

***COLÁISTE NAÍSIÚNTA EALAÍNE IS DEARADH***  
***NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN***

A Recognised College of the National University of Ireland  
*Coláiste Aitheanta d'ollscoil na hÉireann*

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**Professional Master of Education**  
**Reflective Practice Assignment 2020-21**

*The art you practice and the art you teach.*

Describe the relationship between the art you practice and the art you teach. How do these different sides of your identity - artist and teacher - inform and interact with each other?

Your assignment should show evidence of reflection on your own practice and experience, both as a student-teacher and as a student-artist. You should draw on some key sources that have influenced you in your work.

## Education, Art and Access from a Working-Class Perspective

What is the cause of mediocre teaching and unfulfilling learning experiences in school? I proffer that some reasons include the teacher's need to sustain their creative fervour and practice plus create meaningful learning experiences and build relationships with learners whilst trying to ensure that teaching aligns with state examination expectations. Formal education can offer opportunity but it can also mediocrise, restrain and monotonise which raises the question of its efficacy and merit. Aside from these practical problems in education, there are subtler issues in greater need of attention. This reflective writing will explore authority and autonomy as they relate to current systems of education and how my art seeks transformation through the eradication of institutionalised classism, along with my official teaching experience having fired the sense of the need for abolition of the curriculum and a complete reframing of formal learning ranging from policies to teacher selection and attitude.

As an artist I am interested in play. As a teacher, play is possible, but always in a formal learning environment where it is regulated. Formal education is a game, albeit one with serious consequences. The teacher is expected to master spontaneous learning whilst abiding by curricular constraints. These topics have been covered extensively in previous writing including *The Institution and Social Control - Reformation, Refurbishment or Abolition?* and *Global Critical Revolutionary Hiphop Pedagogy. From The Cipher to The Classroom - Pathology or Promise?* There is also the matters of success, agreeability with a particular model of teaching and the reasoning behind why some individuals excel in the training and appear to be of the type which the training programme has preference for. This tends to align with state requirements, but is questionable based on the terms and conditions upon which enrollment and selection are based. My interpretation of this is that it boils down to class which I will expand upon throughout the essay.

My student artist-teacher identity and journey will frame the research with the focus shifting between second and third level education based on my experience during school placement for the Professional Master of Education (PME) course at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD). The main themes of my art practice will be viewed in light of education being so fixed as a system and not an experience, leaving little room for moments of joy and profundity, thus ultimately hampering the lifelong impact on students' lives.

A general critique of course content and the assessment framework will point toward notions around autonomy as related to the student identity both from a personal perspective and in terms of post primary students within the system.

I entered the PME as a Bachelor of Arts graduate of Sculpture & Expanded Practice and Critical Cultures in Fine Art. Also known as *Temper-Mental MissElayneous*, I had earned my stripes as a performer in the Irish Hiphop and poetry world in Ireland since 2011 commencing with engagement as an artist activist in the global Occupy movement of 2011, the Dublin rendition of which was known as 'Occupy Dame Street'.



***Occupy Dame Street events featuring Temper-Mental MissElayneous (TMM), 2011.  
Photographer: (L) Colin Foley, (R) Kifah Ajami.***

As an Access student coming from homelessness into third level education at NCAD in 2015 the themes addressed in my poetic and musical work remained pertinent to the visual artwork pursued through my BA. As with songs such as 'Proletarian Restitution', the subjects of restriction, oppression and redemption in the context of class were continued in a visual art manner through projects such as 'Transients' - a public installation presented as part of the NCAD sculpture exhibition of 2017, in which I exhibited a lived-in car with an audio installation sounding on repeat from within the vehicle - a call made to 'Homeless Freephone', a Dublin City Council service which deals with the arrangement of accommodation for service users.



**(L) Elayne Adamczyk Harrington pictured with 'Transients' in Red Square of NCAD at the 'Some Things Should Stay Taboo' 2017 sculpture exhibition. (R) The 'L' plate component of the car installation (vinyl, printed text of manifesto, 140mmx140mm)**

Elayne Harrington AKA *Temper-Mental MissElayneous*

## Transients

This outstallation is part of the *Some Things Should Stay Taboo* NCAD Sculpture exhibition 2017.

