

**AN ÁIT INA BHFUIL T'ANAM IS  
ANN A THÓGAS DO CHOSA TÚ  
(YOUR FEET WILL ALWAYS TAKE  
YOU TO THE PLACE OF YOUR  
SOUL): A STUDY OF  
TRANSFORMATION THROUGH  
INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING  
IN A COUNTY KERRY  
COMMUNITY**

**Vol 1**

**ANNE KENNELLY MA Ed**

**EDUCATION DOCTORATE 2013**

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**ANNE KENNELLY MA Ed**

**EDUCATION DOCTORATE**

**NUI Maynooth  
Faculty of Social Sciences**

**Education Department  
Head of Department: Dr Pádraig Hogan  
Department of Adult and Community Education  
Head of Department: Josephine Finn**

**Supervisor: Dr Anne B Ryan**

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## **Abstract**

People have known from earliest times that the arts have the potential to heal and transform whatever needs attention in inner life. This study illustrates how a group of County Kerry adult learners with visual impairment communicated an understanding of their lives to their communities through various arts media. Exploring their worlds creatively through six stage performances and preparatory workshops, over a seven year period, brought them into deeper relationship with the self, other, community, the earth, their ancestors – their customs, traditions and their ways of being and knowing. Finding voice to tell the stories of the challenge between their internal and external worlds, the surface and the deep, was a transformative experience for them, changing their approach to learning and living. As they transformed their experiences of life on the theatre stage, life was transformed also for their everyday communities and those journeying with them as they co-constructed knowledge with the audiences who viewed their performances.

This study uses an arts-based, heuristic methodology to illuminate their process of transformation. These illuminations in image, dvd and cd formats, are further amplified through the inclusion of the learners' thoughts and reflections throughout the process. Transformation continued beyond the life of their stage illuminations and images of the visual art work capturing this process are also included, as are those of the researcher. This study shows how learning through the lens of imagination, as opposed to a more technical and rational one only, allows for experiences of soul. This, in turn, facilitates an experience of learning as living, which challenges modernist approaches to teaching and learning. An indigenous postmodern worldview and experience emerge from this work and make a contribution to pedagogical theory and models of education. The study also offers implications of an indigenous postmodern perspective for educational policies and approaches.

## **Part 1**

### **Preparing for Journey**

## PROLOGUE

### I AM KERRY

By Sigerson Clifford

I am Kerry like my mother before me,  
And my mother's mother and her man.  
Now I sit on an office stool remembering,  
And the memory of them like a fan  
Soothes the embers into flame.  
I am Kerry and proud of my name.

My heart is looped around the rutted hills  
That shoulder the stars out of the sky,  
And about the wasp-yellow fields  
And the strands where the kelp-streamers lie;  
Where, soft as lovers' Gaelic, the rain falls,  
Sweeping into silver the lacy mountain walls.

My grandfather tended the turf fire  
And, leaning backward into legend, spoke  
Of doings old before quills inked history.  
I saw dark heroes fighting in the smoke,  
Diarmuid dead inside his Iveragh cave  
And Deirdre caoining upon Naoise's grave.

I see the wise face now with its hundred wrinkles,  
And every wrinkle held a thousand tales  
Of Finn and Oscar and Conawn Maol,  
And sea-proud Niall whose conquering sails,  
Raiding France for slaves and wine,  
Brought Patrick to mind Milchu's swine.

I should have put a noose about the throat of time  
And choked the passing of the hobnailed years,  
And stayed young always, shouting in the hills  
Where life held only fairy fears.  
When I was young my feet were bare  
But I drove cattle to the fair.

'Twas this I lived, skin to skin with the earth,  
Elbowed by the hills, drenched by the billows,  
Watching the wild geese making black wedges  
By Skelligs far west and Annascaul of the willows.  
Their voices came on every little wind  
Whispering across the half-door of the mind,  
For always I am Kerry.



## CHAPTER ONE

### A WORD BEFORE JOURNEY

#### **Introduction**

I begin with the poem, 'I am Kerry', by Kerry poet, Sigerson Clifford, to indicate that this study is rooted in County Kerry – its people, past and present and their ways of life; its landscape; its history; its customs and traditions. This is an indigenous, arts-based, heuristic, participatory research study on the importance of connecting to soul in adult learning. The purpose of the study is to explore how creative expression opens channels that allow the soul to express itself, thus enabling a process of personal transformation, which, in turn, transforms learning and life. The inspiration for the study was provided by a group of adult learners with visual impairment, whose experiences of life, learning and living were transformed in the telling of their sacred stories or personal myths, through the media of expressive arts.

The learners were participants in an adaptive information technology programme for adults with visual impairment, which was set up by Kerry Education Service in 1998, a time in Ireland, of advocacy for greater participation in education for people with disabilities. This was a second chance, adult education programme, offering modules in Adaptive Information Technology, Braille, Communications and Life Skills related subjects. I first met with the learners in 1998 when I was conducting research into the issue of inclusion of people with disabilities, in education. I was undertaking this research as part of a Master of Arts Degree in Education. I carried out the research while working full-time in arts administration in Siamsa Tíre, The National Folk Theatre.

The learners gave generously of their time, thoughts and feelings, during the interview periods for the research process. They spoke of feeling isolated socially and hoped that participation in their new learning programme would bring opportunities for greater social as well as educational integration. I completed the research project and returned to administrative work, but their expressions of longing for greater human

connection stayed with me. I felt deeply moved by all that they had shared so generously with me and I was haunted by a desire to give something back for what I had received from them. I was also conscious of wanting this reciprocal act to make a positive difference to their lives, in terms of opportunities for integration with, and inclusion in, community.

The phrase 'Hidden Voices from the Dark, integrate and interact' had been coming in and out of my consciousness for some time. Its meaning puzzled me. One day, while turning the words over in my mind, I suddenly realised their possible significance. They could hold a key to greater social interaction for the learners. Integrated performance work with the Siamsa Tíre performers could provide the learners with a voice in the community. In 1999, I set up the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project with the learners and the Siamsa Tíre performing company, while remaining in employment in the theatre. The aim of the project was to produce and present a 'once off' performance to the public in the theatre in August 1999, which would create greater integration and interaction between people who were visually impaired and those who were sighted.

The performance, entitled, 'Tabhair dom do Lámh' (Give me your Hand), was a truly transformative experience for all who participated in it and witnessed it - the learners, their families, the Siamsa Tíre company, the community and for me. It was clear from these reactions that the project would continue. I left my position in the theatre in 2000, following my successful application for an advertised teaching position on the learners' programme. I taught Communications and Life Skills subjects to the learners until January 2011. The 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project continued and during the years 2000 to 2006, five new performances, expressing various aspects of the journey of life for the learners, were presented and shared with the community. The project ended in 2006, following a re-structuring of the learners' assistive technology learning programme.

The learning programme comprised twenty-one learners, aged from early twenties to sixty years. Between eight and eleven learners chose to participate in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, each year, from 1999 to 2006. Four learners were core members of the project for its duration, with other learners replacing those either

graduating from the programme or unable to participate for health or other personal reasons.

Siamsa Tíre - the National Folk Theatre was involved in all phases of the project, in various ways – performing, stage and musical direction, lighting and stage management. Phases one and two of the project were theatrical presentations, in collaboration with the Siamsa Tíre performing company. Phase three was a mixed media production and involved working with Des Dillon (Collage Artist), to produce a collage to form part of the stage presentation. The media chosen for the fourth phase were music and poetry, with Kerry author, Paddy Kennelly and musicians from the National Folk Theatre, collaborating on the project. The fifth phase, performed by the learners, and supported musically by the National Folk Theatre, was partially experienced in the darkness, by the audience. In this work, the learners aimed to make the community aware of what it is like to live daily life with a visual impairment. In the sixth phase, the learners used masks to conceal the faces they present to the world each day, and to reveal aspects of the hidden ‘self’ within.

Romanyshyn ((2007) states that: “a work chooses one as much as one chooses it” (p. 16). In a sense, this research question of how the arts led to transformation chose me. I can recall childhood memories of attending concerts, plays and films in small parish halls in North Kerry, where I found parts of my ‘self’ in the magic and mystery of what was being expressed. Also, hearing of, and observing, experiences in the arts as being truly transformative human events had always left me wondering how this happened. I started the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project as a response to the human needs of the learners. I never intended it to be a study. Yet, the reflections of the learners at the end of the cycle of six expressive arts performances fuelled my desire to understand its depths. Following the first performance, one learner stated that: “*When you see your life out there in front of you in the art and drama, you know what you have to do*”. This, I could not ignore and hence, this study, where I am drawn clearly and strongly to illuminating the importance of bringing the voice of the unconscious/the soul/the imagination into a place of unity with the cognitive, through creative expression, in education.

## **Research focus of study**

The research focus of the study is two-fold: (1) To discover how the arts enable the telling of our personal myths or sacred stories and how we can be transformed in the process, and (2) how this process of personal transformation can also transform learning and living. Through the channel of imagination, the arts enable us to have experiences unavailable to us from any other source. They connect us with, and enable us to give expression to the deepest part of ‘self’ and in doing so, put us in touch with the fullness of our being. They give us the means to know what it is to be fully human and to live in a world with other human beings. Participation in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project was a transformative experience for the learners who reported growth in self-confidence and transformed connections to the self, other, nature, larger institutions and communities. This process also contributed to a transformative learning experience for them. The expressions from their performance work fulfilled many of the learning criteria for FETAC modules in Communications. It also provided motivation for their participation in modules in Art, Personal Effectiveness, Drama, Music, Health Related Fitness and a wide range of recreational and social activities.

But, experiences of transformation were not confined to the learners alone, even though they are the focus of this study. Through sharing their journey, in their performances, new ways of being were imagined and opened up for the community and for all of us who journeyed with them. Hussey (2004) states that: “In the theatre space, practitioners and audience are imaginers – each group is engaged in the exercise of their imagination and in the discovery of what it means to be free” (p. 15). Responses illustrating these experiences of transformation by the community are included with images from the performances in the illuminations of the performances in chapters six to eleven.

## Structure of Thesis

The thesis is comprised of three parts. Part one, entitled, 'Preparing for Journey', holds the Prologue and the first four chapters of the work. The Prologue features the poem, 'I am Kerry', by poet, Sigerson Clifford, to invite the reader to the location of the study. This, the first chapter, 'A word before Journey', as the title suggests, provides a brief introduction, or a 'word', about this study. Chapter two, 'Soundings of Journey', explores the conceptual elements of the study, including the concept of the indigenous and that of place and story, with a focus on Kerry, the stories of the 'Navigatio' and the Jeanie Johnston famine ship and their influence on the journey undertaken by the learners. My connections with the work of Siamsa Tíre, the connections and differences between the terms psyche, soul and spirit are explored here also. Here, too, I explain how Knill's (2005) theory of expressive arts facilitates transformation of limiting situations in daily life through engagement with the imagination.

