

Pre-Texts in Ireland



ABOUT PRE-TEXTS

Welcome to creative educators! Many know that thanks to Ireland's rich history and living tradition of writing, Dublin was designated as a UNESCO City of Literature and is an active participant in a growing network of Creative Cities.

It is therefore auspicious that Pre-Texts – which is about making learning more challenging and fun, is being launched on Bloomsday (16th June). The name for this most colourful of literary festivals, was inspired by James Joyce's Ulysses. His work, along with other authors' writings, have become central to a distinctly Irish experience of Pre-Texts, reflected upon by Emma O'Brien in the ensuing essay. We are grateful to Grangegorman ABC for supporting this publication so that the value of Pre-Texts can be more widely disseminated.

Pre-Texts combines high-order literacy, innovation and citizenship. It encourages educators to re-tool for 'close reading' and getting 'beyond' the text. When educators become facilitators of workshops where complex texts are prompts for creating a choreography, a painting, a story-board or a spoken word poem, participants stay intensely engaged in mining elements of the text for vocabulary, grammar, concepts, inferences, multiple interpretations and references to their most intimate concerns. Pre-Texts is for groups of all ages and abilities and works in a variety of formal and informal settings. It favours the slow, shy or disenfranchised reader and learner.

Specific learning objectives and outcomes include critical thinking, reading enjoyment, innovation skills and citizenship. Achieving the latter by setting a base-line of universal participation and replacing single 'correct' answers with an invitation to make something new with the text, students learn to admire one another's work and reflections. Pre-Texts is a powerful response to bullying and to uneven power-plays in general. Immersive workshops amount to 18 hours in total while the programme implementation is similar and can be spread over a number of weeks in sync with community group schedules. There are distinct modules, each of which include warm-ups, reading and questioning of the text, what was done, a creative and interpretive response, reflection and tangents.

Pre-Texts is inspired by Cartonera, - a social, political and artistic publishing movement that began in Argentina in 2003. The founders, Javier Barilaro and Fernanda Laguna started Eloisa Cartonera in Buenos Aires in response to the 2001 economic crisis which led to an increase in the number of cartoneros, people who make their living by collecting and selling salvaged materials to recycling plants. Cartonera books are made from cardboard, creative covers are hand painted and sold on the streets at the cost of production to increase access to literature. Following in the footsteps of early Cuban cigar factories where stories were read aloud to the cigar rollers, the very first session of Pre-Texts involves participants listening closely while creating a book cover from cardboard and recycled materials. After each creative session participants sit in a Freirean circle to reflect like Boal's spect-actors. The question is always the same: 'What did we do?' One reflection follows another until everyone has spoken. While readings deepen during the ensuing sessions of visual, literary and performance interpretations of the same selected text, participants also develop breadth by going 'off on a tangent' and choosing a text they can connect to this in another way. There is an emphasis on working with found and recycled materials.

Pre-Texts has been developed by Doris Sommer, Director of the Cultural Agents, NGO, at Harvard University. Her academic and outreach work promotes development through arts and humanities in a variety of communities and schools in the USA, Latin America and beyond. She is author of 'The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities' (2015). In this publication, Sommer gives a more detailed account of the influences that informed Pre-Texts and points to the benefits of this training which include: students read more, better learning outcomes, improved literacy, development of creative skills, advocating innovation, promoting collaborations and encouraging peer support. Complex texts are interpreted from as diverse a range of perspectives as possible. In workshop style, activities involve warm-ups, book-making, reading aloud, questioning the text, writing new texts, hanging (publishing) them on the clothes line, back-to-back portraiture, spoken word, sound scores, image theatre, forum theatre, 'off on a tangent', play and more play, until the reader has grown in confidence and curiosity.

WHY GRANGEGORMAN?