The audio installation is a recording of a call made to 'Homeless Freephone', a Dublin City Council service which deals with the arrangement of accomodation for service users...**Or Transients.**

This term refers to those who stay awake all night, those who seek shelter, the ones who live in cars, move from pillar to post, shift belongings and children from hotel to hotel, those who walk miles day to day, sit down and are moved on, those in the 24 hour wet house, the dry house, the stair well, on the bridge, in the door way...

**Those** who are in society but on the fringes of the community.  
**Those** who are in one system and apart from another.  
**Those** who have created their own systems and communities.  
**Those** that must live this undetermined existence in this constant state of **transience**

Prior to and during my undergraduate years I was representing Poetry Ireland and Axis Ballymun as a teacher and group facilitator in numerous projects and initiatives such as the Poetry Ireland Writers-in-Schools scheme. Many of these, including the Junior Certificate Schools Library Project (JCSP) on *Wrapparound*, along with other professional endeavours brought me into the classrooms and the staff rooms of various second level institutions ranging from the Bronx, where Hiphop was born to across Ireland, where Hiphop is loved. Indeed, schools do love Hiphop, but this cultural movement remains extracurricular. The experience of bringing rap, poetry and performance into schools on a short-term project basis offered me a viewpoint of the institution as seen and experienced from a more departed position than that of a conventionally trained teacher.



**TMM & the 1st year 'Wrapparound' students from Trinity Comprehensive Ballymun, April, 2014.**

My practice addresses the repressive nature of society and the constraint of its social systems, referring to conditions and injustices such as addiction and alcoholism and covers areas such as access to education and homelessness along with generational poverty, classism and Working-Class experience in an autoethnographic manner. As I entered into formal teaching it was curious as to where this very raw, personal and adult approach would fit into any teaching programme or unit of learning pitched at 12 to 18 year olds and within a curriculum framework. It is one thing to understand the social implications regarding students in DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), it is another thing to put that to good use in accordance with teaching coursework. One example of where my identity and my artistry were applied in a balanced and enriching manner of teaching was for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) classes which I covered for my host teacher during my first school placement at Ballinteer Community School (BCS). I arranged a visit from a gentleman - a former drug addict in recovery, now the pastor of a church and a homeless outreach organiser. Seán told his personal story and the class engaged in a Q&A where students learned about Seán's past life, his leadership roles as well as his commitment and service to God and community.



***(L) Seán held the position of outreach coordinator at Aras Community Addiction services (Drug Free And Recovery Assistance Project). (R) Seán is a volunteer at 'No Bucks' & The Lighthouse organisations.***

My connections and knowledge in the area of drug community work plus my experience of homelessness are an asset in this respect and this is one of the occasions where my art practice as a socially engaged practitioner was actually useful and was extremely constructive learning as well as adhering to the curricular coursework. My ability to organise and coordinate in a sensitive and careful manner was at play here. So many of these details of my character, values and talents were hampered, rendered irrelevant or had to be omitted because of the conventions of the course. The PME did not seem quite able to direct a student from my background and of my practice. I expect it is a lot to do with the post primary curriculum not being hospitable to my approach. Although much assistance was given in the course, I could never seem to create what it was they seemed to be 'looking for' in developing lessons and teaching. I had been able to self-direct beautifully in my former years of formal and informal learning, but this course seemed to paralyse that ability in me. Much of the learning felt oppressive and dysfunctional, a lot like how school felt. I think it can be chalked off simply as institutional pathology. In spite of this, I persevered and my spirits were always lifted by the very real and healthy experiences that were had with students. I was able to connect with the entire school in a way that would have been otherwise impossible without my pre formal education expertise.

Another event I coordinated was performance poet Karl Parkinson visiting BCS for College Awareness Week (CAW). As well as witnessing live renditions of several of Karl's seminal works, students were encouraged by the autodidactic poet to embrace their own stories and got a sense of the value of all types of education, whether formal, self directed or mentorship.



