

# Atlantic Technological University's Artist-in-Residence Programme for Students of Early Childhood Education and Care

## Introduction

Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Galway and Mayo campuses were delighted to be awarded an artist in residence funded by the Arts Council for 2022–2023 to work with the students undertaking the BA programme in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The arts project *Scéalta* (Stories, Curiosity, Engagement, Active learning, Language, Theatre, *Aistear*) was funded under the Arts Council's Young People, Children and Education (YPCE) programme, which was made available for the first time to colleges specifically providing ECEC programmes in 2022.

This article identifies the positive learning experiences for the BA programme of having an artist in residence working with the students and young children. It highlights the challenges faced and how creativity and the arts can unite communities across diverse perspectives, including social, language, cultural, and minority groups.

## Creativity in ECEC

When we think of creativity and the arts in early years settings, we think of what Loris Malaguzzi describes as *the hundred languages of children* (Edwards et al., 1993). Malaguzzi suggests that children have a hundred ways to express themselves, to listen, to marvel, to discover, and to invent. According to Gardner (2011), people have the potential to develop a combination of nine separate intelligences, including musical, visual, bodily, inter- and intrapersonal intelligences.



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Atlantic Technological University was awarded an artist-in-residence programme for 2022–2023, funded by the Arts Council, for an artist to work with students undertaking the university's BA programme in Early Childhood Education and Care. This article describes how the programme arose, the creative initiatives that took place, and the results for students, children, and everyone involved.

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A recent report found that exposure to cultural and creative activities fosters civic and democratic identities and the development of social skills (European Commission, 2023). We recognise the importance of a strong focus on creativity and the arts in the degree programme in which we lecture, offering opportunities for students to be curious, creative, and playful, to think critically, and to explore their multiple languages and intelligences while studying at ATU. This was the catalyst for our application for the Arts Council's YPCE artist-in-residence programme.

The programme was extended to recognise further education programmes in ECEC in higher-education institutions in Ireland from September 2022. Our team at ATU were one of the first universities offering the BA programme to receive this prestigious award. The Arts Council's YPCE residencies support artists or arts organisations to spend an academic year in residence in a higher-education institution in Ireland. The aim is to provide opportunities for artists to develop their skills and experience in education settings, and to develop their artistic work in a collaborative and supportive environment. The artist-in-residence programme also provides opportunities for teaching staff to engage with artists in creating bespoke creative initiatives with and for the students.

## Artist in residence

The BA team at ATU were delighted to host Clíodhna Noonan, an early years arts creator, producer, and programmer for arts events with children and families, as artist in residence on the BA ECEC programme from September 2022 to June 2023. Clíodhna presented performances of tailor-made theatre and visual art experiences for children aged 0–6 years, including *Silver Tree* (2009) *Dream Train* (2011), *Mora* (2022), a puppetry workshop, and WAAW, a non-musical adventure with Joeri Wens from Belgium.

The performances took place on both Galway and Mayo campuses. ECEC students could experience the performances, reflect on how they affected them, and share their reflections with young children. They could also experience these performances with young children and families present at community events. These really inspired the students, who saw how children responded uninhibitedly to the magic of performance.

Children and families from early years settings, family support centres, direct provision centres, Ukraine, local primary schools, parent and toddler groups, and an active age group had the opportunity to experience these community events on ATU campus, in libraries, and in community centres. The ATU team also worked with Galway County Childcare Committee. Over 1,000 children had at least one arts experience, while adult engagement included 84 students, lecturers, parents, and childminders. Lecturers on the Mayo campus could also

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spend a day exploring their creativity with a Mosaic workshop hosted by Akvile Simanskiene.

## Looking ahead

The artist-in-residence project was extended following feedback from students, who expressed an interest in hosting Clíodhna in their early years settings. The result, *SCEALTA: Our Bus, Our Journey!*, was awarded the Arts in Education Portal Documentation Award in 2023 – the first award on this portal for the ECEC sector (Arts in Education, 2023).

As a follow-up, ATU's BA Early Childhood Education and Care team, led by the present author, were appointed co-ordinators of the Arts in Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare pilot project, funded by the Arts Council and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) from May to December 2023. This will explore how the Draft Principles for Engaging with the Arts in Early Learning and Care (DCEDIY, 2022) can be supported in practice in ECEC settings.

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What we learned from this initial artist-in-residence programme is that creativity and the arts can unite communities across diverse perspectives. Children and families who did not have English as a first language could still participate at performances. Many performances were emotional, bringing people of all ages together. BA students at ATU reflected on how the programme helped them reflect on their practice and their role as educators in supporting children's creativity, curiosity, and explorations through play.

ATU was delighted to have this opportunity to support student engagement with creativity and the arts, but also to bring the arts into the communities of Galway and Mayo. Students, lecturers, children, and their families were inspired and developed new skills and competencies. The programme fostered civic and democratic identity. ATU *Scéalta Eile* (Stories, Curiosity, Engagement, Active learning, Language, Theatre, *Aistear* Extended Initiative for Learners in Early years education) has been awarded funding for the academic year 2023–2024. Our creativity and the arts in *Aistear* at ATU continue.

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## REFERENCES

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Atlantic Technological University Artist in Residence Clíodhna Noonan, performing *Dream Train* at Tuam Community Childcare Centre as part of the Arts in Education Documentation Portal Award ; *Our Bus Our Journey*.