Bringing Pre-Texts to Grangegorman in Dublin's inner city is a response to calls for better connections with people working and living locally, who are already invested in helping to advance educational experiences for a variety of ages and abilities. '...the lives we live' Grangegorman Public Art Working Group agreed to the introduction of Pre-Texts within Pathway 4 which supports creative agency building in the community. It was chosen because the socio-economic facts were quite stark. A significant number of young students in this part of the city are leaving school early or are not engaging with further education for a variety of reasons. There is also a significant number of lone parents along with a growing migrant population, but there is also a strong wish within the adult population to reengage with education and learning. Current socio-economic profiles and community reports have already evidenced challenges to keeping students in learning environments and Pre-Texts sets about contributing to reversing this downturn. Above, all, Pre-Texts was seen as a way of building connections with people in the locality who are already creatively engaged with their respective communities.

Many consider Grangegorman to be the last of Dublin's inner city communities to undergo a process of regeneration. With the re-visioning of St. Brendan's into a state-of-art Health Service provider, the establishment of Technological University Dublin and the recognition of both new and long-standing communities, schools and residents, Pre-Texts places people at the centre of regeneration. It's about sharing with, skilling up, re-connecting and building real community.

In June 2016, TU Dublin hosted an introductory workshop. Educators, teachers, artists and community leaders from across the city were invited and the response to this proposal was overwhelming. As a consequence, a cross-community Steering Group was established and during 2017 sufficient funds were raised which led to an open call. The Steering Group met regularly in the North West Inner City Network, and became a source of guidance and encouragement along the way. On a practical note, by raising



additional funds from Dublin City Council and The Ireland Funds, it was possible to be inclusive of anyone who wished to take part. The ensuing 'Training for Trainers' three day intensive course led by Doris Sommer, led to a second stage where participants implemented their training with respective groups.

At the time of writing, twenty three people have trained in the Pre-Texts method and almost half of these have implemented Pre-Texts among their respective groups. A register of those who have received Certification from Cultural Agents at Harvard is available by contacting culturalagents.org.

We are delighted that the Pre-Texts Experience in Ireland will be shared at the 2019 International Meeting of the Consortium of Humanities Centres Institutes (CHCI) this June. The theme of this year's conference 'Cultural Interventions', in recognition of the CHCI's interest in questions of collaboration, engagement and impact in context, with diverse research partnerships internationally.

On behalf of the Public Art Working Group, we look forward to supporting further creative community engagements led by TU Dublin School of the Creative Arts.

Jenny Haughton,
Public Art Coordinator



Pre-Texts in Ireland Diverse journeys in Literary Dublin

Emma O'Brien

- THE STORY BEGINS
- TRAINING THE TRAINERS
- THE CREATIVE EDUCATORS COMMUNITY
- YOUTH PROGRAMMES
- COMMUNITY SETTING
- ADULT EDUCATION
- PRISON EDUCATION
- "IT'S ALL OVER... AND IT'S ALL ABOUT TO BEGIN."

THE STORY BEGINS



A small group of dads are listening to a reading of the popular children's story "The Gruffalo". Together they are working innovatively and creatively with the story text focusing on developing their children's literacy skills.

This is no ordinary group of Dads – these men are currently in prison and the StoryDads programme has been developed to support meaningful contact with their children. StoryDads is just one story of many from the introduction of Pre-Texts to Ireland. Pre-Texts encourages learners to engage with challenging texts fostering



high order literacy, innovation and citizenship. Pre-Texts enables participants to think innovatively through creative activities with literature and text. What follows is the story of Pre-Texts in Ireland, a story which evolved over 3 years and the first time for Pre-Texts to come to Europe. The Pre-Texts training programme was introduced in two stages. The first stage comprised 'train the trainer' workshops. This was followed by the formation of a community of creative educators who implemented their learning within their own respective community groups. The rich tapestry of the Pre-Texts experience in Ireland is shared through this piece.



“Publishing on line in this innovative way is a central aspect of Pre-Texts.”



TRAINING THE TRAINERS



An open call was made to teachers, trainers, youth workers, artists, educators and others working in learning environments with children, young people or adults in Dublin's inner city to join the 'train the trainer' workshops. Following a positive response, the training of those nominated by organisations began when Doris facilitated a two-and-a-half-day intensive workshop at the TU Dublin campus, Grangegorman. Twenty-three participants from diverse backgrounds across Dublin City joined the Pre-Text training.