*Performance poet Karl Parkinson at Ballinteer Community School for College Awareness Week, 2019.*

The organisation of this event was an exceptional stride for a PME student and I requested support from Poetry Ireland who agreed to pay Karl for his work. For Parkinson to discuss the elephant in the room issue of class to the entire school for CAW in the form of his own published poetry, in his colloquial eloquent way was ambitious, transformative and thrilling. This drove research, activities and themes for the transition year unit of learning carried out later in that term. This eventualised as a documentary media project on Karl and his work but could not be finalised due to COVID. However, there were huge benefits for this culturally diverse class through expressive multi-language exercises and performance tasks creating greater student collaboration across Spanish, Italian, German, Arabic and Irish cultural backgrounds. This project offered learning that presents a future Ireland with the chance to truly recognise and respect Working-Class culture in a deeper way. It serves the entire community and can extend its reach to the arts by acknowledging the largely invisible role of class in the art world, at a time when efforts around gender and racial inclusion have become increasingly commonplace (Cascone, S., 2018). This is the way to create understanding of class matters in Ireland.





***'4 Elements' - A transition year mini documentary/show featuring performance poet Karl Parkinson.  
(L) Students watching a screening of an interview with Karl as research.***

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**BCS 4th year Documentary project - Karl Parkinson interview questions**

Seán:

The theme of our mini documentary project is 'Mind, Body, Heart and Soul', you of course are our subject and we are so happy to have you as our guest once again at Ballinteer Community School.  
What are your thoughts on these 4 elements and tell us - are they relevant to your work?

Sonia:

When did you start writing and why? Do you remember the very moment and what was your first poem?

Abril:

How do you feel when you are writing? Has that evolved over time?

Fernando:

It is clear from your work that you are inspired by working class roots and this has been a huge driving force in your writing  
...Is there anywhere else you get your inspiration from?

Mary:

In an article you stated "I didn't meet any other writers til I was 30 years old." Why is that and how did it feel when you finally met others like yourself?

Katelyn:

Do you find it difficult to write in such a personal way?

Ciara:

You visited Ballinteer Community School for College Awareness Week in November last year.

"Your performances were awe-inspiring" and thanks again for being our guest poet.

Do you enjoy visiting schools and can you tell us about your involvement with education and community work?

Aymen:

You said that your book 'The Blocks' is your biggest breakthrough so far...(it is easy to see why), but could you tell us why do you think so?

Ali:

You talk about victory a lot in the article we referred to earlier... "Victory over loss, victory over poverty..."

Could you elaborate on the topic of victory in light of your background and your status as a writer for us?

Mariana:

A simple but vital question, Karl: why do you want to be a poet?

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Claudia:

What was the overall mood or feelings you experienced during the writing of 'The Blocks'?

Mousaab:

During our mini doc project, we studied the work of another poet Noel Sweeney.

In his work 'Stay Alive' he refers to the statistics of male suicide in Ireland - 1 a day.

Do you refer to suicide in many of your works and if so do you feel comfortable discussing suicide in your work?

Maria:

Why did you choose poetry and literature as your 'job'?

Isabel:

How do you think/hope 'the Blocks' might impact other people who maybe grew up in similar circumstances as you in O Devaney Gardens?

FINAL QUESTION:

Angel:

Were you always interested in poetry...how about in school?

***Questions created and compiled by students for an interview with Parkinson.***

Class is an often intensely disliked and misunderstood topic. In relation to class and the arts I have written extensively on the topic in my BA thesis entitled *Verbal Revolution and the Language of the Oppressed - Language and Class - From Beat to Flow*. The PME course has been an opportunity to observe the type of values associated with a competitive curriculum based on a point system and this has obvious implications for children that come from what the Department of Education refers to as 'disadvantaged communities' (DEIS, n.d.). In *'Education for a Changing World' the chapter on equity* discusses barriers to participation in education and how to tackle the problem through integrated action between education, health, labour, training agencies, social welfare, with equal cooperation between schools, parents and the wider community (1992, p.45). Within my real experiences in schools as a formal educator I have not heard class mentioned as a word, a concept, much less a lived reality of the bulk of students in attendance at the school. If the issues are not openly discussed and the conversation driven by people from these under represented groups, why then is it any use to create policies that insist upon values that are not being lived out in the classrooms and staff rooms?

