

## Book Reviews



**Denise Lyons (editor)**

*Creative Studies for the Caring Professions*

Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2010. pp €26.99

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I find it difficult to reach a conclusion on this book, especially for the purposes of a review. I keep changing my mind. There is a lot I like about it, and a lot I don’t. It’s very clear that a huge amount of work has gone into this book and it is important to recognise that.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning each chapter are interesting, well researched and thorough. The reader, you get the impression, is supposed to be able to immerse herself in a range of perspectives and approaches to working through the arts.

However, perhaps in the effort to be rigorous and broad, something has been lost and the book falls between too many stools. The theoretical approaches become repetitive chapter after chapter, because at heart what they each do is make an argument for the validity and usefulness of using the arts in the caring professions. While this argument is important, it’s a departure point, but the book never seems to ... well ... depart. It doesn’t go anywhere.

While many arguments are made about the usefulness and benefits of creativity in Section One, beyond the usefulness of the arts as a methodology, a more rounded perspective is never put forward: that provision for access to the arts, for everyone, is a right in itself. Disappointingly, only two chapters in the whole book make the point that workshops should have artistic objectives as well as social ones. There is an overall lack of discussion on artistic outcomes or development, of art for art’s sake.

Section Two aims to focus on practical uses for the creative arts. I liked the issues raised on game consoles and rewards in residential units, I thought it was honest and smart and in general enjoyed reading that chapter which was insightful and sensitively written by Mario R.J. Corbin. I also really enjoyed the chapter by Lucy Hyland, Sheila Kissane and Joanne Seymour on sibshops which was insightful, reflective and practical. This was also true of the excellent chapter by Gerry Morgan on drama in mental health settings. The approach of these chapters, which focused on the practical, the tasks, and the groups they were concerned with, avoided the lack of balance that other chapters suffered from. I was disappointed that many of the practical activities comprising Section Three, which I would regard as warm ups or games, were described as ‘workshops’.

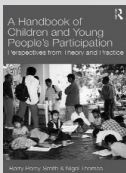
Missing from the book is discussion or argument about quality experiences for the participants. Somewhere between the weighty body of research underpinning reasons for using the arts and the actual execution of a workshop or activity, a discussion of artistic expertise or skill is absent.

In spite of the wealth of references and academic arguments for play, for creativity and for the arts, I am unsatisfied after reading the book. Something of substance is missing – a drilling down into what a group’s engagement with the arts will look and feel like, what their experiences will be and how it can be facilitated in a meaningful way.

The book feels like it wants to present a ‘can do’ attitude but I worry what will happen to the workshop leader with no background in the artform in which they’re working if the workshop goes off track, is rejected by the group, or if the group move through the material quicker than expected and need to be challenged. I often use the analogy in my own work of a wet box to describe the pitfalls of repeating someone else’s workshop without the expertise that underpins it: like putting a wet box back together, it will have the outline shape of the original but is in danger of not being fit for purpose in any other way. The reader, presumably a student about to move into one of the caring professions, is not given enough support or depth to confidently move through many of the suggested workshops and activities.

There are some great ‘treats’ to be found. In general any of the shaded text boxes provide an interesting and useful coda to that chapter, such as the twenty top theorists on children’s art, and the compilation of various factors that inhibit or promote creativity in workshops. The witty sketches in Paul Timoney’s chapter were a treat also and it’s a pity they were not used throughout the book.

Some chapters presume a certain amount of knowledge and common ground on the part of the reader, others presume you know nothing. This again made me ask what this book wants to *be* – a handbook, an argument for the arts, an academic text? Perhaps the problem is that in its ambition to be all of those things, it’s in danger of being none and much of the worthwhile content falls through the cracks in the process.



**Edited by Barry Percy-Smith and Nigel Thomas**

*A Handbook of Children and Young People’s Participation: Perspectives from Theory and Practice*

Oxford: Abingdon, 2010, 378pp. £24.99

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Interest in children and young people’s participation has flourished since the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. The UNCRC specifies a broad range of children’s rights, including their right to form views and to express these views freely in all matters affecting them (Article 12). Article 12 has resulted in the emergence worldwide of a myriad of participatory initiatives aimed at ‘hearing young voices’ and involving children and young people in decision-making on matters concerning them. In Ireland ratification of the Convention in 1992 was followed by the publication of the National Children’s Strategy