Arriving on the first day, no one could have imagined the special bond

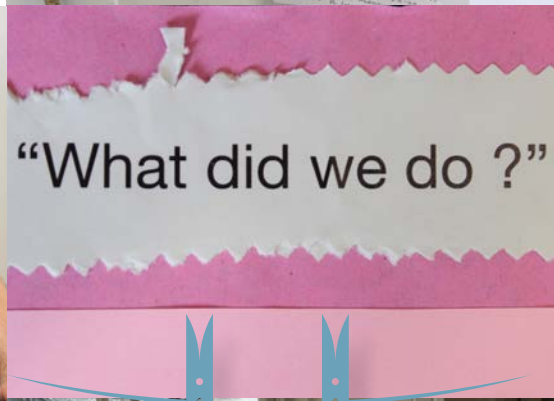
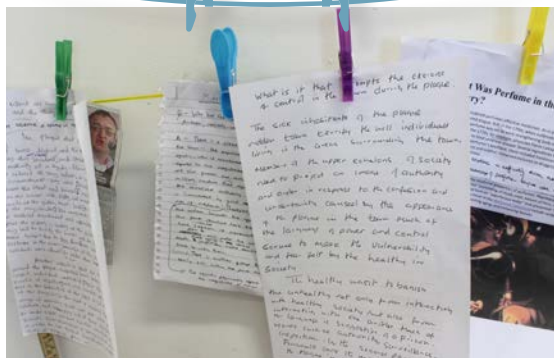
that would bring the community of learners together. Over the following days, participants enjoyed 'playing' Pre-Texts, working with the challenging text 'Panopticism' from the French philosopher Foucault (Discipline and Punish, 1975). This text choice was deemed appropriate given the history of incarceration associated with the Grangegorman site.

The first session began with ice-breakers encouraging the group to get to know each other in an encouraging and inclusive way, followed by an out loud reading of the text as participants creatively

designed book covers. After book covers developed in the Cartonera style, - a Latin American publishing tradition of using recycled cardboard to make beautiful book covers - everyone asked a question of the text. Choosing a piece of writing from recycled literature such as magazines and newspapers participants hung their piece on a clothes line with



pegs. 'Publishing on line' in this innovative way is a central aspect of Pre-Texts. Moving the clothes line outdoors to enjoy the beautiful sunny Dublin weather, the group read and discussed each published piece making the text become more individually meaningful. These 'tangents' are a core element of Pre-Texts that invite participants to connect an external text to the original text. It also highlighted how Pre-Texts is not constrained to a typical classroom environment. "What Did we Do?" another key Pre-Texts moment that concludes every activity, requires participants to share reflections



on that process. The democratising effect of collective reflection was identified as a key transformative moment, whereby everyone was encouraged to look at each other, not just the facilitator, ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to contribute and listening to each voice until everyone had spoken. This initially challenged the Dublin

group, however, as the workshop progressed these moments became deeper and more reflective encapsulating the participants' transformative learning journey.

Participants were then encouraged to form groups and create a learning activity linked to the text for their peers. What followed was

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an amazing array of over twenty innovative and creative learning modules bringing the ‘Panopticism’ text to life through poetry, photography, word activities, drama, theatre and mime, collective story writing, editorial work, and sculpture making. All were delivered and received enthusiastically by participants. In one session, Artist Educators Clodagh and Laragh developed an architectural/town planning activity. In this learning activity, the facilitators laid down a physical boundary of the town wall as described in the text. Participants



own community. Acknowledging Dublin's rich literary heritage, many considered using text from acclaimed Dublin authors such as James Joyce to introduce Pre-Texts in their communities. Two 'weavers' were chosen from within the group to support participants in introducing Pre-Texts in their own community and aid the development of a community of practice.

created a model of a building mentioned in the text. As each group member added their model, the town from the text emerged in reality leading to a stimulating debate regarding contemporary town planning and spatial politics.

Towards the end of the 'train the trainer' workshop, participants shared personalised lesson plans to implement Pre-Texts in their



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THE CREATIVE EDUCATORS COMMUNITY



Following the summer break, the next step was for all trained in Pre-Texts to implement their learning within their respective communities. To assist in this process, the group met bi-monthly with sessions facilitated by 'weavers', Tom and Leonie. These convivial meetings provided opportunity to discuss the implementation and adaptation of Pre-Texts in various settings and learning contexts.

