

I Am An Artist

NCTE / RTÉ
Multimedia Education Resource



I Am An Artist DVD

Evaluation Executive Summary



www.iamanartist.ie

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1. Introduction

I Am An Artist, the multimedia primary visual arts resource produced by NCTE (National Centre for Education) and RTÉ (Radio Telefís Éireann) as part of the **IMMERSE** initiative, was piloted and evaluated in primary schools in May/June 2004. This executive summary (of the larger evaluation report) briefly outlines the methodology of the evaluation and discusses the teachers' comments and perceptions of the resource. Summaries and recommendations in relation to each aspect of the resource are presented. The closing comments discuss the findings in relation to terms of reference of this evaluation.

I Am An Artist is an interactive media resource based on the primary visual arts curriculum. The resource consists of 29 short films on DVD (each 6 minutes in length) and an interactive website with slideshows of children's and other artists' work, Can You activity sheets and links to highly interactive, visual arts related games and activities. The resource has been designed to support teachers in the adoption and delivery of the new primary visual arts curriculum. Each of the six strands of the visual arts curriculum is covered, along with other themes which are topical and interesting to pupils. This resource is broadband dependent.

2. Acknowledgements

The evaluation team wish to acknowledge the time and assistance that the teachers and children in the six pilot schools provided during the pilot period and also during the school evaluation visits.

3. Methodology

This evaluation set out to study the following **Teaching and Learning Objectives**:

- Identifying teaching methodologies and approaches used during the pilot (in particular changes from traditional methods).
- Observing student motivation and attitudes to learning using the media rich materials.
- Observing learning - Does interaction and engagement with these materials lead to any observable improvement in understanding/comprehension of certain concepts among individual students?
- Assess teachers' views of the appropriateness, relevance and usability of the materials with regard to the science in the primary curriculum.
- Does the availability of relevant and targeted interactive materials lead to:
 - (a) greater utilisation by teachers
 - (b) significant student usage
 - (c) greater support and facilitation for school principals/ school management

The evaluation was based on a multiple case study approach. The conceptual framework underpinning this approach revolved around the classroom teachers and the children and focused on the extent of use of the **I Am An Artist** materials, the quality of innovation (if any), and the nature and extent of change in teaching and learning styles.

Six primary schools around the country were selected to participate in the pilot. The schools were based in Dublin, Limerick and Ennis. All schools chosen had access to ISDN or Broadband facilities and represented a cross-section of Irish primary schools, both urban and rural of mixed gender. Each school agreed to undertake particular sections of the **I Am An Artist** resource.

1. St. Brigid's N.S., Castleknock, Dublin (6th Class)
2. Jobstown N.S., Tallaght, Co. Dublin (4th Class)
3. Bayside N.S., Sutton, Co. Dublin (2nd Class, Junior School)
4. St. Nessian's N.S., Mungret, Limerick (5th class)
(Owing to technical difficulties and the late arrival of material, St Nessian's did not ultimately participate)
5. Lisnagry N.S., Limerick (5th Class)
6. Ennis N.S., Ennis, Co. Clare (5th Class)

All school visits took place during June 2004. Participating teachers were interviewed (six in total), using an agreed open-ended questionnaire, designed by the evaluation team. Copies of the questionnaire were provided to all teachers prior to the evaluation visit. Children were interviewed in groups of three to five for 20 to 30 minutes and they were observed using the **I Am An Artist** website in a lab or classroom setting. Children were given time to browse the site and visit links of their choice.

4. Limitations of this evaluation

- This study is limited by the number of schools and teachers participating in the pilot phase.
- The time frame of the study was very short.
- The timing of the evaluation clashed with many events in the participating schools, i.e., school tours, preparation for final class assessments, changing classes.
- There were some minor technical problems with the Internet service in some schools.
- Lack of video streaming of all films on **I Am An Artist** website

Bearing in mind these limitations, the evaluation team has confidence in the findings and recommendations presented in this executive summary.