An exploration of the literature relevant to the study is provided in chapter three, 'Concepts: Mapping a new space for Journey'. The chapter focuses firstly, on the value of story and myth and the differences between the frameworks of life-story and personal myth-making. The theorists covered in this review include: Campbell (1993; 2004), Kearney (2002), McAdams (1993), Atkinson (1995) Kenyon and Randall (1997), Frank (1995), May (1991), Whelan (2006) and Pinkola Estes (1993). Literature in relation to art, intermodal expressive arts, soul, aesthetics and liminality includes works by Malchiodi (2005, 2008), Moore (1992), Hillman(1989), McNiff (1981; 1992; 2004, 2009), Levine (1992), Allen (1995), Knill, Barba, Fuchs (2004), Knill, Levine & Levine (2005). Knill, Levine and Levine's (2005) framework of intermodal expressive arts provides the ritualised space for the expression of Atkinson's (1995) framework of personal myth or sacred story. This is the journey of separation, initiation, return. Together, Knill's and Atkinson's literature provides the conceptual framework for the thesis. The six stages of the journey of the learners in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project are illuminated through this conceptual framework.

Insights into the need for healing, as a result of a modernist approach to life is provided in literature by Hederman (2007), Kennelly (1991), Spretnak (1999), McIntosh (2008), and Johnson (1986, 1990). Theories of transformative adult learning provided by Mezirow (1991), Greene (1995), and Miller (2000) are discussed. However, there is a focus on literature on this subject by O'Sullivan (2002) and Cajete (1994), as their theories are based on indigenous ways of knowing and are particularly relevant to the experiences of the learners in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project.

Chapter four gives attention to the methodology used in the study. Finding a methodology to tell the story of the study was a long and difficult process for me. The problems associated with this process are discussed in this chapter. The methodology chosen for the study – indigenous, arts-based, heuristic modes of inquiry are explained and their effectiveness discussed at length here, also.

Part two, 'Illuminations of Journey', covers chapters five to thirteen of the study. Chapter five, 'A Plan to Journey' profiles the learners who undertook the journey in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project. This is followed by an account of preparing to journey. I explain firstly, my own experience of hearing this call to journey and then the responses of the learners and the performers in Siamsa Tíre to this experience. The rationale, aims and objectives for the pilot project, which was planned as a singular experience, but which developed into a much longer journey due to its outcomes, are also described.

Part two also contains chapters six to eleven of the study. These chapters illuminate in word, image, and video links, the six performances of the journey of the learners in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project (cf. Appendices 1-6). A chapter is allocated to the illumination of each performance. No attempt is made to analyse these journeys. Instead, their expressions are allowed to speak for themselves, with commentaries added pointing to links with the literature reviewed and other relevant writing. This approach was influenced by Ó Cruaíoch (2003). In the introduction to his book of stories on the 'cailleach' or wise-woman healer, he states that he refrained from analysing the stories, preferring instead to respond to them in a way that was more in-keeping with that of their original audiences by examining the importance of

characters, motifs and symbols (p. xii). The process of transformation for the learners, continued beyond the life of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. This process is illuminated in chapter twelve. My own process of transformation is explored in chapter thirteen.

Part three, ‘Reflections on Journey’, holds chapter fourteen, the final chapter of the thesis and the Epilogue. Chapter fourteen, discusses the findings of the study and their implications for education. The Epilogue brings us right back into place again, through the rebirth of an ancient phenomenon in the natural world – the return of the white-tailed eagle to its kingdom in Kerry and its symbolic significance for our times.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SOUNDINGS OF JOURNEY

#### **Introduction**

This chapter explores the elements that inspired me to create the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. It begins with an examination of the concept of the indigenous and what this means for us as Irish people, and particularly, Kerry people. This involves looking more deeply at place, that of Kerry and of Tralee, as these are places with stories of journey, that paved the way for the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project to unfold. The local stories of the journeys of St. Brendan the Navigator and that of the Jeanie Johnston famine ship both influenced the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project and are discussed here. So too, is the work of Siamsa Tíre (The National Folk Theatre) which provided the rich base for the work and development of the project. Its connection with the theory of intermodal expressive arts is discussed. The spirit of place permeated our journey on the project, transforming our experiences of psyche, soul and spirit. The differences between these terms are discussed in this chapter. This differentiation is important to provide clarity on the inner journey of the learners and on the inner experiences of all us who journeyed with them.

#### **Indigenous**

In describing this study as indigenous, I take the meaning of the word from the Concise Oxford dictionary: ‘belonging naturally to a place’. In the Irish language dictionary, Ó Luineacháin, Ó Siochfhradha (2005), ‘dúchas’ is the word used to describe our ‘heritage’, ‘native place or country’ (p. 96). “An bhfillfidh tú ar do dhúchas? Will you return home/to where you belong” (p. 96). In daily life, we speak of m’áit dhúchais (my native place), mo theanga dhúchais (my native language). In Ó Luineacháin, Ó Siochfhradha (2005), the meaning of the word ‘dúchasach’ is given as ‘hereditary’, ‘inherent’, ‘indigenous’ (p. 97). Ní Dhomhnaill (2005) in speaking of individual personality traits, states that in West Kerry, these would be attributed to ‘dúchas’, or “genetic heritage” (p. 97). She explains that her own ‘sauciness is inevitably put down to *dúchas*, or genetic heritage’ (p. 97). She explains this further:



“It is put down especially to my Great-Aunt Elly, of whom I am supposed to be the temperamental dead spit’ (p. 97). The translation of many Irish words transcends the merely literal, and the word ‘dúchas’ is no exception. It encompasses all that we are connected to - genetic heritage from inner and outer perspectives, from personal lineage and personality traits to that of place with all its connections and memories for its inhabitants. O’Donohue (1998) explains that:

A native is one who belongs to a place by virtue of birth. The term suggests that somehow your initial belonging to a particular place seeps into your heart in a way that can never be washed out again”

(O’Donohue, 1998, p. 58)

This study is rooted in experiences of connection to Kerry, its people – present and past, its stories and legends, customs and traditions, geography and location. Smyth (1985) states that it is important to realise that ‘much of our lives – our experience of place – is a local thing’ (p. 4). This is true whether one is referring to lives lived in rural, urban, city or sea-side environments. Each of these places, he states, ‘has its own layered geography which incarnates – makes physical – the experiences and aspirations of its people’ (p. 4).

Kerry poet and writer, Gabriel Fitzmaurice (2000), states that Kerry is a place ‘that exists in the mind as surely as it does on any map’ (p. 10). The ‘energy in Kerry’ (p. 10), often commented on by people new to the county, may be due, he suggests, to the wide range of arts activities, literature, drama and music festivals, fairs, horse races, regattas, Gaelic football matches, taking place in the county, on a year-round basis. Kerry is a place with a landscape of beauty, of the rugged and idyllic kinds, but above all, it is a place of literature, with a history of writers in both languages (Irish and English), known both nationally and internationally. The writer, the late John B. Keane from Listowel, Co. Kerry, explains how the river Feale, on which the town is built, infuses his being and inspires his writing:

The river itself is always cool and there's always a breeze in the river-side. And what with the whispering of the breezes, the cadences of the water, the changing nuances of the notes, and the singing of the birds and the general aura of tranquillity that pervades the whole scene, this is the next thing to Paradise, really. And it is my favourite place in all of the world.

(DVD: 'From Source to Sea')

This verse, from a short poem, composed by the writer when he was forced to emigrate to England in the 1950s, highlights O'Donohue's (1998) point that the experience of belonging to a place becomes part of one's heart in a way that can never be erased:

All over Feale River the shadows are falling,  
And deep in Shanowen the vixen is calling,  
The sweet night is young love, the night is forever,  
And shadows are falling all over Feale River.

(DVD: 'From Source to Sea')

And for me, as for many others in the county, Kerry is also a place of journey, outer and inner. In the Dingle peninsula, in West Kerry, the pilgrimage journey 'Cosán na Naomh (The Saints Road), dates back to earliest times and was probably adapted by the Church from a pagan celebration. The route, almost eighteen kilometres long, is still travelled by many today. It begins at the southern end of the peninsula in Ceann Trá (Ventry) and ends at Sáipéilín Bréanainn (Brendan's Oratory) on the summit of the mountain. The remains of the oratory, a small stone building, is believed to have been used by St. Brendan and is named after him.

A mere five minutes walk from my home brings me to the town-land of Blennerville, the place of departure for the famine ship, the Jeanie Johnston, which made sixteen voyages, carrying over 2,500 emigrants safely to America, over a seven-year period, from 1848. Despite the congested and crowded conditions on the ship, no life was ever lost on board, on voyages lasting on average, seven weeks each. An exact replica of this ship was re-constructed in Blennerville, completed in 2002 and is now docked at Custom House Quay in Dublin's city centre where it is open for visitors to see.

Atkinson (1995) points out that:

Our stories are always variations of one of the thousands of folk tales, myths or legends, that have spoken to us for generations of our inner truths. Stories connect us to our roots.

(Atkinson, 1995, p. xii).

It is in the story of St. Brendan the Navigator's 'Navigatio' that the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project finds its parallel in journey. St. Brendan, an Irish monastic saint, also known as Brendan the Navigator, was born in a district between Spa and Fenit Island, some five miles west of Tralee in 484, and baptised at Tubrid, near Ardfert, by St. Erc. The maritime tradition was, and still is, very strong in the Fenit area and according to local scholar and author on the life and voyages of Brendan, Gearóid Ó Donnchadha (2004) who lives there, inhabitants were known as the '*feara feorna*, people of the shore, people who grew up with the sea at the centre of their consciousness and culture' (p. 17). Ó Donnchadha believes that 'to understand Brendan is to understand this call of the sea' (p.17). Combining missionary zeal with a love of seafaring, Brendan travelled extensively by sea, founding monasteries in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Brittany. While there is no historical proof of his journey in search of The Promised Land of Saints, Tim Severin, a British navigational scholar and modern day explorer, demonstrated in 1976 that it was possible to undertake this trip in a boat such as the one described in the 'Navigatio'. He created a replica of the boat described in the 'Navigatio', set sail, following the steering routes outlined in the text of the Navigatio and landed in Newfoundland in 1977. While this did not prove that Brendan landed in America, it did prove that such a journey was possible following the route laid out in the text. Ó Donnchadha (2004) believes that it is very likely that Brendan did reach America (p. 25).

Regardless of the certainty of this fact, what is more important for all who read and know the 'Navigatio', and in particular for this study, is the meaning of this voyage. If it cannot be proven with certainty, why is it important to us? The 'Navigatio', Ó Donnchadha (2004) suggests, appears to fit within a genre of literature, peculiar to Ireland, known as the 'immram' (p.14). These immrama involve a hero's journey, in

a boat, to another world, most often in search of a Christian paradise. Characteristically, the hero has several adventures on several islands, as does Brendan during his seven-year journey in search of Paradise Island, the Promised Land or St. Brendan's Island.

