of both the online survey and teacher interviews from this research report. There were 62 responses to the online survey and from the 14 teachers who volunteered to be considered for interview, 5 were contacted.

From both the online survey and teacher interviews agreement around what constituted a useful resource when engaging in arts-based activities with students considered that they:

- be easily accessible and easy to use
- save time
- are easy to understand
- can be used for more than one, single situation, or can be combined in one or more situations.

What constituted an actual resource brought out a range of options, such as:

- other teachers in the school
- outside experts and teacher CPD support services
- places and spaces, such as museums and galleries
- books and stories
- access to relevant materials/instruments
- online resources.

A number of teachers stated that resources best contributed to their own professional development when:

- they were first starting off in teaching
- an expert in the arts-based area was on hand to demonstrate.

Teachers also stated that resources became popular with them when it was evidenced that:

- the students became more confident in their work
- student interests, knowledge and skills were broadened
- student enjoyment in the work and learning was obvious.

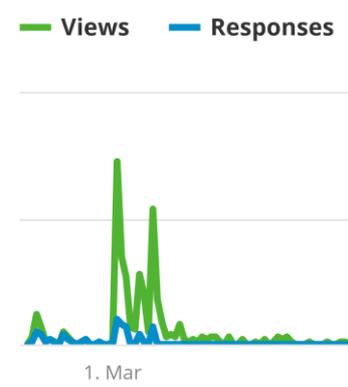
# Online Survey

The online survey was open from Monday 11th of February until Friday 8th of March, 2019. The survey consisted of:

- a set of initial questions looking for consent to use the information from the respondents' replies
- general questions about the county their school was in and the type of school
- questions about their preferred area/s when teaching the Arts
- the resources the teachers would use and why

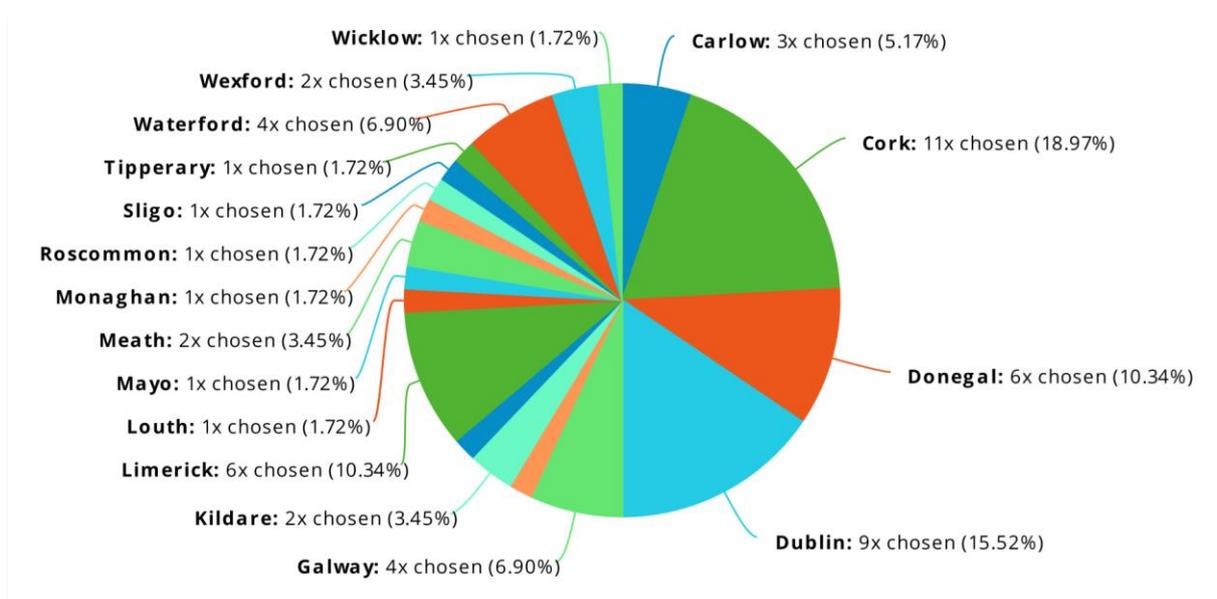
Respondents were also asked to supply an email address if they wished to be considered in a further interview, which would be recorded.