The challenges and constraints of introducing the method of Pre-Texts were discussed with many acknowledging one of the key strengths of the programme being its inherent flexibility to be contextualised to any cohort of learners. As community member Robbie noted: "During the meetings we discovered the many different features of working with groups in different environments. These

included the gender mix or not of the group, groups with people from different cultural backgrounds, groups from same culture, participants who would know each other beforehand, groups where participants never met prior to Pretext etc. This highlighted for me

the essential nature of the Pretext ethos in that it can be used in any environment with any group”.

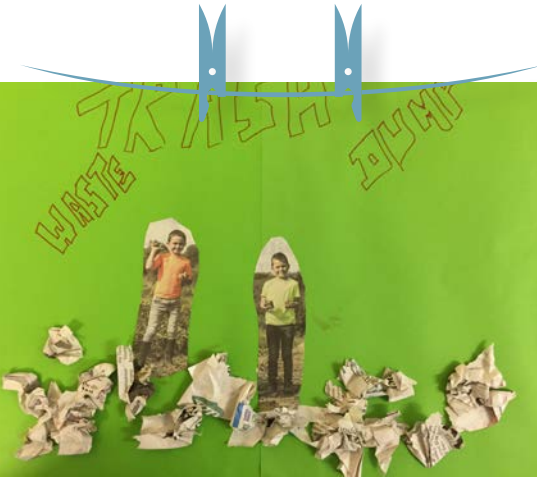
Sharing and learning from each other as a community of creative educators, the group began to implement Pre-Texts in diverse education and community settings

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in Dublin city. The following vignettes provide a glimpse of the unique responses of the creative educators to the Pre-Text method and implementation in their communities.

YOUTH PROGRAMMES



Youth Justice Worker Tom was first out of the Irish training blocks when he introduced Pre-Texts to a group of young people in Dublin's north inner city. He worked with a group of teenagers (aged 13-14) considered 'at risk' in a community-based high-support school. The school places a strong emphasis on literacy and the social development of students, and utilises an alternative, more flexible education programme and approach. In small group weekly sessions, Tom experimented with Pre-Texts, choosing a number of different creative activities based on text from the novel "Trash" by Andy Mulligan. Despite the varying

literacy and attention levels in the group, a script writing exercise from a scene in the novel enabled an insightful debate within the group on homelessness. One young person got easily distracted and requested to play pool. Tom adapted activities to meet this request by introducing a game of pool on completion of a creative learning activity.

Elsewhere, Playwright and Creative Facilitator Anthony modified Pre-Texts for a community of young people. The Complex Youth theatre works with young people (14-19 years) to create energetic, new and original material. The youth theatre

is founded on a philosophy of respect for all members and strives to enhance social and personal development through performance and creative writing. Working with a small group, Anthony set out to visit and reimagine a scene 'The Dead' from the novel "Dubliners" by James Joyce. Through the application

of various creative and artistic techniques, Anthony noted that: "the black and white of the text became a colourful performance piece". Pre-Texts was central to the development of the Complex Youth Theatres' new play – "Dubs" ("What happens when a group of young activists take over the house of The

{ "I wouldn't have read Joyce stuff, 'cause when you're in school it's so different, but this way when you're acting it out and stuff, you get it."



Dead"), which premieres in Dublin. One young participant noted of his experience of developing a theatre play through Pre-Texts: "I wouldn't have read Joyce stuff, 'cos when you're in school it's so different, but this way when you're acting it out and stuff, you get it".

Artist Educator Leonie also introduced a group of young people participating in a youth club to Pre-Texts using a variety of texts including Bill Bryson's a "History of Everything". The group responded positively and enthusiastically to the creative activities that they developed together.

COMMUNITY SETTING



Bridging the intersection between formal and informal education, Arts Educator Jenny and Resident Artist Jimmy introduced Pre-Texts to a group comprising art students from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, and residents from Dublin's inner city. They choose "Animal Farm" by George Orwell as the text choice because it was identifiable in the context of contemporary societal issues (Brexit talks and Climate change) at the time of training. The text and creative activities facilitated sparky discussion and sensitively enabled participants to discuss personal beliefs and attitudes.