Is it inappropriate to talk about it - the whole basis of the DEIS policies and HEA access plan is based on precisely this - why then aren't we discussing it and imbuing the curricula with Working-Class culture and experience? There is a desperate need for Traveller culture to be inserted into the Irish historical studies at primary and second level. Other than myself using the terminology and referencing specific terms such as 'Traveller', 'Working-Class' and 'Black Irish', I have never heard the terms uttered in a classroom. In the code of professional conduct for teachers it is explicitly stated that respect, integrity, trust and care are ethics that educators are to uphold (2016, p. 6). It is imperative that we see very real implementation of this ethical standing in formal education if it is to be believed and trusted that these policies are deeply effective and transformative for the betterment of these social groups. It is another question as to who determines that entry into and completion of formal education is essential for quality of life and who measures that quality of life as the standard that is aligned with these cultures' values and is not just drawing them into

education for the benefit of the economy. If these people are being included but their cultural backgrounds are being left outside of the institution, rather not fully embraced, it rouses suspicion as to what its true function and purpose is. Inclusion and diversification as proposed by the HEA (Higher Education Authority) poses the question of autonomy and I will cover this topic through my research project that will be submitted this year.

Further to this, as democratic as higher education strives to be and in light of state efforts, namely, the Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH), the lived experience of undergraduate and postgraduate education at a predominantly middle-class institution can differ vastly from the promises of inclusion, diversity and opportunity as per the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education from 2015-2019. The PATH Strand 1 regards Initial Teacher Education and states one of its aims as:

To increase the number of students from under-represented groups entering initial teacher education; and provide more role models for students from these groups, demonstrating that there are pathways open to them to realise their potential through education (Programme for Access to Higher Education | Higher Education Authority, n.d.).

Being from a 'disadvantaged community' myself, I produce art around those internal and external experiences. Although the thematic of relationships of power and oppression have not been fully applicable or appreciated in a course that sets its sight on producing post primary art teachers. It is my personal experience that the path from primary to third level has been one layered with subtle and overt forms of discrimination and exclusion based upon status and social class and my interpretation is that it still exists, if in a more polite form. Regarding the middle-class top heavy agenda it seems to be an attitude of become "like us", not come as you are and become a "part of". Regardless of the striving to include or draw upon the talents of under-represented groups, recent studies within the realm of art profession have shown some disappointing findings:

People from working-class backgrounds are vastly underrepresented in arts jobs, according to a new report from a team of sociologists in the UK. Only 18.2 percent of people working in music, performing and visual arts, come from lower-class origins, found the study, which draws from interviews with 237 participants. The problem is reinforced at the top, which is occupied by those who tend to believe they got there on their own merits and that class and social obstacles are limited (Cascone, 2018).

This concludes that there is still fear and contempt stacked against Working-Class people by the institution and by the people who work within it. As with everything social, both education and profession are inextricably linked to class. In the chapter 'Coming to Class Consciousness' from *Where we Stand: Class Matters* by bell hooks we see an assertion of the dichotomy familiar to many artist teachers. 'No one in my family wanted me to pursue art; they wanted me to get a good job, to be a teacher'. Black folks could not make a living as artists' (2012 p.31). The world seems to see the artist as separate from other professions, such as a teacher and what is a problem for the privileged is an even bigger problem for the less privileged. Since race is also a class matter, it is easy to see how in an Irish context and indeed internationally, it is more difficult to acquire education, more so art-teacher education as a working class person. I am less interested in talk of access and inclusion and more committed to promoting true appreciation of working class culture, history and background. Indeed formal learning from primary to university will happily consider itself a shareholder in the creative capital produced by its alumni, if it is of the quality and value that the institutions deem appropriate, but this entire mindset around quality and qualification needs to be addressed and challenged as much as hierarchy does across the board in education nationwide.

In closing I want to refer to cautiousness of formal learning. Referring to my work *Transients*, for example, I ask the question: how many standard gallery-goers do you think would recognise the audio installation element...the DCC freephone music on hold? Well, how many folks who read Irish Arts Review are looking for a bed through the Dublin Region Homeless Executive? The answer is contained within. There is a chasm of division between who gets to see, interpret, create, critique and teach art and it is *still* down to privilege. So, when I made *Transients*, I did it in such a way, not to alienate the middle class viewer, moreso to emphasise its ignorance to the detail of Working-Class experience by showing things they can interpret but will not understand. Because they haven't been transient, haven't been told to move on, n'or do they know what a wet house is and they don't understand access and eligibility the way that Working-Class and underclass folk do, yet they write these access policies. It is always middle class teachers teaching our children and institutions are aware of this and seem to be adapting and evolving, but it is our culture and community that should bolster its own truth, without the need of a more qualified executor to facilitate our learning.

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