An initial email campaign to promote the research study was sent to organisations and primary schools that had recently worked with NCCA. This contained a link to the online survey. Nearing the end of the online survey's timespan, social media was also used to circulate the link. Responses over the life of the survey can be seen in the graph below.



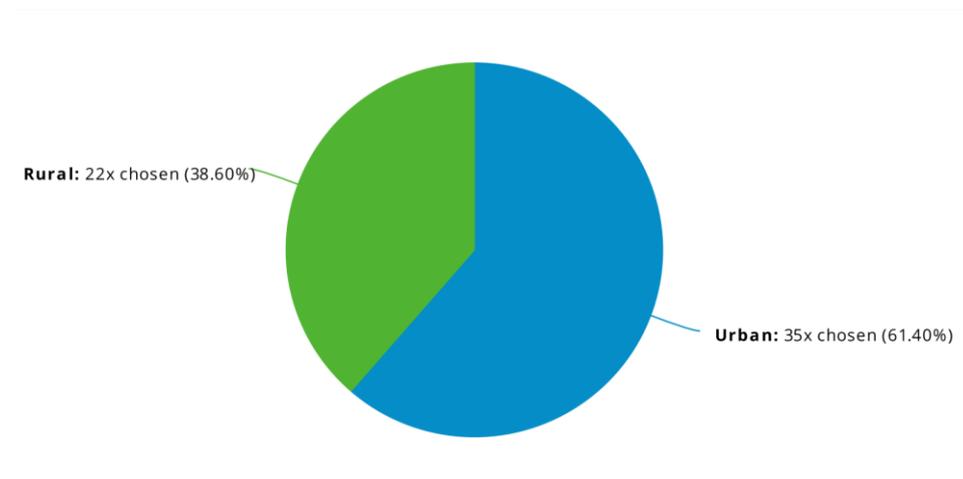
The online survey was viewed a total of 319 times with 62 respondents answering it. Of these 62 respondents, 19 completed the online survey in full. However, the majority of respondents did complete the majority of questions in the online survey. Response rates remained relatively high for set questions that afforded respondents a quick and easy way to indicate an answer, such as radio button options. Responses did reduce to around 40 when it came to longer free-text answers, but this in itself is a relatively good response. The online survey itself was designed to be short to maintain the focus of respondents.

## Which county do you work in?



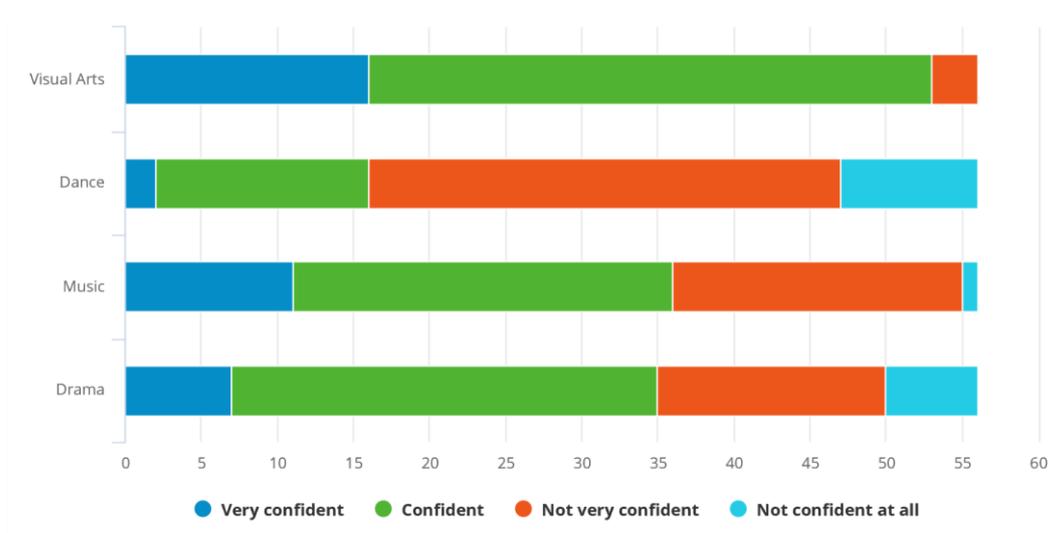
A total of 58 respondents chose to supply information for this question. While the large urban centres were well represented in the questionnaire it was good to see that this was balanced by the responses from around the rest of the country.