Participants in this group were drawn from very different socio-economic backgrounds which led to interesting discussion and dialogue. As Jimmy noted: "Though challenging at times, facilitating a group from varied socio economic backgrounds through Pre-Texts was a testament to the versatility of the approach".

Community Development Worker Eilish, selected the text 'Women's Position in Irish Society' when working with a group of mature women in St. Michael's Family Resource Centre in Dublin City. Amongst the various creative activities developed, Eilish noted that role play activities enabled the

group to deeply engage with the text and identify and communicate key aspects of women's lives. Eilish said of her experience introducing Pre-Texts: "The Pre-Text approach is a good way of enabling people to engage and learn in a fun way".

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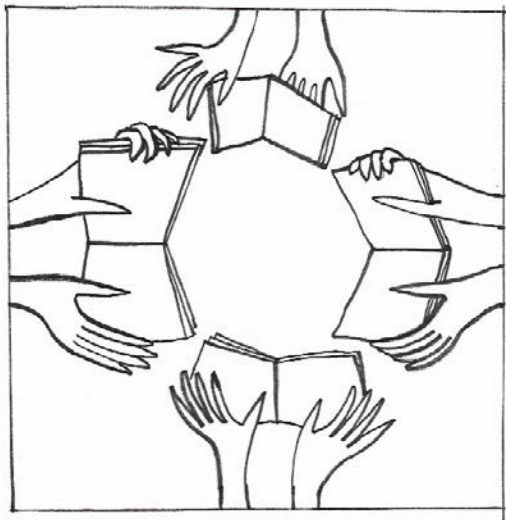




It de-mystifies knowledge by breaking down complex ideas/ language and by using creative means to increase participation and to explore learning in a collective way.”

In another community setting, University Educator Emma and Social Inclusion Co-ordinator Grainne adapted Pre-Texts together with a group of young women, some in recovery, at the Gateways Project, using text from “Stoneybatter – Dublin’s urban village” by Kevin Kearns. Grainne said of Pre-Texts: “I can see the potential benefits of Pre-Texts for communities within parts of the inner city who have had negative education experiences, because Pre-Texts is great fun and learner driven. For some, participating in Pre-Texts may be