Ó Donnchadha (2004) states that to discover the meaning of the 'Navigatio' we must return to the value we place on our heritage of Newgrange and the Book of Kells - "Of such stuff is the *Navagatio* created" (p. 25). He believes that the *Navagatio* is a very complex effort to reconcile the old ways of spirituality that had obtained in the land for thousands of years, with those of Christianity. He also believed that it was an effort to explore poetically, imaginatively and artistically, the fundamental questions of human life. In an effort to understand the *Navagatio*, he states, we need to leave behind "our modern, scientific and analytic mentality and see it for what it is, "as challenging an interpretation as are Newgrange and the Book of Kells" (p. 28).

Ó Donnchadha, himself a sailor, has sailed the waters that Brendan sailed, crossing the Atlantic Ocean twice, in small boats. He describes the experience of a major Atlantic storm, in these crossings, as "nature gone mad" (p. 8) likening the assault on one's being to an "out-of-body experience where one is bereft of all but the experience of the moment" (p. 9). He suggests that some of the rich imagery of the 'Navigatio' was influenced during such storms or lonely watches where both the horizon and the world seem to have disappeared leaving only the vast expanse of the ocean water (p. 28). Delyth (2008) describes this situation as being beyond 'The Ninth Wave', which she states, is 'a metaphor for our visionary journey' (p. 216). Delyth (2008) states that this wave "represents the liminal boundaries of our perception, of the mortal and the Otherworld. This is the greatest wave that takes us out to sea, or brings us home again" (p. 216).

Ó Donnchadha(2004) makes a connection between this liminal state and the motifs of the circles and tunnels of Newgrange and the intricate drawings in the Book of Kells, stating that they represent the phases of Van Gennep's (1909) rites of passage. Our understanding and ritualization of rites of passage, he suggests, involves three stages, separation (pre-liminal), transition (liminal) and incorporation (post-liminal), (p. 26). These three phases represent the timeless and sacred aspects of our own lives and are

discussed in more detail in the literature review. The incidents related in the ‘Navagatio’ fit these three phases. Firstly, Brendan’s separation as he leaves and sails out to sea, secondly his encounter with many dangers while there, and finally finding the promised land and returning home.

Ó Donnchadha sees the ‘Navagatio’ as a means of trying to come to terms with the difficulties of attempting to reconcile the old with the new: “What may be missed is that when deeply-ingrained cultural categories of thought are upset, the whole human psyche is threatened; one faces a calamitous breakdown of self and society” (p. 27). This is fundamental to this thesis. Just as Brendan drew on his imagination to reconcile the new Christian faith with the older beliefs, rituals and understanding, so too this thesis explores how a group of adult learners, cut off from the deepest part of the ‘self’ and from appropriate integration into society, due to the medicalisation of their visual impairments, used the language indigenous to all of us – the expressive arts – to connect them to what was lost to them and to us all, since the Enlightenment. Knowledge gained from deep connection with self, other, nature, was cast aside from this period onwards, in favour of more scientifically based ways of knowing as it was believed that these would lead to human freedom and happiness. The story of Brendan’s ‘Navagatio’, rooted us right into our own journeys of separation, initiation, incorporation – our sacred stories.

At the start of the new millennium, due to the efforts of the local communities, a bronze statue of the saint, five metres in height, created by artist Teige O’Donoghue, was completed and now stands on Samhpipe Rock, at the entrance to Fenit harbour, in Co. Kerry. This powerful image of a spirited, heroic individual, with his right knee bent forward facing challenge, his left foot resting against an obstacle, depicts the battle stance of a warrior of the Fianna (mythological Irish warriors), suggesting no avenue of retreat. With his left hand outstretched, pointing in the direction of America, cloak blown back by the wind, he stands on a site embracing features of Irish archaeology and history, principally the triple spiral and standing stones, and those of the Riasc Cross and the Beehive hut, the latter two particular to West Kerry. His presence serves as a guide to the journeys we need to take in life, outwardly and inwardly. Co-incidentally, his sculpture was in the process of being created at the time I was planning the first phase of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, his

outstretched arm pointing me, on a subconscious level, to the site of the project – Siamsa Tíre (The National Folk Theatre), my work place at the time. (See following image, downloaded from the internet in preference to photographing it, as the sculpture is now surrounded by a railing to provide for public safety).



[www.saint-brendan.org/news.asp?p=saint-brendan-2012-activities](http://www.saint-brendan.org/news.asp?p=saint-brendan-2012-activities)

Downloaded 5<sup>th</sup>. June, 2012.

## **Irish folk theatre**

It is significant, I believe, that the project was rooted in the work of Siamsa Tíre – The National Folk Theatre. Siamsa Tíre is based in Tralee, County Kerry, in a purpose built theatre, its construction resembling that of an Irish Ring Fort. It serves as home to its performing company, whose aim is to project through the medium of theatre, at home and abroad, Irish folk culture in all its forms. It operates two rural folk theatre training centres, in areas that are rich in tradition, one in my birth place of Finuge, in North Kerry, an area with a distinctive dancing style, the legacy of a local dancing master, Jeremiah Molyneaux. The other, in Carraig, in the West Kerry Gaeltacht, an area rich in traditions associated with the Irish language. These centres train young people in the folk theatre idiom. The theatre also serves as an arts centre for the south-west region, offering a wide programme of arts events at professional, amateur and community level.

‘Folk’ is an often abused word, but means a form of cultural expression, widely recognised by a people, distinctively their own, and containing some hidden power to evoke a sense of identity and recognition. ‘Folk’ is open to other ways of perceiving and is sensitive to the belief that there are other realms of existence that enter and make their presence felt in this realm. Time is not linear in the folk realm. Belief in transformation is central to the folk world. This can be seen in the process of shape-shifting, for example where the children of Lir change into swans, in the mythological tale of that title. ‘Culture’ can have many interpretations, but from my experience in Siamsa Tíre, I understand it to mean how a people sees itself and its relationships, how it chooses to express itself in moments of celebration and in times of particular emotional importance. In its work, Siamsa Tíre celebrates a uniquely Irish attitude to many of life’s deepest experiences. It expresses how the Irish see themselves, in an unselfconscious way.

For me, experiencing the work of the company for the first time in the nineteen seventies, was a profound experience. During the performance, there was a sense of ‘coming home’ to myself, a felt sense of belonging, and wanting to stay connected to that place. Later, fate intervened, with personal circumstances dictating that I leave

my teaching position in County Louth and return to my native Kerry. Within months, I was working with the company.

The language of folk theatre is a blend of music, mime, song, dance, movement and storytelling. It is through these ancient, shamanic, expressive forms, that the company expresses uniquely, its understanding of the inner, outer and other worlds experienced by the Irish psyche. Lambert (2003) states that through these forms of expression ‘the creative energies and relationships hidden beneath the natural world were brought into the conscious realm’ (p. 6). Comments reflecting experiences of familiarity and belonging, by patrons of international audiences, following performances, suggest that the work has the capacity to transcend cultural boundaries, finding the places where we are all connected.

### **Intermodal Expressive Arts**

An interrelated use of different art forms is common to both the language of folk theatre and that of intermodal expressive arts, though the focus in folk theatre is on the integration of the traditional arts. Knill (2005) is the author of the theoretical framework for expressive arts, which he defines as the ‘rites of decentering and restoration’ (p. 77). This framework dovetails with that of Atkinson’s (1995) process of personal myth or sacred story, which is the journey of separation, initiation, return. Expressive arts, provides the ritualised space where this journey can be lived out. This is discussed in detail in the next chapter. Knill (2005) explains that these rites have characteristics in common, leaving everyday space and entering and occupying ‘devotional’ (p. 77) or liminal space, for a period of time, where there is an opportunity to explore imaginatively a range of solutions to a ‘stuck’ situation. The difficult or limiting logic of daily life is left behind as the person enters the logic of imagination. At the end of the journey, the individual is ‘challenged with the difference as a confrontation’ (p. 83). This, suggests O Donnachadha (2004), was the journey explored in the ‘Navigatio’. It was the journey of the learners with visual impairment in the Hidden Voices from the Dark project. This is, and always has been, according to Campbell (1993), the hero’s journey, the universal process of transformation. Journeying in this way connects us to soul and spirit.



## **Psyche, Soul and Spirit**

The words ‘psyche’, ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ are often used interchangeably leaving one to wonder if they mean the same thing or if there are differences between them. I use the term ‘psyche’ in the study, to mean both the conscious and non-conscious aspects of the human mind. McNiff (2009) confirms this understanding when he speaks about the capacity of creative expressions to integrate the ‘conscious and nonconscious workings of the psyche’ (p. 13).

I take my definition of soul from Moore (1992), who states that soul is not a thing, “but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart and personal substance” (p. 5). Hillman (1989) provides an understanding of soul as the “imaginative possibility in our natures, the experiencing through reflective speculation, dream, image and fantasy – that mode which recognizes all realities as primarily symbolic and metaphorical” (p. 21). McNiff (1992) states that soul is “also an inner movement or stirring, the force of creative animation and vitality” (p. 2).

Transformation occurs through connection with the unconscious, where all human consciousness begins. The unconscious communicates with the conscious through the pathways of dreams, fantasy and imagination, in the language of symbolism. A relationship with imagination is a relationship with soul. Soul is a channel to the unconscious. In this study, I have made a choice to use the word ‘soul’ in place of the word ‘spirit’. This is important as the learners speak about the importance of soul for them, with one learner believing that the word soul should feature in the title of this study. But, as the transformation highlighted in the study is that of body, mind, soul and spirit, it is important to highlight both the distinctions and connections between soul and spirit.

Plotkin (2003) believes that both soul and spirit are transpersonal. Spirit draws one upwards and soul draws one downwards in “a voyage into darkness and shadow” (p. 2). Miller (2000) agrees, believing that soul connects ego and spirit and that: “There is more of a sense of depth than of ascendance as we tend to look down into our souls” (p. 24). Plotkin (2003) describes soul as the “vital, mysterious and wild core

of our individual selves, an essence unique to each person, qualities found in layers of the self much deeper than our personalities” (p. 25). The concept of soul “embraces the essence of our particular individuality” (p. 25). In contrast to this, the concept of spirit points to what all things and all people have in common, “our shared membership in a single Cosmos, each of us a facet of the One Being that contains all” (p. 25). Miller (2000) agrees: “Through spirit we experience unity with the divine” (p. 24). He believes that it is the part of us that is beyond time and space. Plotkin (2003) suggests that spirit transcends all things and imbues or is immanent in all things. On the one hand it is something that is removed from ordinary life, but on the other hand, it permeates everything in life. “Soul embraces and calls us toward what is most unique in us. Spirit encompasses and draws us toward what is most universal and shared” (p. 25). He believes that both spirit and soul are sacred (p. 26). They both suffuse life with meaning, beauty, mystery and wonder. They are both transpersonal because “they exist beyond the personal, beyond the conventional mind or personality” (p. 26).