## Rural versus urban?



Almost two thirds of the 57 respondents who answered this question (61.04%), identified their school as based in an urban environment. This is very much in line with the responses from the initial question.

## Confidence in delivering the Arts?

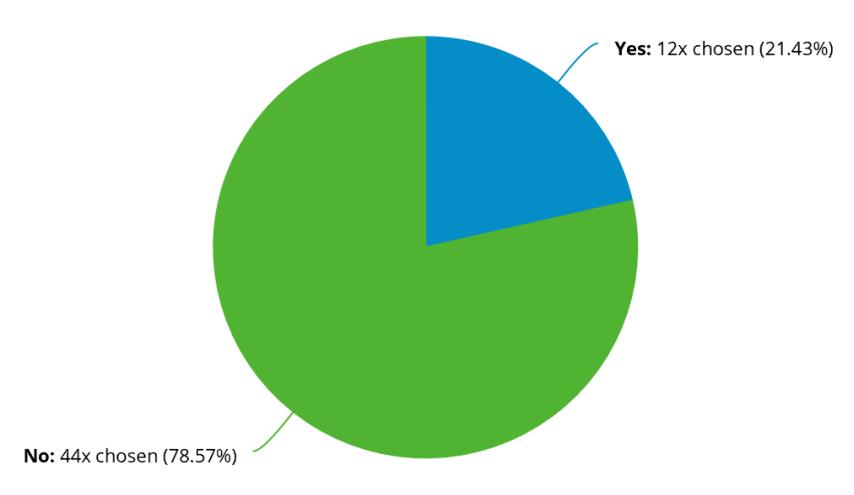


There are three curriculum areas in the Primary Arts curriculum in Ireland: Visual Arts, Music, Drama. Dance forms part of the Physical Education curriculum. However, it was included in this questionnaire because other jurisdictions, represented in the Arts Experts Group, offer dance as a subject within their primary curriculums and the results of this questionnaire will form part of a wider research report.

56 respondents chose to answer this question. The greatest level of confidence was recorded by respondents when they engaged in teaching Visual Art, followed by Music, Drama and Dance.

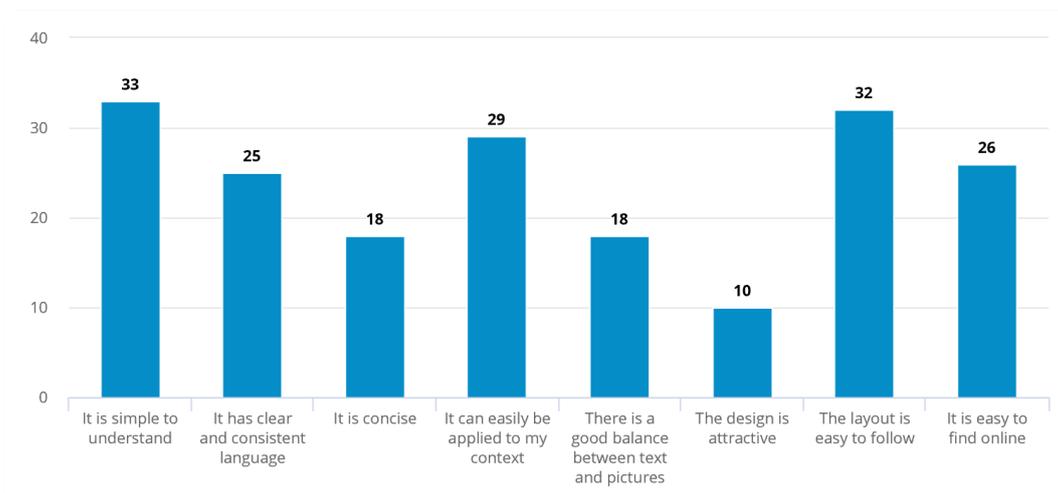
	Very confident 1		Confident 2		Not very confident 3		Not confident at all 4	
	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%
Visual Arts	16	28.57%	37	66.07%	3	5.36%	0	0%
Dance	2	3.57%	14	25%	31	55.36%	9	16.07%
Music	11	19.64%	25	44.64%	19	33.93%	1	1.79%
Drama	7	12.5%	28	50%	15	26.79%	6	10.71%

## Qualification in one or more Arts subjects?



Of the 56 respondents who answered this question, 12 stated that they had either a professional or academic qualification. The questionnaire did not look for further details from respondents so there is no breakdown of the subject areas related to the qualifications. However, it is encouraging to note that 21% of respondents do have a qualification in an Arts subject.