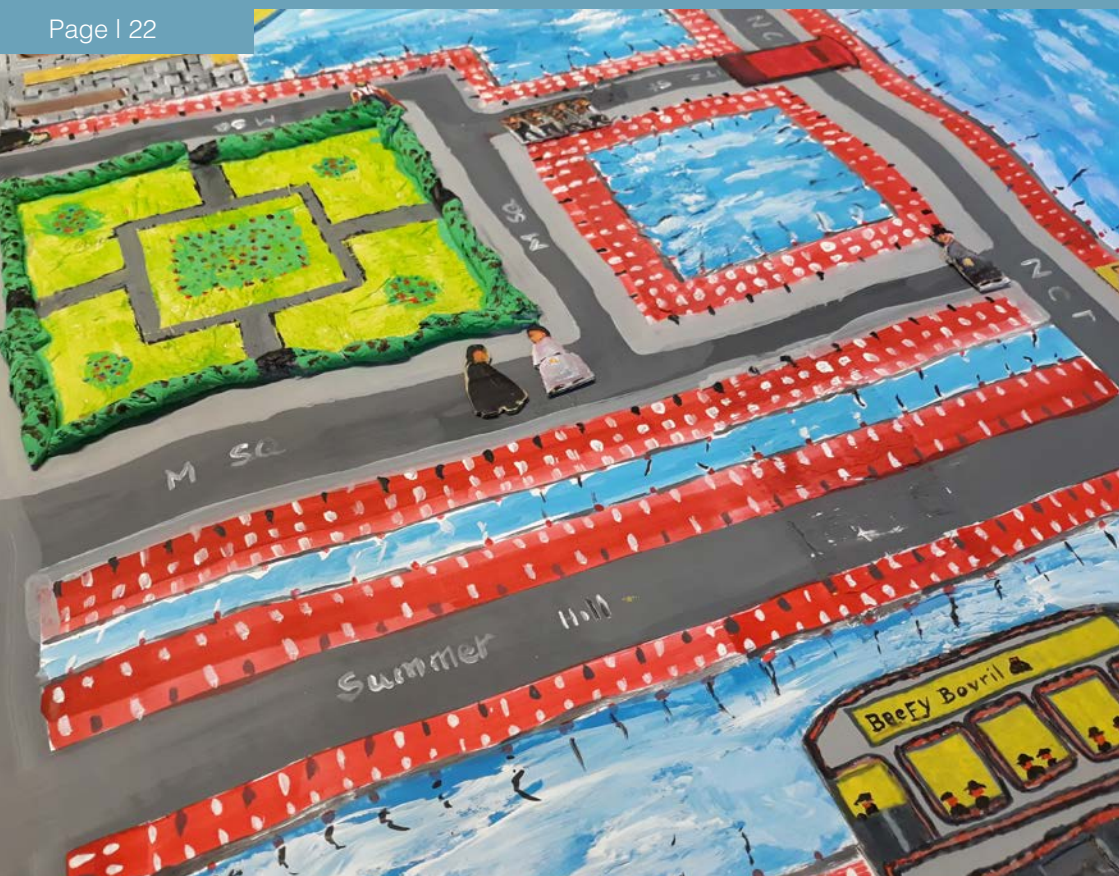


Drawing by Laragh Pittman

their first experience of learning and having fun at the same time. It has the potential to encourage people to reengage with education”.

Artist Laragh facilitated Pre-Texts in the Refugee and Cultural Diversity Programme at the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. The programme’s remit was to work with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and Muslim communities in Ireland. A reading group comprising Muslim and women from other backgrounds was formed. Through Pre-Texts Laragh adopted a relaxed, sociable and innovative way of looking at the complex Human Rights text ‘The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women’

(CEDAW). The group explored ways of making this text heavy document more relevant to their own lives by contributing their own voices particularly those of Muslim women in Ireland. The group shared different languages, used visual arts and spoken word to demystify and clarify the text. One highlight was the group visit to the exhibition of artwork by Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian an Iranian artist at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Kilmainham Hospital. Laragh noted “Pre-Texts acted as a democratic way of approaching a challenging text and opened it up for analysis and scrutiny”.



“The protocol is around improving literacy, democracy and citizenship, and uses a dialogical method where everyone speaks and participates.”

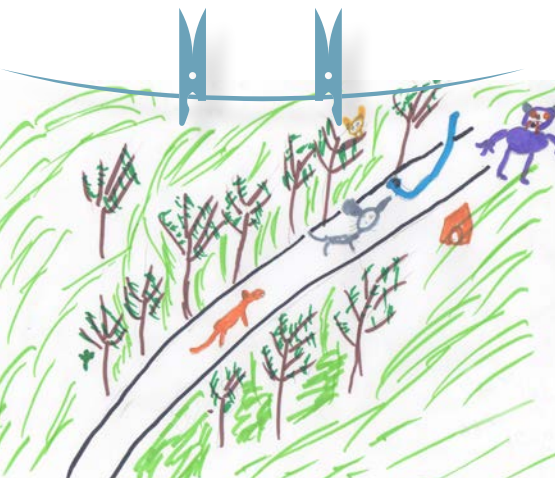
ADULT EDUCATION



Adult Education Tutor Lisa joined the Pre-Texts Training programme from the Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC). DALC students are mostly older adults who have had poor education experiences and are returning to learn how to read and write and gain confidence which will allow them to participate in work, further education and in their communities. Lisa used a variety of texts and creative techniques pushing herself outside her comfort zone. The programme enabled Lisa to work

together with her students to find deeper meaning in chosen texts. One highlight was when using text from the James Joyce novel “Ulysses” Lisa and her students created their own story about the landmarks and characters of Dublin. Lisa was invited to share her Pre-Text experiences with peers at the DALC Adult Literacy Conference. Lisa was drawn to Pre-Texts as “the protocol is around improving literacy, democracy and citizenship, and uses a dialogical method where everyone speaks and participates”.