Soul is transpersonal, Plotkin (2003) states, because it is deeper and far more expansive than the conscious mind, encompassing many qualities of which we may not yet be aware, may never become aware, or may deny or refuse to see. Spirit, he explains, is also transpersonal as it is independent of our individual beliefs and knowledge about self and about the process of our life’s direction. “Spirit simply insists you return to spirit (and the universal essence of your self) through surrender to the present moment” (p. 27). We align ourselves with spirit through responding to the call or bidding of our souls. Plotkin (2003) believes that: “Soul is ultimately an agent for spirit. And a healthy ego or personality is an agent for soul and, by extension, for spirit as well” (p. 27).

Balancing the journey between soul and spirit is important for a life of fulfilment and wholeness. Plotkin (2003) states that living excessively in either the realm of the light or the dark can be problematic. Many people fear the descent into the self, he believes, because western religious traditions associate it with a turning away from the sacred, towards evil and wickedness (p. 28). McIntosh (2008) and Hederman (1991) both point out the need to work with our darkness, (see Chapter Three).

Plotkin (2003) believes that we need to experience both: “The upward and downward journeys support one another” (p. 29).

Although soul and spirit are opposites in one sense, Plotkin (2003) states that, “they are not in any way opposed to one another” (p. 29). He points out that: “Soul shows us how we, as individuals, are different (in a community affirming way) from everybody else. Spirit shows us how we are one with all that exists” (p. 29). When a person encounters his or her individual soul, we are more likely to say, Plotkin (2003) suggests, that “she has uncovered her unique gifts, her destiny, her purpose, or personal meaning”. In the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, the learners experience both soul and spirit on their transformative journeys and expressive arts provides the means of transport for them to do so.

This chapter brought into focus the stirrings and soundings of place, which provided me with the inspiration and direction to create, develop and give expression to the importance of inner journey, through the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. The indelible fusion with place and the stories and traditions held within its landscape and their influence on us always, the power of voice through intermodal expressive arts, and the movements of psyche, soul and spirit through our human forms, are all explored here. The next chapter provides a clear map of the inner journey undertaken by the learners in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, through a review of the literature and conceptual framework of the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCEPTS: MAPPING A NEW SPACE FOR JOURNEY (Literature Review)

#### Introduction

This is a study of a group of adult learners who transformed their personal stories through expressive arts, in a second-chance, adult learning programme. For them, personal transformation led to a positive change in their approach to learning. The purpose of the literature review is to explore subjects relevant to their transformation. Atkinson (1995) points out:

Our stories are always variations of one of the thousands of folk tales, myths or legends, that have spoken to us for generations of our inner truths. Stories connect us to our roots

(Atkinson, 1995, p. xii).

Atkinson's statement echoes through the experiences of the learners, as the story of their journey finds parallel in Ó Donnchadha's (2004) 'The Navigatio', the mythical voyage undertaken by St. Brendan the Navigator, in search of the Promised Land. The subjects of myth, life-story, personal myth-making, expressive arts, soul, healing and transformative adult learning, are all relevant to this study of transformation.

Following an overview of this literature, the focus then turns to a more detailed exploration of how Knill's (2005) framework of intermodal expressive arts work facilitates expression of Atkinson's (1995) personal myth-making process. These two frameworks - Atkinson's personal myth-making process and Knill's theory of intermodal expressive arts, form the key theoretical concepts of this study. Atkinson (1995) refers to the personal myth-making process as, "those personally sacred and timeless elements of our lives" (p. xv). Kearney (2002) leaves the way open to add this concept of telling sacred story through intermodal expressive arts, to ways that have gone before:

The narrative imperative has assumed many genres – myth, epic, sacred history, legend, saga, folktale, romance, allegory, confession, chronicle, satire, novel. And within each genre there are multiple sub-genres: oral and written, poetic and prosaic, historical and fictional.

(Kearney, 2002, p. 5)

Section One focuses on the value of story and myth, and the differences between the frameworks of life-story and personal-mythmaking, connecting the personal myth to the collective myth, and the need for healing in a modernist world. Section Two explores how art unites the conscious and the unconscious, and how it enables healing and restores soul, for the individual. The issue of aesthetics and how we are enabled to connect to the sacred within us, through art, are discussed here. This section also includes a detailed exploration of how Knill's theory of intermodal expressive arts facilitates Atkinson's theory of personal mythmaking. It concludes by querying the need for a new myth, for the times we live in. Theories of transformative learning relevant to the study are discussed in Section Three.

## **Section One**

### **Story, Myth, Modernism and the need for Healing**

#### **Stories**

McAdams (1993) echoes Kearney (2002), when he points out that: "Human beings are storytellers by nature. In many guises, as folktale, legend, myth, epic, history, motion picture and television program, the story appears in every known human culture" (p. 27). Story is central to our meaning-making, to how we make sense of the world, of our encounters, and experiences. McAdams (1993) discusses Bruner's suggestion that human beings understand the world in two different ways. The first, he terms, the 'paradigmatic' mode of thought. In this mode, we understand our experiences in terms of logical analysis and empirical observation. By contrast, in the 'narrative' mode of thought, our concern is with human wants, desires and needs (p. 29). The narrative mode is the mode of stories. In this study, the focus is on story. It is important to point this out as sometimes the word is used interchangeably with

'narrative', and this use often begs the question: 'Are they the same thing? Frank (2010) spoke of an overlap between both, but stated that in narrative, there is a skeleton plot and a sequencing of events, which can give rise to a variety of stories. Stories are local and particular. They have characters and this is what distinguishes them from other forms of narration. People break into story he believed, because they feel the need to arouse the imaginations of the people listening. Imagination is what makes stories, 'stories'. Many things are possible, Frank stated, if someone comes along and tells us the right story. McAdams says: "Stories are less about facts and more about meanings" (p. 28). Brown (2009) states that storytelling has been identified "as *the* unit of human understanding" (p. 91). In early development, it is central, he believes, to learning about oneself, the world, and one's place in it. But, stories remain central to understanding in adulthood also. He believes that: "Storytelling has the capacity to produce a sense of timelessness, pleasure, and an altered state of vicarious involvement that identifies narrative and storytelling with states of play" (p. 92).

Pinkola Estes (1993) states that throughout all of human history, and in her family tradition of Mexican-Spanish by birth and Hungarian by adoption, the ultimate gift of story is two-fold;

that at least one soul remains who can tell the story, and that by recounting the tale, the greater forces of love, mercy, generosity and strength are continuously called into being in the world.

(Pinkola Estes, 1993, p. 3)

In these traditions, the telling of a story is considered a spiritual practice. Tales, legends, myths, folktales are "learned, developed, numbered and preserved the way a pharmacopoeia is kept" (p. 3). In these societies, she points out, stories are not used simply as entertainment. They are "conceived of and handled as a large group of healing medicines, each requiring spiritual preparation and certain insights by the healer as well as the subject" (p. 4). These medicinal stories were used to teach, evoke transformation, re-create memory and heal. Many of these stories, she notes, originated in a person's or group's intense human suffering, and much of story comes from this place of pain. Paradoxically, she states, that "these stories that rise from

deep suffering can provide the most potent remedies for past, present and even future ills” (p. 5). During the fourth phase of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, ‘Deir mé, Deir tú’ (I Say, You Say), where the group members composed poems and music to communicate their dual needs for freedom to live individually and as part of the collective, one learner envisaged the future potential for healing in this work, when he stated how important it would be to ensure that a copy of the cd of their music and poetry would be donated to the local library as “it may give hope to someone, twenty years from now, who is losing their sight and going through the same thing we are”. Mellon (1992) concurs with Pinkola Estes:

Although setbacks of all kinds may discourage us, the grand, old process of storytelling puts us in touch with strengths we may have forgotten, with wisdom that has faded or disappeared, and with hopes that have fallen into darkness”.

(Mellon, 1992, p. 1)

McAdams adds his voice to these statements; “stories may also mend us when we are broken, heal us when we are sick, and even move us toward psychological fulfillment and maturity” (p. 31).

## **Why do we tell our stories?**

### **Identity**

Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living. They are what make our condition human”.

(Kearney, 2002, p. 3)

When asked the question, ‘who are you?’, we often tell our story. “That is”, Kearney (2002) says,

you recount your present condition in the light of past memories and future anticipation. You interpret where you are now in terms of where you have come from and where you are going to.

(Kearney, 2002, p. 4)

In doing this, he states, we give a sense of ourselves as “a narrative identity that perdures and coheres over a lifetime” (p. 4).

Atkinson (1995) states that: “To tell our life story is to tell our spiritual autobiography” (p. 12). Stories take us beyond our everyday existence, into the realm where we experience the the connection between our life themes and those of others, “where we are broken, where we are whole, and where we are most authentically us” (p. 11). In this space, he believes, “we come in contact with the holy, the eternal, the spiritual, in all life and in our own” (p. 11).

### **Connection**

Frank (1995) states that: “Stories do not simply describe the self; they are self’s medium of being” (p. 35). Atkinson (1995) states that telling our stories “may be the most important way we have of giving our lives meaning” (p. 16). Telling our stories is a way to define and give order to our lives and put them in a perspective that is valid for us. In connecting to the human community through our stories we may find we have more in common with others than we imagined. A learner reflects on this, following the telling of his story in the sixth phase of the project, ‘Cé tusa Istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?):

*I feel I know the others in the group better. I grew up with ‘A’ and I never knew he felt that angry about the way he was treated. ‘B’ who always seems so bright and bubbly – I didn’t realize he felt so down about not seeing his daughters grow up.*

We get to know ourselves better, heal the parts of ourselves that need it, make peace with ourselves, understand others, and the world around us, better than before, through telling our stories. It is a process, Atkinson (1995) believes through which we can “experience many forms of release, recovery, resolution or renewal” (p. 16). The capacity to see our own life as a comprehensible story, he explains, is vital to our happiness and well-being. He states that, “Life stories make up the thread that



connects the human family. It may well be that we can leave no greater legacy than the story of our life” (p. 16).

## **Meaning**

Kenyon and Randall (1997) stress that the metaphor of life as story can contribute to a positive and meaningful interpretation of the current dilemma of separatedness and disconnection (p. 10). Telling our stories and hearing the stories of others enables us to see our connections. This experience promises the possibility of a world which is richer for honouring both our individuality and our interconnectedness, as this line from a learner’s poem, in phase four of the project, ‘Deir mé, Deir tú’ (I say, You say), highlights: *“Alone I compose, but together we can perform a beautiful piece of music”*. Kearney (2002) agrees: “Every life is in search of a narrative” (p. 4). We all seek to bring unity and harmony into the strife and fragmentation of our daily lives. He argues that, in a postmodern era, narrative provides us “with one of our most viable forms of identity – individual and communal” (p. 4).