## Key features in a useful Arts resource



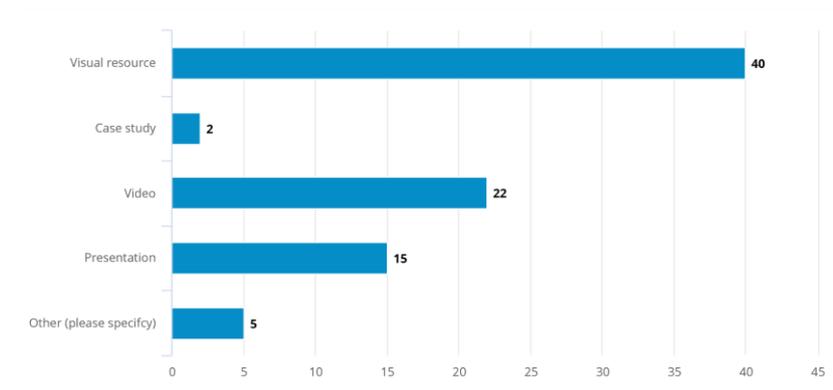
The next section of questions focused on the use of resources by teachers within arts subjects. 40 respondents gave feedback on what they considered to be the key features in a useful arts resource. The question was open to allow more than one option to be picked.

According to 33 respondents, the fact that a resource was simple to understand was deemed to be the most important feature with 32 agreeing that the layout needed to be easy to follow. 29 respondents required that easy application to the class context was a key feature. 26 respondents chose that it needed to be easy to find online. 25 felt that the resource had to use clear and consistent language. 18 noted that it needed to be concise and a further 18 agreed that there had to be a good balance between text and pictures. Only 10 felt that the design of the resource needed to be attractive.

Respondents were presented with a free-text box that asked them to select the most important key feature of those listed. There were 33 individual responses to this question with the majority agreeing that a resource needed to be easy to use and understand. Many also agreed that it needed to be easily located online, with one respondent stating the reason why as, “I don’t have the time, money or space for an extensive collection of posters, etc.” Teachers, however, also noted that the resource needed to be both easily applied within their own context and adaptable to other contexts and uses as required. One respondent noted that they must be able, “to adapt [the resource] to different classes and [it should] be clear and easy to follow-practical and visual also.”

These results initially suggest that for a resource to be used by teachers, ease of access and use and the fact that it saves them time is at the top of their list, followed by it being easily understood and useful in more than one situation.

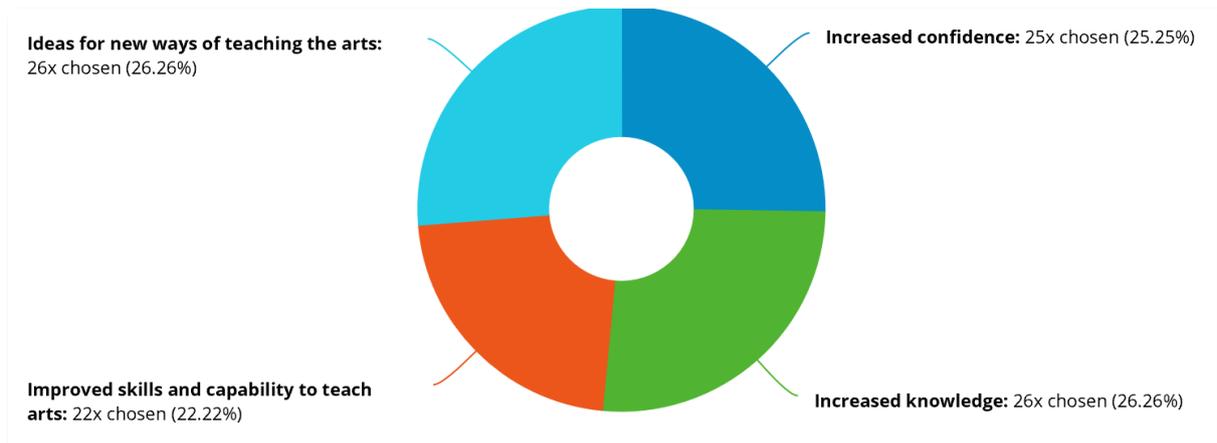
## Types of resources used most frequently



