

NYCI's Certificate in Youth Arts

Nicky Peacock is an artist based in Galway. She has been working part-time with the Galway Diocesan Youth Services in youth information and in their Mol an Óige after schools project. In this article Nicky writes about her experience and learning to date on the Certificate in Youth Arts Course 2009/2010. The

Certificate in Youth Arts is a part-time, year-long university level course of study in Irish Youth Arts Practice and Policy. It is coordinated by the National Youth Council of Ireland and accredited by NUI Maynooth (Department of Applied Social Studies).



When I first heard of NYCI's Certificate in Youth Arts, I thought this would be a great opportunity to learn how I could bring my knowledge as an artist into my work with the youth service. The certificate group has now met on three occasions. The initial group interview was a workshop where all the potential participants got the opportunity to meet and work together. We then met for modules one and two in October and for module three in November.



In October it was exciting to get together again, and the feeling of group identity was tangible as we gathered for the first module at the Sean O'Casey Centre, East Wall in Dublin.

After registration and meeting everyone we had an overview of the course and an exploration of our group identity with Majella Perry and Rebecca Bartlett, the course tutors. Exploring ways of

learning both as practitioner and learner, we audited our personal skills and experiences and then defined our personal philosophies of youth arts. We examined different art forms and explored what we personally understood to be youth arts. The tutors encouraged us to have a reflective attitude to our own learning throughout the course and to consider the actions we must take to achieve our personal goals. We spent time getting to know each other and reflected on how we place ourselves professionally in terms of youth arts.

During the second module, Creative Social Education, Maurice Devlin, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth, spoke about the range of supports available to us as students of Maynooth University. Orlaith Mc Bride from The National Association of Youth Drama (NAYD) gave us a comprehensive introduction to the history of policy making in terms of youth arts in Ireland. The presentation



highlighted for me how important it is to work persistently in trying to influence policy in the sector.



Composer Elaine Agnew had each of us making music during her workshop. Her passion for music showed me how the dedication, talent and confidence of the artist, can make it possible for a novice to be inspired by an excellent experience of an art form. Her workshop has motivated me to develop the use of sound and rhythm in my own practice as an artist, which will also develop my youth arts practice. In Author Seamus Cashman's

creative writing workshop, it was his total respect for the poetry and writing of each participant that impressed me. I felt that we were all on an equal footing and that whatever I thought of and wrote was valid. With mercurial and calm skill he imparted the essence of the sheer enjoyment of being free to write. After these fine workshops we had time to review our experiences as a group. I find these group reviews very helpful for reflection.

Identifying the expectations of young people today, we looked at the challenges and risks that they face. There was a wide variety of opinions about what young people might expect from a youth arts project and we each started to voice our personal opinions more strongly. Our visit to the Young Critics Forum during the Dublin Theatre Festival was a strong affirmation for me of the benefits for young people engaging in critical thinking and discussion in the arts.



Meeting for the third module in DanceHouse, we prepared for the site visits to The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) and the Rialto Youth Project by looking at two Youth Arts Projects: Tell your Story and the Sparkling Seven. Doing this I started to recognise the



importance of partnerships, alliances and collaborations that had been brought to our attention. We also looked at project planning and documentation in the light of these projects.

A consistent part of all our learning is that we are taught best practice through examining models of excellence. This is both encouraging and a challenge because it shows what

is possible with excellent project management from the start. The work of the Rialto Youth Project is the result of decades of dedicated efforts by young people, community activists, youth workers and artists.

For me, it was instructive to hear how Fiona Whelan (Artist in Residence) considers the primacy of her identity as an artist to be the most valuable asset that she can bring to the community. At IMMA we had a presentation by Helen O' Donoghue, Head of Education and Community Programmes, which showed us the structure of the youth



programme at the museum. We were guided around a current exhibition in IMMA by staff members known as Mediators. We also had time to get creative in Studio 8, the dedicated studio space for young people at IMMA. My interest was taken by the potential which artists in residence at IMMA have to engage with the public, including young people.

Working with an enthusiastic mix of strong personalities, who are all interested in maximising their contribution in the area of youth arts, is exciting and motivating. I am looking at my own role from different angles and am learning the importance of clarity of roles within projects. I'm also reflecting on the importance of the goals, which the young people and those they work with, set out to achieve.

For more information on the Certificate in Youth Arts visit www.youtharts.ie/content/nyci-certificate-youth-arts

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