## **The four transforming functions of stories**

Atkinson (1995) points out that there are four transforming functions built into the stories we tell – psychological, social, mystical and cosmological. Campbell (2004) points to the same functions in mythology, stressing however, that in our present world, “the cosmological and sociological functions have been taken away from us” (p. 25).

The process of psychological development, Atkinson (1995) states, involves a “dialectic of conflict and resolution, change and growth” (p. 6). To be capable of this, we need to reflect on, take in, understand and make sense of our experiences and their meaning for us, on a continuous basis. Telling our life stories, he explains, enables us to see our lives in new ways. This brings form and order to our lives and gives new insights into life’s journey. Atkinson (1995) believes that traditional communities fulfilled this function for people “by guiding them through a socially prescribed rite of

passage” (p. 7). Since society no longer provides this function, we tell our stories as a way of doing this.

From a social perspective, sharing our story with others helps us to see what we have in common, and helps to keep us connected to others. The learners highlight this point in phase four of the project, ‘Deir mé, Deir tú’ (I Say, You Say), when they chant the words they’ve composed: “*We’re all the same, we too make the same mistakes occasionally*”, highlighting the fact that they, like others, misjudge situations, behaviours and attitudes, also. The bond established in this way helps us to keep a sense of community and to see our place in the social order of things. Seeing how our experiences and feelings fit in with the world around us is important as we no longer live in a time of adhering to fixed principles. Campbell (2004) points out that: “The social laws of yesterday are no longer the social laws of today” (p. 25). Today, he says, we think of morality as something we can judge, not as something immutable, handed down by the gods.

In exploring the cosmological function of stories, Atkinson (1995) believes that telling our stories brings order to life by helping us to see the world around us and the place and roles we have within it. We reveal our world view through the stories we tell about our lives. Today, our world has become a global village, and with fewer borders to conquer, our need is to see how our stories fit with this new image of the universe (p. 13). Today, Campbell (2004) says: “Our image of the cosmos is totally different from the image expressed by the religious traditions in which we have been brought up” (p. 25).

Atkinson (1995) believes that telling our stories “is an act of transcending the personal and entering the realm of the sacred” (p. 11), and that the mystical function of stories is fulfilled in this way. When we leave behind our everyday existence and enter the realm of the sacred we are in touch with the eternal mystery that lies beyond the limits of human knowledge, space and time. This eternal mystery is not simple, rational knowledge, but a deeply felt mystical experience. In this realm, which we call sacred, we experience the spirit that imbues all life. Atkinson (1995) believes that as we tell our stories we begin to recognise the diversity of our experiences and also the unity of our common life themes. In this space, he says, “we feel a sense of awe, humility, and respect as we come face to face with an ultimate mystery that words fail

to describe” (p. 11). At the end of the fourth performance, ‘Deir mé, Deir tú...’ (I Say, You Say), a learner highlights the necessity of recognising the importance of both our individuality and our collectivity, as he states, “*Alone I compose, but together we can perform a beautiful piece of music*”. For Atkinson (1995), “sharing our life story with others beyond our immediate ties links us to the circle of life that crosses time and culture.” (p. 11).

Story connects us to the core of our being, to our individual identity. We are individuals, but we are part of a larger whole and we yearn for connections with others, with the stories of others, and with a sense of the spiritual in life, however we perceive that individually. But, Kenyon and Randall (1997) state that we do not create a unique lifestory in a spiritual, individual vacuum, completely from the inside, without being affected by the physical, psychological and social dimensions of human nature. Understanding this idea, they believe, “comes by way of a closer look at the elements of the life as story metaphor” (p. 16). There are interrelated dimensions to our lifestories and the larger stories of human nature and living, and they are discussed next.

### **Interrelated dimension of lifestories**

Kenyon and Randall identify “at least four interrelated dimensions of our lifestories” (p. 16). Firstly, our structural story, which includes “social policy and power relations in society” (p. 16). Structural constraints, they explain, can silence stories in certain areas such as disability, gender, or any area where people are seen as ‘other’ to the dominant discourse. The ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project was set up to give voice to people who believed their concerns were not heard in public. One learner’s reflection following the ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’(Give me your Hand) performance, highlights this point: “*I think it has made people aware that disability does not equal mental handicap. It has made them see us a little differently now*”. Secondly, our social story, “or the social meanings associated with storytelling” (p. 16), including relationships such as employer, employee, younger and older workers. It also includes issues related to ethnic and cultural dimensions of lifestories. Next, there is our interpersonal story, which refers to intimate relationships, including those of

family. Finally, there is “the dimension of personal meaning or *personal* story itself” (p. 16). This dimension consists of our “life history or herstory”, and how the pieces make, or do not make, sense to a person. Beginning this journey was a profound and empowering experience for the learners. One learner expressed its effect, following the first performance, ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand): “*This has given me a new confidence in life – a direction that the future is possible more than before*”. He also articulated its effect on family members: “*You should ask our families how this affected them – it had a wonderful effect*”.

### **Levels of lifestory**

Looking at the interrelated dimensions of lifestories, creates an awareness of how many stories we carry around inside us – those of childhood, adolescence, school, friendships, relationships, career, illness, loss, grief, hope, despair, joy, inclusion, exclusion, being heard, being silenced. We are also part of a world where stories exist all around us. Stories of the past, our ancestors, place, community, the cosmos, exist side by side with those of modern day world events and news flashed across the print, screen and social media. So, what exactly do we mean when we speak of our lifestory? According to Kenyon and Randall (1997), it is difficult to give a precise definition of the concept of ‘lifestory’. To help work through the meanings we can attach to the concept, they believe “there are at least four levels on which it can be understood: outside, inside, inside-out, and outside-in” (p. 33).

These positions are manifest in the thoughts and reflections of the learners in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. Kenyon and Randall (1997) see the outside story as what happens to us (p. 33). One learner articulates his experience of this during rehearsals for the first phase of the project, ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand): “*We’ve all been told the awful words – I’m sorry, there’s no more we can do for you. You’re blind*”. The inside story, they state, is what we make of what happens to us (p. 34). This inner state finds expression in this learner’s words, articulated in his reflection on phase six of the project, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?): “*That sense of remoteness was worst when I realized that I would never again recognize the faces of my friends, or my own vision in a mirror*”. The inside-out story, they explain, is what we tell to others of what we make of what happens to

us. This same learner, during the ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?) phase of the project, reflects on how he concealed the real truth of this position from others, and how revealing it brought real freedom for him:

*I remember clearly when I used to hide my thoughts from my friends and tell a frivolous story. Now, I was telling the truth and seeing myself as I had never done before. This indeed, was hard work, but my God, was it worthwhile?*

The outside-in story, Kenyon and Randall (1997) explain, is what others make of us, on their own, without our consent (p. 36-37). This line from the final poem composed by the learners, ‘I say, You say’, for their cd of poetry and music in phase four of the project, ‘Deir mé, Deir tú’ (I say, You say), highlights the pain they experienced in this regard: “*Ye say (In hushed tones): Isn’t it a shame to see us that way?*”

We never tell our complete story and between these levels, there are gaps and links. The borders that separate the links, they state, “are far from defined” (p. 37). There is a “complex, cyclical relationship” (p. 37) between them. Regarding the gaps, they suggest that we can never experience the totality of either our existence or experience, “nor can we show exactly what we feel or mean” (p. 37). We need to see the individual levels “as qualitatively different, of a different order” (p. 38). Thus, we need to factor in the gaps to all our thinking about human nature, otherwise we will fail to represent such subtle things as secrecy, self-deception, hypocrisy – “realities that, however hard to measure, are integral to everyday life” (p. 38). The modernist way of life views the human being, Spretnak (1999) states as “*essentially an economic being, homo economicus*” (p. 40). In this view, there is no space for alternative ways of being –everything is clear, certain and progressive. This leaves gaps for other ways of experiencing the world, especially the creative, transcendental, spiritual and ecological ways. There is also a gap for the ‘liminal’, the in-between space where difficult experiences can be explored and integrated into life. This study illuminates the importance of this space for transformation of life and learning, through the experiences of the learners, on the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project.

## **Myth: The Sacred Story**

What is myth?

In today's world, the word myth fails to hold meaning for us as a psychological or spiritual term. It is regularly used to describe something that is untrue.

Myth, in contrast to story generally, is about our deepest concerns and is classified as a narrative or an account that portrays the unknown, the unknowable as well as some of the known. Joseph Campbell (1993) defines myth (p.3):

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation.

(Campbell,1993, p. 3)

Myth springs from and creates beliefs. Atkinson (1995) defines myth as “a metaphorical and symbolic story that conveys the deepest truth about life and that at the same time captures the universal aspects of being human” (p. 21).

According to Whelan (2006), since the dawning of the Enlightenment, almost four centuries ago, western society was encouraged, to abandon “all forms of knowing which does not reflect logical thinking or represent physical material reality” (p. 25). Science, mathematics and technology were emphasized and valued at the expense of imagination, myth and creativity, with the result that today we are far more concerned with verifiable facts than existential truths. This point is discussed in literature by Armstrong (2005), Price (2008), Levi-Strauss (1978), May (1991), Campbell (2004), Hederman (2007), and Goodman (2003) and Spretnak (1999), O’Sullivan (2002) and O’Neill (2002).

These viewpoints are important for this study. The hopes of the learners participating in the ‘Hidden Voices From the Dark’ project revolved around personal concerns with regard to development of a more confident sense of ‘self’, and social and communal ones relating to increased integration and interaction with others. These needs could

not be articulated and met through a limited form of rational knowing and factual presentation. A more relational, creative and deeply human response was required to transform their experiences. Their personal stories of the deepest truths of their lives needed to find articulation in a form that would honour their stories, and empower them to re-story and re-create the 'self' through their expressions. This required connection to traditional ways of knowing and being that embraced what Whelan (2006) refers to as, "the realm of imagination with its mythic consciousness" (p. 25). Using the media of expressive arts to enact these sacred stories, offered them multiple ways of seeing, feeling, knowing, understanding and expressing the many layers of their life experiences. They were not reliant on word only. One learner remarks on this, during the workshops for the second phase of the project, 'Cos, cos eile...' (One step, then another step):

*I find the workshops beneficial, especially the work on emotions. They made me look at things in a different way. You can do things in a different way – not always verbally. I know now that I can look angry even though I don't always say so. I'm more aware of my body language.*

In our present day western culture, where rational, logical and analytical ways of knowing, what Whelan (2006) terms, 'logos', ' (p. 25) are supremely valued, the word myth, she states, is not given serious consideration. Within this rational ideology, she explains, "the belief that non physical worlds may exist is treated with contempt" (p. 26). She states that this overvaluing of the rational, analytical way of knowing is both a central weakness and a major cause of many problems encountered in society today. She quotes the psychologist, Adler, who once noted that 'Literalism creates madness' (p. 26). In a logos driven world, muthos as a valid way of knowing is excluded. So, what does she mean by muthos? The root of this word, she explains, is "Mu, which has meanings such as silence, secrets, hidden and arcane" (p. 26). 'Muthos', is related to the tradition of oral storytelling. Bartlett (2009) concurs, stating that the word 'Myth' comes from "the ancient Greek word *mythos*, which simply means 'word' 'narration', 'tale' or 'speech'. To the ancient Greeks, Bartlett states, it was "the antithesis of *logos*, the word for an objective way of describing an event, following the specific rules of logic" (p. 10). Whelan (2006) quotes from a lecture by Irish scholar, Seán Ó Duinn, who believes that *muthos* is the secret hidden in the story,

which even if it is not understood cognitively, brings us into relationship with the cosmos (p. 26).