PRISON EDUCATION



Returning to StoryDads from the beginning of this piece, Visual Artist and Teacher Bernie and Anthony introduced Pre-Texts in the StoryDads project in Wheatfield Prison. StoryDads is a project that runs in conjunction with the parenting course in Wheatfield Prison. Through this project, students are taught to read storybooks to their children. Adapting Pre-Texts, Bernie and Anthony encouraged participants to develop original written stories for their children. Working with a small group of men (aged 20-50), they developed a number of creative techniques using text from



the story of “The Gruffalo” by Julia Donaldson. In this way, participants were encouraged to embody characters and develop character tangents that were original and unique. It was both a fun and educational experience at the same time. One participant noted of his Pre-Text experience “I will use some of what I learnt in this workshop, because I hope to be able to write and illustrate some sort of kids story book for my kids that would be specifically tailored to them, so that when they read it, they will know it is about them and not just another fairy-tale book. When they are older they will have their books and realise I was there for them without actually being there.”

Prison Adult Education Teacher Robbie also adapted Pre-Texts for the prison education environment using text from the novel “The Country Girls” by acclaimed Irish author Edna O’Brien.



{ “I can see the potential benefits of Pre-Texts for communities within parts of the inner city who have had negative education... Pre-Texts is great fun and learner driven.”



“IT’S ALL OVER... AND IT’S ALL ABOUT TO BEGIN.”



As the group met for the final creative educator's community meeting almost a year later it was realised that Pre-Texts had been introduced to many communities throughout Dublin. As the group reflected many shared how through Pre-Texts they experienced a very different perspective on education. They collectively agreed that introducing Pre-Texts in various contexts throughout Dublin city fostered a love of reading, writing and critical thinking through art and creative play. Pre-Texts has been a rich contributor to building diverse community learning environments. Pre-Texts has been rooted in Dublin

City and has demonstrably bridged local communities in Grangegorman with TU Dublin.

One of the key benefits of the programme was the community of creative educators that formed and supported and guided each other throughout the process. The many collaborations and friendships that formed are a testament to this community spirit. As evidenced from this piece, Pre-Texts has been implemented in a variety of contexts across Dublin's inner city and its reach has been both deep and wide. The need to develop cultural agency and its potential impact for social



change has never been greater and it is envisioned that through sharing these stories and experiences that many more diverse audiences will be introduced to Pre-Texts in Ireland. This phase of Pre-Texts is now complete and the foundation stones of the Pre-Texts in Ireland have been laid, to close in the words of famous Irish playwright Brian Friel “It’s all over... and it’s all about to begin”.

Reflection by Emma O’Brien

Emma O’Brien is an assistant lecturer and doctoral researcher in the College of Business, TU Dublin. Emma’s research is exploring how universities can engage with local communities and foster enterprising behaviour.



Sample texts used by Trainees with groups:

O'Brien, Edna. (1986). *The Country Girls*;
Donaldson, Julia, Scheffler, Alex. (1999)
The Gruffalo; Foucault, Michel. *Discipline
& Punish*, (1975) Panopticism III; Joyce,
James. (1914). *The Dead*. Dubliners;
Kearns, C. (1989) *Stoneybatter – Dublin's
Inner Urban Village*; Mulligan, Andy. (2010)
Trash; Orwell, George. (1945) *Animal Farm
– A Fairy Story*; Swindells, Robert. (1993).
Stone Cold.

Acknowledgements

'...the lives we live' Grangegorman Public Art Working Group for supporting this initiative as Pathway 4/Creative Agents.

Technological University Dublin - TU Dublin for hosting this workshop and the School of Creative Arts for hosting the Public Lecture by Doris Sommer.

The North West Inner City Network for hosting the Steering Group meetings.

The Pre-Texts Steering Group

Vanessa Fielding, Artistic Director, Complex Productions; Grainne Foy, Social Inclusion Coordinator, North West Inner City Network; Siobhan Geoghegan, Artistic Director, Common Ground; Jenny Haughton, Public Art Coordinator, Grangegorman Public Art; Kathleen McCann, Employment and Training coordinator, Grangegorman Labour and Learning Forum; Julie Stafford, Senior Development Manager, TU Dublin Campus.