5. Teachers' Views of the *I Am An Artist* Resource

On the whole teachers welcomed this resource and found it was particularly useful for a number of reasons. It facilitated a broad introduction and provided a summary of the six strands of the Visual Arts syllabus. It introduced teachers to different processes and the materials associated with these ways of image making and art making. The response of teachers and children in all the selected schools was overwhelmingly positive. In addition, any teachers outside of the schools in this evaluation project, who had an opportunity to view the web site, were also unanimously impressed by its quality and suitability for classroom use. A common response of teachers was to ask when similar exciting websites and DVDs would be available for other curricular areas. Children were also universally enthused by the **I Am An Artist** website and its contents. However, a number of shortcomings in the resource were also identified. These include the need for references to safety when handling material, the need to take into account the art experiences of students with special educational needs and to give more recognition to the creative process. Finally, many teachers were concerned about the appropriateness of piloting and evaluating this resource toward the end of the school year. Should the resource have been introduced earlier to schools,

it was felt that both they and their students would be more favourably positioned to engage in review and evaluation.

In terms of identifying particular changes in teaching methodologies and approaches, no major changes were observed during this evaluation. Some teachers' comments are listed below:

"The resource hasn't changed my style of teaching but I will get more from teaching Art as a result of this resource. I will be a better Art teacher following this resource."

Junior Class Teacher

"[The resource could] ... possibly change my style, less intervention from class teacher, my children worked from DVD"

Senior Class Teacher

In terms of student motivation and attitudes to learning, all the children participating in the pilot were highly motivated by the DVDs and the website. Some teachers' comments are listed below:

"Yes, all children participating in this resource were highly motivated by the DVDs and the website. Children particularly enjoyed working on their own on the various web links within the site. DVDs excellent, restful, slow, children watched, some magical moments in the classroom while viewing the DVD, children totally absorbed, sharing with children making things, very interested."

Senior Class Teacher

"A more step-by-step approach needed, different levels needed within the DVD, adjust what's there for junior classes, more steps needed."

Junior Class Teacher

In terms of observable learning, classroom observations suggest that the children did have a better understanding of the terminology in relation to art, particularly in the senior classes. However, one teachers did suggest that ...

"More emphasis needed on media, what was being used, not enough time on form and scale etc. Depends on the class, young children need step-by-step but more discussion with senior classes."

Senior Class Teacher

In terms of teachers' views on the appropriateness, relevance and usability of the materials, the comments expressed were positive, overall.

"Children's language improved, reporting on what they had made and on what they do, language developed much more as a result of the DVD and the WWW. Children loved the links, making the pot, links very good."

Junior Class Teacher

"Yes, new techniques, impressed by the systems, look and draw, observational skills, looking for detail, very useful technique, used the school as a support, looked at school surroundings."

Junior Class Teacher

"Yes, the site fits with the Curriculum, good links, need to be used with care, target the children, focus the use, otherwise children could spend too much time browsing without focus. Children enjoyed Leonardo site and mirror writing but could spend all day doing this activity without any learning, we designed our own activity card based on the www. We used the site in the school lab, group activity with activity card. Slide show on the website was very good."

Senior Class Teacher

Finally, in terms of teachers' utilisation of the materials provide, for the purpose of this pilot study, teachers did use the resource. One teacher commented that ...

"Yes, I would recommend this resource for schools. However it depends on ICT facilities in school, positive results from schools with adequate ICT facilities, Broadband + ICT Lab + Single PCs in classrooms, LCD projector essential for success of resource."

Junior Class Teacher

6. Summary of the Strengths/Weaknesses of the Website and DVDs

Strengths

- In keeping with the structure of the syllabus, the website and short films provide for looking and responding to artwork as well as providing for art making. While supporting a core tenet of the syllabus, it also models for teachers and indeed students how looking and responding is integral to art making and how one can relate and inform the other. For example, in the Fabric and Fibre short films the range and quality of images used to demonstrate ways in which artists and designers manipulate, change and use fabric and fibre to construct new realities, to convey meaning or to express feelings and emotions is very good. The puppets, costumes and fabric-sculpture pieces shown should give students an excellent insight into the expressive potential of this medium when used on its own and also when used with other art making materials.
- There is good emphasis placed on exploring and experimenting with a wide range of materials. Useful materials are introduced and suggested during the introductory sections of the short films.
- The materials used for making a relief print in PRINT 2 are innovative and easily accessible and not particularly difficult to use.
- Much emphasis is placed on developing student's ability to describe and discuss their work and the work of others, both on the DVD and the *I Am An Artist* website.
- The short films featuring the late Irish artist Tony O Malley and the art project are excellent. The art project film provides an insight into how art can and is used to communicate, to tell stories and to create new realities. Excellent use is made of a wide variety of art-making process and materials to convey the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. This short film demonstrates purposeful decision-making in art.