‘Muthos’, as a way of knowing, she states, is related to the right-brain activity, while ‘logos’, or logical analytical knowing is a left-brain one (p. 26). This latter is the realm where factual, mathematical and technological thinking dominate and where information is processed in a linear, sequential way. The right brain is the realm where image, fantasy, intuition, metaphor and creativity flourish. It is the aspect of the brain, she explains, that “allows dreaming to happen and facilitates us in reaching the spiritual and mystical realms in ourselves and in the world” (p. 26). In a healthy society, both aspects of the brain are developed and the knowledge present in each valued. The challenge today, she believes, is how to bring balance to the present situation, so that “*muthos*, this right-brain way of knowing and gateway to the realms of the imagination and soul, might be understood and valued” (p. 27).

Myth operates in us. It is part of being human. Therefore, we should make the most of it, in terms of the mythology with which we choose to identify and that which we ourselves make. Today, we may have lost contact with the grand myths, and their wisdom, which guided the lives of our ancestors in the past, but, consciously and unconsciously, we are still influenced by a mythology. The myth which largely dominates life for people in the western world today, is the belief that consumerism and material goods will bring contentment and fulfilment. Our experiences reflect the opposite. The more we consume, the more we want and need.

The reflections of the learners at the start of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project suggest a growing consciousness of a myth by which life could be lived in a more interconnected way: “*Before, when I came to Siamsa Tire, I was in the audience, apart from the group – now, I’m part of them*”. This reflection highlights not only a consciousness of this possibility, but also a desire, a yearning and an intuitive knowledge of the potential for this to become a reality. Meeting with the learners prior to beginning the project, it was clear from their reflections that they felt compelled to live out of the medical model of disability, which confined them to a life unnecessarily disconnected from each other and community. While undertaking an assessment of their needs, one learner spoke of needing to “*feel part of things where*



*my contribution will be taken seriously and valued*". More than one learner spoke of needing opportunities to interact with others. The medical model of disability is a modernist perspective, which sees only the limitations imposed by the disability, thereby obscuring the full potential of the person to contribute to life and society. Through the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, the learners connected to a myth highlighting the bigger story of the truth of their existence – their connectedness to 'self', 'other', place, cosmos, community.

We need to reclaim an understanding of myth as something that captures and holds our deepest concerns and distance ourselves from views that it is mere entertainment, or something untrue that is unworthy of serious consideration. Spretnak (1999) states:

Far from being vacuous storytelling, myth in its true sense is a communion with the deepest truths of existence. It articulates a relational field of cosmological energy, a sphere of participation that includes the narrator and listeners (or the reader) along with the forms of universe life that appear in the story.

(Spretnak, 1999, p. 182)

### **The sacred nature of myth**

Atkinson (1995) states that: "Myth is perhaps the most familiar - and important - form of sacred story" (p. 21). The important concerns and values of a society are reflected in its myths and they are carried forward and kept alive through the passing of the stories from one generation to the next. This wisdom is important to the development of the culture and psyche of a people. Atkinson (1995) believes that we continue the tradition of passing on stories through the generations because "their timeless elements possess an intrigue, a power, and an ability to transform our lives" (p. 20). The Irish story of 'The Druid and his Soul', in O'Connor (1981), is an appropriate analogy to the experiences of the learners in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project. The story is an account of a druid who was so clever he convinced himself, and eventually the King, that neither God nor soul existed, and that logic was the source of all truth. One day, he met with a spirit, who told him that he was a wicked man for destroying the beliefs of his people and that he had only hours to live. He went to the then King, to convince him of the existence of soul. The King did not believe him and so the druid asked him to assemble his people. When they were

assembled, the druid knelt down and asked the King to draw a knife across his throat. As he did, the druid fell dead at his feet, and a beautiful white butterfly fluttered from his throat. This, the Irish say, was the first butterfly. Cooper (1978) states that in Celtic consciousness, the butterfly was a symbol of the soul (p. 27 – 28).

The story of the ‘Druid and his Soul’ provides an important insight into the freedom of spirit which can grow from releasing and allowing the power of imagination to work through us, as the learners demonstrate through re-storying their lives through creative arts. Prior to beginning the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, the experience of the learners reflect that of the druid, as they were closed to the imaginative possibilities of their natures. They were living within a medical model of disability. So much was closed to them, they believed, because of their lack of sight. But their souls and imaginations were there waiting to be touched. And even though this part of them had been neglected for a long time, as Malchiodi (2002) states, it was “still there, fully intact” (p. 17). It was not limited by age or disability. Touching their souls through creative arts work, released the learners from the one-dimensional model of disability, endowing them with the freedom to fly, like the butterfly, and search for their own individual paradise. One learner’s reflection, following the first phase of the project, entitled ‘Tabhair Dom Do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand), emphasizes this: *“I am very proud of being blind now, and being up on the stage the last day has taken away a barrier from the front of our faces”*.

Telling these sacred stories and consulting them for their wisdom in all times, but especially in times of doubt, crisis or confusion, as Pinkola Estes (1993) suggests, is central to the development of our culture. But, so too is memory as this is what enables us to remember the wisdom of these sacred stories and keep them alive. Culture is recreated, renewed, and relived in the light of current experience, each time a story is told from memory. May (1991) states that: “Memory depends mainly upon myth” (p. 66). When an event occurs, whether in fact, in fantasy, or in our minds, “we form it in memory, molding it like clay, day after day – and soon we have made out of that event a myth” (p.66). We then store the myth in memory and use it as a guide in future situations that are similar. Atkinson (1995) points out that traditional stories are considered sacred not only because they hold within them elements that are common to human experience, but because, they do this in a form that is familiar and

recognizable to all: they have a beginning, a middle, and an end, they follow the pattern of separation, initiation, return (p. 21). These phases are obvious in the story of ‘The Navigatio’ as St. Brendan, in the beginning, experiences ‘Separation’ as he leaves his homeland and sails out to sea, ‘Initiation’ in the middle part of the story as he deals with the many dangers he encounters while there, and ‘Return’ at the end as he returns home, having discovered ‘The Promised Land’. Atkinson (1995) states that these stories carry images that are within us and around us, from the natural world, and from the psychological world, and this is central to our well-being. We respond intuitively to them, because they “show us what we are capable of when we live fully and deeply” (p. 21).

### **The enduring elements of sacred stories**

Sacred stories come in a form that communicates a fundamental reality or perception of the world. For example, the tragic story of ‘The Children of Lir’ where Lir’s children are banished from home for seven hundred years by a wicked stepmother and die as four old people on their return, can enable us to see that tragedy has always been part of the human condition and that not all things are within control of the rational mind. The story can help us to appreciate the necessity of connecting to the journey of the soul as well as the mind, as we journey forward in life. Tragedy also features in the story of ‘Oisín’s Return from Tír na nÓg’ (‘Oisín’s Return from the Land of Eternal Youth’) where Oisín leaves his father Fionn and his warriors, the Fianna, to go with the beautiful Niamh, to the land of eternal youth. He promises to return to them, and after a period of what seems like three years, but is in fact, three hundred, he does so, only to find that they no longer exist and the land is much changed. Niamh had told him that she would never see him again if his feet touched the soil of Ireland. As he leaned over to help a group of young men to move a stone, he fell from his horse to the ground and transformed into a crippled old man, trembling with age and barely able to speak. Her words had come to pass.

One learner’s reflection on the importance of connecting to the soul through the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, is obvious when I tell him of undertaking this study, and his belief that it should be called, ‘The Sound of the Soul’ as this is what poured forth in their expressions of their stories, during the life of the project. Sacred

stories hold meaning for both the individual and the community. Atkinson (1995) points out that “they have in common the timeless elements of *metaphor* and *symbol*, *archetype* and *motif*, *pattern* and *repetition*” (p. 22).

Metaphor communicates an important message to us through the vehicle of comparison. Metaphors draw on imagination, and in doing so, bring together two previously unconnected ideas, as in “Life is a journey”, thereby conferring a greater meaning to the term being expressed. Hederman (1999) states that: “Metaphor is the way we talk about what we don’t know, what is invisible, unavailable to us, using words that describe what is ordinary or familiar” (p 13). In symbol, Atkinson (1995 states), its common meaning is usually well-known and understood, but its more profound meaning is often hidden (p. 24). Hederman (2007 explains: “Symbols are particles buried in one reality which bespeak their connection to, or with, a greater reality” (p. 7). When we think symbolically, deeper levels of meaning are opened up and available to us. Hederman (2007) believes that: “The most important symbol of all is yourself as an active part in a greater whole” (p. 7).

Atkinson (1995) describes archetypes as the original moulds from which all other things of the same type are made and explains that they are a major element of our common human experience (p. 25). They hold vast stores of our ancestral knowledge. Birth and death are archetypes common to all human experience, but take different forms, depending on culture. Just as archetypes represent major factors common to humanity, motifs, he states, represent minor parts of human experience. Both recur regularly in our lives and they are predictable because they embody the core of human experience (p. 25). Pattern, he explains, represents a design that is repeated over and over again. It is a regular, predictable way of doing something. Traditional rites of passage “all follow the same predictable three-phase pattern of separation-initiation-return, or birth-death-rebirth, or beginning-middle-resolution” (p. 26).

If memory is central to culture, Atkinson (1995) believes that repetition is central to memory, as it enables us to remember things (p. 26). He states that the recurrence of these timeless patterns, archetypes and motifs show us that many of our experiences, have been experienced by others before us. The more aware we are of these elements, the more we will see how our own stories connect with the lives of others (p. 27).

## **Living the sacred pattern**

Atkinson (1995) believes that the sacred pattern of separation, initiation, return, is the blue-print for our psycho-spiritual development which often guides us through our experiences, whether or not we are aware of it. For the pattern to have meaning and significance in our lives, we need to become consciously aware of when it is present. This means, that as we go through the experience, we are aware that we are experiencing part of our humanity which we have in common with other human beings (p. 39). Living through difficult experiences in everyday life corresponds, Atkinson states, to “living an archetype of the collective unconscious” (p. 39), because our experiences reflect those of our ancestors, as they, like us, struggled to adapt to situations in life. It is our conscious experiencing of these events that leads to transformation.