The following organisations for nominating and hosting Trainees

City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) Education Service to Prison

Complex Youth Theatre, Dublin 8

Common Ground Arts Organisation, Dublin 8

Dublin Adult Learning Centre (DALC)

Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation -
Cultural Diversity Programme, County Wicklow

Grangegorman Development Agency, Dublin 7

Henrietta Street Alternative School, Dublin 7

Home School Liaison Scheme, Dublin 7

Independent Artists and Storytellers Dublin 1 & 7 area

MOST Garda Youth Diversion Project, Bradog Youth Service

National College of Art and Design Dublin

North West Inner City Network Gateway Project

Pathways Centre, Dublin 1

Stanhope Street Girls Secondary School, Dublin 7

St. Micheal's Family Resource Centre, Dublin 8

St. Paul's Primary, Dublin 7 – Learning Support and Special Needs Organiser

Wheatfield Prison Education Unit, Clondalkin, Dublin 22

Writer's Centre, Dublin.

List of Participants:

Lead facilitator: Doris Sommer.

Participants in Training the Trainers: Tom Adams, Michelle Brown, Erin Campbell, Sinéad Clancy, Eilish Comerford, Brian Cregan, Clodagh Emoe, Gráinne Foy, Anthony Goulding, Jenny Haughton, Claire Jegousse, Phil Keane, Lisa Kilbride, Jimmy Leonard, Bernie Masterson, Shilo Mbulle, Emma O'Brien, Anne O'Connor, Bríd O'Mahony, Laragh Pittman, Robert Robinson, Jean Ryan and Leonie Tang.

Pre-Texts Weavers: Leonie Tang and Tom Adams

Final Reflection: Laragh Pittman and Eilish Comerford

Contact creativeeducatorsdublin@gmail.com or public.art@ggda.ie

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Grangegorman Development Agency

The Ireland Funds

'...the lives we live' Grangegorman Public Art (Pathway 4)

Grangegorman Area Based Childhood (ABC) is part of the national ABC Programme funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs through Tusla. Grangegorman ABC targets investment in services to improve outcomes for children and their families, in the North West Inner City Area of Dublin. It enables greater interagency collaboration to ensure services make the most impact, are timely and accessible, and have the potential to be sustainable.

Images courtesy of:

Lori Keeve

Emma O'Brien

Tom Adams

Brian Cregan

Eilish Comerford

Anthony Goulding

Lisa Kilbride

Jimmy Leonard

Bernie Masterson

Laragh Pittman, drawing on page 21.

Pre-Texts – The Irish Experience, will be presented at the Public Humanities Network of CHCI on Wednesday 19th June 2019 in Trinity College Dublin.

See cultural agents websites for updates on certified creative educators @ www.pre-texts.org

Design by Lee Ryan, Designroom.ie

...the lives
we live¹

grangegorman
public art

1 EXTRACT FROM TREASURE OF A SUMMER NIGHT, REVISED EDITION 2015,
BY KING TERNANSON OF THE AUTHOR, DENISE MCKIN, AND THE GALLERY PRESS



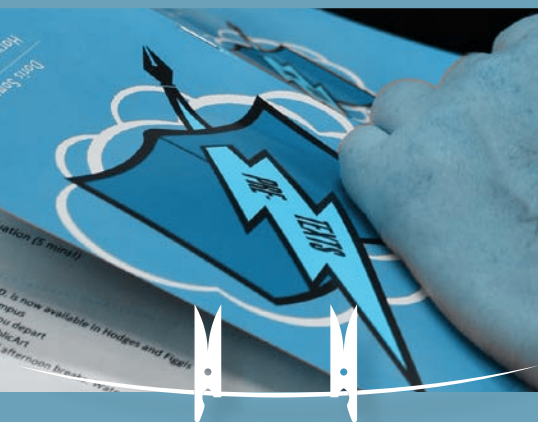
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For further information about Pre-Texts contact CreativeEducatorsDublin@gmail.com, public.art@ggda.ie or see www.pre-texts.org for updates.