- The link into artist's websites from their work shown as part of the Slide Show on the Web Site is an excellent idea.
- Overall the Teachers' Notes prove useful to teachers in terms of outlining particular processes and listing appropriate materials for such processes and activities. Many of the notes are written with reference to the Visual Arts Syllabus. Similarly, some of the lesson plans and notes are presented for particular age groups and class levels. In keeping with the structure of the syllabus, many of the notes provide for looking and responding to artwork as well as providing for art making.
- The Slideshows on the website represent an attractive and powerful set of resources through which teachers can elicit high-quality responses from their pupils.
- The visual presentation of each activity step in the 'Can You?' section greatly increases the ease with which children can follow the directions and instructions, and facilitates their use by children from a broader range of ages and ability levels.
- The Weblinks area of the website comprises a superb set of external websites to support the topics that the children are exploring.
- The interactive activities located in the Play Area represent some of the most imaginative and exciting educational resources to be found anywhere on the Internet, for any subject. This area is essential viewing for all teachers who want to see the World Wide Web at its best.

Weaknesses

- What is most striking in all the short films presented as part of this resource and which are classroom based, is the absence of a teacher and the noticeable lack of any direction or guidance given to students while they engage in various art practices and art making activities. It is unclear if the students are following a specific brief or project; if they have been introduced to a topic and stimulated by images; if they themselves have some say in the direction of their projects.
- It is unclear if the content of this resource is targeted at a specific age group or class level in the primary school. If the resource is designed for the entire age range of primary school going children, from 4 years to 12 years, as it would appear to be, this is one of its greatest weaknesses as it clearly fails to take account of the discrete stages of artistic development along with the physical emotional and intellectual development of children in general. Moreover, should this resource be targeted at all class levels without differentiation it is likely that students will experience the presented activities more than once during their time at primary school. This would not serve art teaching and learning well.
- The demonstrations by the resident artist do not always reinforce or develop the ideas being presented during the introductory parts of the four sections.
- Due attention is not devoted to developing students critical, analytical and reflective skills.
- In the Teachers' Notes undue emphasis is placed on materials, medium and processes to the exclusion of developing conceptual knowledge and understanding, and due recognition is not given to the creative process.
- Greater differentiation by age and class level is desirable in the teachers' notes. Suggested approaches to providing an integrated approach to teaching art and providing art-learning opportunities for students is good. It would be useful and beneficial to develop and expand on this approach.

7. Closing Comments

The **I Am An Artist** DVD and website represent a wonderful resource for the children and teachers in Ireland's primary schools. The overall high standard of the website's visual design and the irresistible attractiveness of the images and activities draw each child into a thorough and engaging personal exploration of each of the strands of the Visual Arts curriculum. The structure of the website also serves to provide teachers with a clear framework through which they can understand, organise and deliver a comprehensive programme of Visual Arts in their classes.

Not only does this resource provide a tremendous support for teachers of Visual Arts, it also represents an exciting development for teachers who believe in the potential of Information Technology, and the Internet in particular, to support curriculum delivery. The **I Am An Artist** website itself, and its superb selection of weblinks and interactive activities, provide a wonderful testimony to the power of the Internet and should win a large number of new converts to the potential of the Internet to deliver high-quality educational resources.

The **I Am An Artist** resource represents the beginning of an exciting era of home-grown electronic resources for Irish Primary Schools. While there is some scope for improvement, particularly in terms of navigation and usability, the **I Am An Artist** website has set an impressive benchmark for the future design of educational websites in Ireland.

It must be stated that this innovative multimedia resource, while welcomed and praised by all teachers in the pilot study, will only succeed if all teachers and schools are given the necessary resources to use the material. Schools will need LCD projectors, a broadband connection or at least ISDN quality. Teachers would benefit from inservice on the use of this resource through the network of Education Centres throughout the country. The evaluation team recommends the use of the **I Am An Artist** resource in Irish primary schools, however, future productions of this resource needs to take on board the comments and recommendations as set out in this executive summary and in the full evaluation report.