Atkinson (1995) suggests that we may experience these archetypal patterns on different levels. He explains that we can experience them very subtly on the unconscious level, which means we have little or no awareness of them. Even when we experience them on the conscious level, they may not have a deep and lasting effect on us. When we experience the archetype on the supraconscious level, where it is sudden, deep and immediate, it is more likely to have a lasting and transformative effect on our lives (p. 39).

Most of us have had experiences in our lives that have had a profound and enduring effect on us. These are experiences of joy and sorrow that we will never forget because the archetype has penetrated deep beyond the surface of our being. These moments may come at times when we are either prepared or unprepared, or at times of tragedy and sadness. What matters is how we respond. At our moment of greatest trial we find that the assistance we need is there for us. We just need to be able to recognize it. One learner, explored his fear of death, which he traced back to the time of his late grandmother’s death and funeral, through a mask he made, during a mask-making workshop, during the sixth and final phase of the project, entitled, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?). He expressed his experience of this archetypal moment:

*When Anne put the mask on me it was the same as being laid out in a coffin. It's what I felt. It was so tough. It was hard going. It was the fact that I couldn't get out of where I was in the coffin. When the mask was taken off I felt better. It was something like getting a sense of the Lord that made me feel better, and that's why I sang, The Lord is my Shepherd.*

This awareness can begin the process of what Jung calls individuation, where we begin the process of becoming fully aware of ourselves. We make our stories sacred when we consciously acknowledge the experience of a personal struggle, and broaden our consciousness so that we experience a symbolic death, struggle for a new inner freedom and experience a rebirth. Following this learner's revelation through his mask, the learners opened up a conversation about their attitudes to death. This was a very freeing experience for them, as they believed, in common with many in western society, that it was a taboo subject and therefore not open for discussion. The learners expressed their appreciation to this learner for opening up the subject for them. His struggle provided a new inner freedom and rebirth both for him and the other learners. Atkinson (1995) believes:

When we clearly identify the movement from order to disorder and back to order in our lives and the resolution of our own conflicts, we have found the universal in the unique and the sacred in the personal.

(Atkinson, 1995, p.46-47)

### **Life-story and Personal Myth-making**

Atkinson (1995) distinguishes between 'autobiography', 'life story' and 'personal myth'. He defines autobiography as "a more formal, written story of a person's life" (p. xv). He believes that when we begin to think reflectively about our own experience, put it in order and give expression to it, we begin to discover who we are at our core. Automatically, through this process, he believes that "we get more in touch with our own spirituality" (p. 51). A life story is the story a person remembers and tells about the life they have lived and what they want others to understand and know about it. Atkinson states: "A life story is the essence of what has happened to us. It includes the important events, experiences and feelings of a lifetime" (p. xiv). A life story, he explains, can take many forms, a factual, poetic, metaphorical, or

creatively expressive form. What matters is that it is told, “in the form, shape and style that is most comfortable to the person telling it” (p. xv). For the learners, an expressive arts approach, using a variety of media, enabled the fullest expression of the complexities of their stories.

Atkinson (1995) states that a personal myth is “what is most deeply true about our own experience of life. It is our expression of those personally sacred and timeless elements of our lives” (p. xv). It is a process of recognising, understanding and accepting how universal or archetypal themes and motifs function in our lives. A personal myth, Atkinson states, is made up of the same three parts as a traditional myth or story. It is “our personal expression of how the pattern of separation-initiation- return has played itself out in our lives” (p. xv). This is the journey undertaken by the learners and an outline of how each stage of this pattern plays itself out in each stage of their journey is illustrated (through photographs and dvds) and discussed in detail in chapters six to eleven.

Atkinson (1995) suggests that we need to connect with our mythological voice in order to explore and give expression to our personal myth. This, he says, is the voice of the soul,

the voice that is in touch with your deepest values and beliefs, your most universally human experiences. This is the voice that communicates between your soul and your mind, carrying information about the lasting, eternal world for you to use in the everyday world.

(Atkinson, 1995, p. 83-84).

Our personal myth is the story of how we have overcome our “dark nights of the soul” in order to arrive at some new understanding of ourselves. When we live the mythic pattern, we experience the total range of the spiritual life. This is where we connect to the timelessness of our own story and where we find a deep connection to the lives of others – past, present and future.

We each have our own mythology. We are all heroes and heroines on mythic journeys. McAdams (1993) points out that what traditional myths have done for us on the level of culture, personal myths accomplish for us as human beings. A

personal myth portrays an identity, showing the values of an individual life. “The personal myth is not a legend or fairy tale, but a sacred story that embodies truth”. (p. 34). In hypermodern times, living in a demythologized world, McAdams believes that in the midst of this existential void, where our world can no longer tell us who we are or how we ought to live, we are “challenged to create our own meanings, discover our own truths, and fashion the personal myths that will serve to sanctify our lives” (p. 34). Our personal myths give a sense of connection and purpose to our lives. One learner reflects on the benefit of exploring her personal myth following the second phase of the project, ‘Cos, cos eile..’ (One step, then another step):

*I found it a healing journey for me. The last seven months have been very difficult. But, since I came down to the workshops, it has lifted me a lot. It has done wonders for me. I can feel it. I haven't felt this good about myself in ages. I'd like to perform it again.*

Our lives and our myths link with those of others, and in so doing, have the power to intensify and enrich their lives and myths also. McAdams (1993) suggests: “Ideally, the mythmaker’s art should benefit both the artist who fashions the myth and the society that it adorns” (p. 113). A learner’s reflection illustrates the importance of this statement for him:

*It gives us a chance to show the public what we can do – that’s very important – they think we can’t do things because we can’t see. This proves we can. You get the sense of, we can and we will.*

### **Phases in the Personal myth**

Atkinson (1995) refers to Campbell’s (1993) framework, what he calls the ‘monomyth’, for telling his own personal myth and enabling others tell theirs. The monomyth is a single, three-part story comprised of archetypes and motifs from numerous myths, legends and folktales. Atkinson states that: “It expresses the common pattern followed by all the hero myths of the world” (p. 86), as in the story of Achilles and Cú Chulainn from Greek and Irish mythology, respectively. Modern day heroes are personified in the characters of Shrek, and Luke Skywalker in the Star Wars series, and Dorothy in ‘The Wizard of Oz’, because their experiences are built on this same framework also. It is a pattern that enables us to readily recognise and



identify the same archetypal themes in our own experiences. Campbell (1993) describes it as “a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage, *separation-initiation-return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (p. 30). This rite or ritual is discussed in detail in the works of Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969), who point out that in traditional societies, a similar ritual occurred throughout the life course. Each life transition, whether, birth, puberty, marriage, childbirth or death, was facilitated with a traditional ritual or ceremony. Seeing their lives within the framework of separation, initiation, return, was a familiar experience for people in these communities. These were the familiar and usual archetypes of their experiences.

Atkinson (1995) explores the three main parts of the larger archetype, which are Separation, Initiation, Return. He also includes each of the motifs, or four smaller elements within the larger framework (p. 88). So, for example, within the first part, Separation, which may involve, in contemporary terms, moving from one phase of life to the next, he explores the motif of ‘the call to adventure’, the first sign of a new life unfolding, which we can either go with, or stay within familiar territory. This is followed by ‘Assistance’, where we feel we are being guided and protected in the new realm we have just entered. We face our ‘Initial Challenge’ when we get a warning of impending danger within this realm. This is followed by the fourth and final motif of ‘Retreat’, where we find ourselves withdrawing, turning inward from the world and reflecting on our situation.

Moving to the second part of the archetype, that of ‘Initiation’, we encounter the first motif of ‘Greater Challenges’. At this point, we are faced with more difficult tasks and struggles, which we are challenged to overcome. As we work through this struggle, the second motif of ‘Further Assistance’ presents itself in the form of a meeting with someone or something, maybe even an aspect of our inner selves, which helps us and gives us a momentary view of what may be possible. But exposure to difficult challenges tests our personal standards and values and at this stage we face the third motif of ‘Temptation’. We have the opportunity to turn away from what is facing us or to proceed. If we choose the latter, fear dissolves and we enter the fourth motif of ‘Renewal and Rebirth’. We symbolically die to the old and experience a rebirth.

Following this, we enter the third phase of the archetype, that of 'Return'. We now face the choice of either denying or returning to the world with our new knowledge. If we survive the profound effect of returning, we feel the urge to give something back for what we have received. This represents the first motif of this phase, 'Responsibility Accepted or Denied'. The second motif of 'Living Consciously' involves finding our balance on returning to everyday existence and accepting that others may not understand our experience. It also involves being at peace with the way things are and realising that we are not finished works – we are always in a process of becoming. These archetypes and motifs are illuminated in the journey of the learners, in each of the six performances of the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, in chapters six to eleven.

Hederman (2001) states: "Whatever the origin of the story, it is about a hero who has to go down under to deal with a persecuting monster" (p. 208). This mythic pattern represents the awakening of the 'self', the beginning of change and transformation, being supported and guided, journeying deep into the psyche, battling with dark and difficult experiences there, a harmonising and integration of these experiences, and finally, a return to a renewed experience of life. Atkinson (1995) points out that at the end of this process, we "know the greatest story in the world and we have lived to tell our own version of it" (p. 105). Campbell (2004) states that:

What I think is that a good life is one hero journey after another. Over and over again, you are called to the realm of adventure, you are called to new horizons.

(Campbell, 2004, p. 133)

and he suggests that we may have to embark on further journeys in the future. One learner reflects on this, following his revelation of an aspect of his inner self, through mask, in the sixth phase of the project, entitled, 'Cé tusa istigh? (Who are you, inside?):

*This performance was an expansion of all the other work we've done and was very thought provoking for everyone. We've done so much and each year you realise there's more to show.*

This is what Kenyon and Randall term, 'restorying', believing that: "Since who we are, is a function of the stories we tell, as these change, we change" (p. 99). They use the metaphor of river to describe a story, saying "it cannot stand still. It has to go somewhere, to unfold, to flow. As it does, it becomes a *different* story" (p. 100).

### **Connecting personal myth to the collective myth**

McAdams (1993) believes that:

Our personal myths provide our own lives with a sense of unity and purpose. But our own lives connect to other lives, our myths, to other myths. The most mature personal myths are those that enhance the mythmaking of others.

(McAdams, 1993, p. 113).