There were 40 responses to this question and respondents could choose more than one option. All respondents chose visual resource as the type they would use the most in class. 22 chose video and 15 chose presentation. Only 2 respondents stated they would use case studies as a resource in class. 5 respondents chose the “other” option and mentioned the use of, “artist biography’s/story books

(visual arts /drama inspiration)", project work and active learning, online tools, "My enthusiasm and demonstration" and teacher text books as well as PDST (Professional Development Service for Teachers) resources online.

## The main benefits from using Arts resources



There were 40 responses to this question and while it was open to choose more than one option no one chose to specify the "other" option. 26 respondents agreed that using Arts resources both increased their knowledge and gave them ideas for new ways of teaching the Arts. 25 respondents agreed that it increased confidence and 22 agreed that the resources improved their skills and capability to teach the Arts.

## Which specific Arts resources do you find most useful?

A free-text box was available for teachers to list off resources they found to be most useful. There were 21 responses to this question and they are summarised by subject below.

<b>Resources for Music</b>
Tin Whistle Made Easy, Ceol programme for music, Out of the Ark website, The Learning Station, The Singing Walrus, Hi5 and Debbie Doo on YouTube, Hi5 on YouTube, The Right Note, Music Generation, <a href="http://www.singup.org">www.singup.org</a> , A&C Black resource books, RTÉ - Music in the classroom
<b>Resources for Visual Arts:</b>
Packs on various artists, with background info, pictures to discuss and exploration activities from Twinkl.co.uk, Videos, The Usborne Art Treasury By Rosie Dickin, Pinterest, Online resources from art galleries, such as the Tate Gallery, <a href="http://www.iamanartist.ie">http://www.iamanartist.ie</a>

<b>Resources for Dance</b>
Boogie Beebies Dance CD, P.D.S.T. dance plans, Videos, Preschool Learn to Dance on YouTube, PSSl dance lesson plans
<b>Resources for Drama</b>
Drama for 5-11 yr olds, David Fulton Publishers, Theatre Games for Young Performers from Meriweather Publishing, Role play in the Early Years series from David Fulton Publishers, Drama 5-14 by Irene Rankin, Dramaresources.com, Aistear for Drama in small groups
<b>General, cross-curricular resources</b>
Music videos which combined movement/dance, the curriculum, bouncing ideas off colleagues, the teacher's own books, Google and You Tube searches

# Teacher interviews

Out of 35 respondents to this question, 14 agreed to be contacted at a later stage to discuss their answers in more detail. 5 teachers were randomly selected from this list of 14 and contacted. The summary of their interviews is recorded below.

The teacher interviews were recorded either using online teleconferencing software or over the phone. All teachers were asked the following five questions:

1. Could you tell me about one or two resources you've been able to use effectively with your pupils?
2. What features do you think makes the resource an effective one to use with your pupils?
3. Please describe how you have used the resource(s) with pupils in your classroom.
4. If you can, please describe how the resource(s) contributed to your own professional development e.g. improved confidence, greater knowledge and understanding, improved skills.
5. Could you tell me what type of impact the resource had on your pupils? e.g. increased engagement with expressive arts, pupils reporting increased enjoyment.

Most of the teachers interviewed tended to focus initially on one area of Arts education, usually either Visual Arts or Music, but were prompted during the interview to also discuss Dance and Drama. The responses to the interview questions also depended on the ages of the children involved and this is reflected in both the teachers' answers as well as the types of resources they use.

## **QUESTION 1:**

**Could you tell me about one or two resources you've been able to use effectively with your pupils?**

In response to this question all of the teachers listed off the various resources that they used with their classes.

Teacher 01 stated that they would use more traditional resources as opposed to online resources including visiting local museums/libraries and especially if there's an art exhibition on. They also said that they relied on other teachers in the school as a human resource. This worked especially well when it came to team teaching and sharing lessons and resources as they rotated between classes. The school would generally hold a day of STEM or Arts activities every second Wednesday

Teacher 02 relied on more visuals in class for Drama/Art activities as well as starting with a story rather than instructions. While this teacher also cited using the Ceol Programme for Music and Dance, which was devised by a company to support the Music curriculum in primary schools, they did note that they use their own choice of resources for Art or Drama. They would also use YouTube clips and channels for Dance because they were “very visual and easy to see and follow.” This school has a lot of SEN students and so the teacher also relies on the Speech and Language Therapist as a resource of expertise and collaboration when setting appropriate themes for the class. The teacher themselves has a very strong interest in Drama, which gives them the expertise to utilise it as a resource in their classroom. They also noted that the students’ own ideas were a great resource too.

Teacher 03 worked by using the early childhood curriculum known as Aistear. To support their work, they would create junk art and recyclable materials for printing (leaves, string, vegetables, bubble-wrap).

Teacher 04 stated that they would use online resources such as general images and images of different artists' work which are available on the internet. However, they would also use the local Art Gallery and have previously involved a local illustrator (and their notebooks as examples), an expert in digital audio recording and a percussionist as a resource when working with the students. One other resource they mentioned was a choreographer who worked with all classes in the school to teach Irish dancing for a Christmas show. Calendar events, such as Seachtain na Gaeilge (a celebration of Irish language and culture set around St. Patrick’s Day) were a resource that created an interesting point of focus. The school assembly was also a resource where time was given to allow different classes to present a work of Drama. This teacher also used YouTube as a resource to both publish the students’ work and to share it with parents

Teacher 05 used a variety of media, such as oil pastels and materials for cards, as a resource. Special event days, such as Easter and St. Patrick’s and Father’s Day as well as Seachtain na Gaelige were also a resource employed by this teacher. However, they stated that they would also use digital images, or their own drawings displayed on the classroom whiteboard and mentioned Pinterest as a website they would use. Teacher 05 also pointed out that the school has invested in about sixty violins, which are used in the school by all 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> class students for traditional Irish and classical music. When it came to Dance, and in particular Irish set dancing, other teachers were a great resource and because it was both social and enjoyable, the students were drawn to it much more. They also employed stories in English as inspiration for Drama scenes. Interestingly, this teacher also said that a resource they got a lot from was in visiting other schools to see what they did.

## **QUESTION 2:**

**What features do you think makes the resource an effective one to use with your pupils?**

Teacher 01 mentioned that students themselves were an effective resource. When they were involved in "reciprocal teaching" (where the students taught their peers), helped at times by their teacher, they seemed to be more invested in the learning. Other teachers were also mentioned as a further resource. Other resources they found to be effective were museums, the curriculum documents and Croke Park hours (hours that can be used by a school to help them plan learning activities). This teacher was able to judge the effectiveness of a resource based on how interested students were but also focused on what their understanding of it was as well. They felt using resources was best suited to project work and especially for their school's "Super Wednesdays", where students experienced either STEM or Art activities.

Teacher 02 stated that, for them, resources were most effective when they contained a visual element or were more visual-based or were a simple story or storyline that students could follow.

When asked this question, Teacher 03 said that resources which allowed the students to show their own ideas or involved them in their own discussions were most effective. They also stated that they found Google images to be an effective resource. Some elements of effective resources that this teacher pointed out were that they also needed to be cheap and cost-effective as well as adaptable/recyclable.

Teacher 04 said that resources were very effective when they could be shown on a screen. They needed to be colourful and almost tangible. Another effective resource, however, is a good teacher or a good outside facilitator. They judged a resource as effective based on how interested their students were.

Teacher 05 stated that having access to the internet, in general, was an effective resource. They based their judgement on the effectiveness of a resource on how excited students were about it, saying that a lot depended on how the resource is "delivered" to the students.

## **QUESTION 3:**

**Please describe how you have used the resource(s) with pupils in your classroom.**

Teacher 01 said that they based some of the choice of resources on their students' own interests. For example, a project about animals and their habitats. Resources were especially good in kick-starting an idea, as the driving force behind them, or even to help deepen student understanding.

Teacher 02 said that the resources needed to start with a story to draw in the students. They also said that they used resources to help them in fulfilling curriculum objectives.

Teacher 03 stated that open-ended themes worked well with their students and really engaged them when they worked on Junk Art activities, such as construction of a school/town design (using recycled boxes) or within Aistear times in class as a lightning activity.

Teacher 04 said that they based their choice of resources on their students' own creativity. They also said that they would display resources on the board for all students to see. This worked well in Art activities, for example weaving. However, the resource was sometimes used as the spark or prompt to create interest and engagement in an activity, or to inspire. The teacher said that when it came to choreography for dance, both they and the students found that it needed to be a more adult-led activity.

Teacher 05 said that when they used resources, they were almost always teacher-led, but that they were used at times to start an activity with the students or to begin a discussion about, for example, how a work of art might have been created. Resources were best used when they related to students' experiences or previous knowledge. This enabled students to brainstorm at the start of an activity. Sometimes the teacher also utilised a resource during class/group discussion, which would lead to individual creation.

#### **QUESTION 4:**

**If you can, please describe how the resource(s) contributed to your own professional development e.g. improved confidence, greater knowledge and understanding, improved skills.**

Teacher 01 stated that it was great to have teachers in the same school who were experienced in teaching, for example, Art. This also meant that they could share this experience throughout the school, and this became powerful in a team-teaching environment. They did note that, being part of a large school made it easier for the teachers to share their skills as there was more expertise available to draw from.

Teacher 02 said that the resources they used in Music and Art helped them be more confident in these areas of the curriculum that they were teaching. It also meant that using a pre-designed programme they had been trained in ensured they were following the curriculum for their students. However, they did also state that they had expertise in Drama and so relied on their own professional judgement in that area of the curriculum. They did also say that being able to combine resources in projects was very important. They also made the point that resources and CPD courses are helpful to have when first starting off in teaching.

Teacher 03 said their own confidence after attending professional development meant that they could better fuel their students' imaginations. They also agreed with the sentiments of Teacher 02 in that being able to combine resources in projects was very important as well as being able to integrate subjects in projects.

Teacher 04 stated that the use of outside facilitators was very helpful when it came to learn of new ideas, skills and so this helped them to become more confident. This teacher would like more regular and returning professional development. They also noted that the curriculum is very diverse and so it's hard to stay on top of everything.

Teacher 05 stated that learning how to use resources has made their job easier because the lessons were fun and enjoyable for the students.

#### **QUESTION 5:**

**Could you tell me what type of impact the resource had on your pupils? e.g. increased engagement with expressive arts, pupils reporting increased enjoyment.**

Teacher 01 said that while access to museums and the like was good, it was access to the skills of other teachers which was the resource that enabled better team teaching, co-teaching and by default also helped the students. It was good for students to have another adult voice/perspective in the room as they worked. First-hand access to work in a museum setting was also pointed out as important.

Teacher 03 saw that the resources promoted creative thinking within their students with open-ended tasks allowing them to use their imagination more. This teacher also noted the resources also enabled a focus on groupwork and collaboration. This in turn has led to students becoming more confident.

Teacher 04, in agreement with Teacher 03, also noted that students became more confident. They also stated that their students enjoyed performance, dance, dramas and art lessons more. Making use of different resources informed students and also broadened students' interest in other genres of production within a subject, for example, illustration.

Teacher 05 reiterated the comment from Teacher 04, that their students enjoyed performance, dance, dramas and art lessons more. Teacher 05 also agreed with Teacher 04 that the use of different resources broadened students' interests. This meant that students were more excited in what was performed and also understood it more. They stated that the more real and more visual that resources were and the more hands-on the students were, the more they learned, understood and enjoyed.

### **Anything else?**

At the end of the recorded interviews, the teachers were asked if there was anything else they wished to add. Teacher 01 said that there was space in Primary schools for broadening pedagogy and looking at process as well as product, especially when dealing with the conceptual/personal side of Art. They also stated that it was important that the teacher be seen as a co-learner with students and not always the expert in the room. Students appreciate it when they see their teacher is learning too.