The personal myths explored by the learners through their journey on the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, touched my heart, soul, spirit and life experiences and drew me into exploring my own personal myth which is explored in chapter thirteen. May (1991) states that in current times, our myths no longer serve their function of 'making sense of existence, the citizens of our day are left without direction or purpose in life' (p. 16). For example, today, in the western world, people adhere to the myth that happiness is achieved through endless consumerism. This myth is not sustainable and is crumbling in these fragile economic times. Atkinson believes that when a living myth either breaks down or dies, we go through a period of chaos, confusion, meaninglessness and spiritual isolation (p. 108). This, he states, is the result of the breaking down of the values and truths that hold a society together. Yet, it is these values and truths that guide our own lives in times of crisis. They are essential for the regeneration of the person and of society. If, Atkinson states, we believe that we are in the critical stage of the pattern; it could also mean that the regeneration stage is underway. Both phases, he believes, can happen simultaneously, without our awareness of it. When, and if, a new myth emerges, it becomes 'a rallying force to live by' (p. 108). But, we have a choice - we can either stay in the pattern of chaos, or assume our individual responsibility to contribute to the good of the 'whole'. When it comes to finding a new mythology, according to Atkinson, 'the

first place to turn is our own story, our own truth, our own search for meaning' (p. 110). One learner reflects on his experience of finding and sharing his inner truth, following the sixth phase of the project, *Cé tusa istigh?* (Who are you, inside?):

*I knew it would be very personal and I felt I was putting myself out in the open. It helped to do this through a mask even though I knew people would see me as me, but doing it through a mask helped me to do it more honestly. I felt I was going to be stronger inside in me by showing this. It was going to be my feelings and experiences so it was important to be as truthful as I could express myself.*

Our own autobiographical truth, Atkinson states 'has a great deal to teach us about our relationship with others and the world we live in' (p. 110). This is highlighted by the same learner, in the same reflection:

*I wasn't able to express myself and tell people how I was feeling, but by doing this project, I went deep into my inner feelings and I expressed myself as honestly as I could, because it was to my benefit to do so, and to the benefit of those around me who want to understand me but can't. This was a way of expressing my feelings about myself, about my disability.*

The importance of the learner's experience is confirmed by McAdams (1993):

*Fashioning a personal myth is not an exercise in narcissistic delusion, or a paranoid attempt to establish oneself as God. Instead, defining the self through myth may be seen as an ongoing act of psychological and social responsibility.*

(McAdams, 1993, p. 35).

Restorying our personal myth, as highlighted in the experiences of the learners, can enable us to re-frame our personal experience and gain degrees of control and depths of energy that previously were denied us through locked-up pain. Galbik (1991) states that, world healing "begins with the individual who welcomes in the other" (p. 75).

Welcoming in the story or myth of another cannot take place if one has not welcomed the story of 'self'.

### **Modernism and the need for Healing**

In his introduction to the 'Book of Judas', poet, Brendan Kennelly (1991) asks:

I wonder if many people feel as I do – that in the society that we have created it is very difficult to give your full, sustained attention to anything or anybody for long, that we are compelled to half-do a lot of things, to half-live our lives, half-dream our dreams, half-love our loves? We have made ourselves into half-people. Half-heartedness is a slow, banal killer. It is also, paradoxically, a creepy path-way towards "success", especially if the half-heartedness is of the polished variety. I think it was D.H. Lawrence who said that the real tragedy of modern man is the loss of heart. I don't think so. I believe our tragedy is the viability of our half-heartedness, our insured, mortgaged, welfare voyage of non-discovery, the committed, corrosive involvement with forces, created by ourselves, that ensure that our lives will be half-lived. There's a sad refusal here. A rejection of the unique, fragile gift.

(Kennelly, 1991, p. 11)

Today, as Kennelly (1991) points out, there is a one-sided and half-hearted approach to the person and to life. This approach is the result of modernist thinking and requires healing so that life can be experienced in a more wholesome way. Beginning in the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the modern period of European history was a time of great change, politically, socially and economically. The Industrial, American and French Revolutions took place during this time. It was seen as a time of great advancement and heralded the development of capitalism, industrialization, nation states and science. Spretnak (1999) states that in the modernist worldview, economics is the "fundamental determinant of everything else" (p. 40). Humans are seen as economic beings. Economic expansion and success, with its emphasis on material wealth, achieved through industrial and technological development, is seen as the source of well-being for society. Progress is linear in the modernist frame, therefore the vision for human evolution is directed towards further economic development and its attendant material benefits.

Modernism supports the notion of reason and knowledge, particularly knowledge that is scientifically based, as the path to human happiness and freedom. For this reason, Spretnak (1999) states, modern cultures are sometimes called “hypermale”, as these traits are considered masculine and more highly valued than those deemed feminine, such as empathy (p.221). Modernism sees nature as a force to be conquered and controlled and people as rational, autonomous ‘selves’, independent of other ‘selves’. It is a frame that has received much criticism for its ability to de-emphasise the connections between people, nature, place, and marginalize people and ways of being to its process, for example, women and indigenous people and their intuitive ways of knowing.

Post-modern thought purported to reject these ideas. The emphasis shifted from fixed and immovable times to a time of greater flexibility in life. Instead of the separateness, order, linear progression, control, lack of relatedness and universality of modernism, attention now shifted to multiple ways of knowing, diversity and difference, understanding the partiality of all knowledge, change as a series of flowing connections and reconnections, fragmentation and discontinuity. It heralded the end of grand narratives, for example that of religion. Spretnak (1999) states that in the modernist frame, a sense of the Divine was understood as a male deity, ‘God the Father’. In postmodern times, a sense of the Divine was believed to be no more than an empty gesture, what she terms “gesturing towards the sublime” (p. 73). Neither sense of the Divine can adequately hold the deeply embodied sense of the Divine, experienced by the learners in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, through their connections with self, each other, nature and community. Postmodernism also saw the end of trust in the structures of institutions. A learner demonstrates his justification in his lack of trust in the attitude of the medical profession towards disability during the first presentation, ‘Tabhair Dom Do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand), when he recalls being told that nothing more can be done to help him, as he is blind. The learners’ education programme was started through a ‘bottoms up’ endeavour, with the aim of learning the new adaptive information technology, which would afford them the same access to technological communication as sighted people. This demonstrates their belief that the motivation had to come from them, as it may not happen if left to educational institutions alone.

However, not all theorists agree with these distinctions. McIntosh (2008) states that in relation to modernism and postmodernism, “the one is just an extension of the other” (p. 38). This belief is also shared by Spretnak (1999). In both frameworks, McIntosh (2008) states, only that which exists in material terms is real, there is no metaphysical, “there is no beyond for the metaphysician to get ‘behind’! There is no essence, vital presence or spiritual underpinning that underpins the turning of the world” (p. 38).

Spretnak (1999) sees our present world not as postmodern, but, as one of “more intensified modernity or hypermodernity” (p. 8). This description captures an attitude of diminished value on the past and a greater commitment to science, knowledge and the convergence of technology and biology. Hypermodernity brings with it changes which are occurring at a greatly accelerated rate, reflecting greater wealth, better living and medical standards. But greater separateness, lack of relatedness and a more soulless existence also feature as more negative effects of this change. If we were truly postmodern, Spretnak (1999) states, we would “counter the modern ideological flight from body, nature and place. It would be a grounded, deeply ecological, and spiritual postmodernism” (p. 223).

Today, in our hypermodern world, we look to material accumulations to provide meaning in life. But, these ultimately fail us, because their ability to nourish and fulfil us, is transient. Consumerism opens a void that can never be filled. Whelan (2006) explains that it positions the human being and individualism at the centre of the universe. The earth is viewed as an endless resource of raw materials, the rights of other species are secondary to those of humans, and there is a failure to recognise the earth as a living sentient organism (p. 32). She states that: “The world created in this way has no connection with any other world, since it believes that the physical world is completed within itself” (p. 33). Fulfilling our need for meaning brings us right back to the self – not the self Spretnak (1999) describes as the ‘socially engineered’ self of modernism, or the ‘fragmented’ self of postmodernism, but the ‘processual’ self of what she terms, ‘Ecological Postmodernism’ (p. 72), where we “reconnect anew with our larger context: the Earth, the cosmos, the sacred whole” (p. 66).

McIntosh (2008) also holds this vision of a reconnected life for humanity. He sees a three-fold basis of human ecology expressed as “the soil, soul and society of human community” (p. 55). Breaking relationship with any of these, McIntosh states, “ruptures the fabric of reality” (p. 53). But, the wounds of fracture exist and healing is needed to enable more balanced and connected lives. McIntosh (2008) views our disease as metaphysical, explaining that metaphysics is “concerned with what underlies the outer surface of the material world” (p. 34). It means, he believes, looking beyond the outward manifestations of a human being and connecting with “what it takes to bring that person alive from within” (p. 34). The cure for metaphysical disease, he suggests, needs to be metaphysical.

### **The Healing Process**

McIntosh (2008) believes that healing must start with the inner house, or inner life, which, he states, “is the absolute underpinning of the becoming existence” (p. 54). Whelan (2006) believes that this is what will support us as we challenge the viability of the rootlessness, superficiality, emptiness and hunger of western consumerism and search again for insights and wisdom from our mythic past which can expand possibilities for a more connected life in a material world. She states:

I believe that developing one’s inner world and the abilities to inhabit these worlds and these dimensions within ourselves is a first step towards understanding something of the mystery of life.

(Whelan, 2006, p.33).

Hederman (2007) shares this belief: “In earlier times inner vision presented itself in a coherent language of mythology or religion” (p. 55). This calls for a heroic journey down into the deep unconscious. Johnson (1986) states that Jung, through his work, concluded that:

The unconscious is the real source of all our human consciousness. It is the source of our human capacity for orderly thought, reasoning, human awareness, and feeling. The unconscious is the Original Mind of humankind, the primal matrix out of which our species has evolved a conscious mind and then developed it over the millennia to the extent and the refinement that it has today. Every capacity,



every feature of our functioning consciousness, was first contained in the unconscious and then found its way from there up to the conscious level.

(Johnson, 1986, p. 6)

In modern life, Johnson (1986) states, there is a complete splitting off of the conscious mind from its source in the unconscious (p. 9). Through this disconnection, we cut ourselves off from our souls and from our deepest sources of strength, renewal, wisdom, creativity, and capacity for growth, leaving us with a vague and generalised sense that something is missing from our lives. Johnson (1986) emphasises this point: “Our isolation from our unconscious is synonymous with our isolation from our souls” (p. 10). Ellenberger (1970) states that, according to an ancient concept, “disease occurs when the soul – spontaneously – or by accident, leaves the body” (p. 6). The healer searches for the soul and returns it to the body. Logically then, he states, “the treatment of disease consists in finding, bringing back, and restoring the lost soul” (p. 7).

Soul cannot be lost in the literal sense. It is always with us, moving backwards and forwards between the surface and the deep, striving to connect us to the meaning-filled depths of who we are. However, McNiff (1992) believes that we lose contact with it in our daily lives and “this loss of relationship results in bodily and mental illness, rigidification, the absence of passion, and the estrangement from nature” (p. 21). Moore (2000) states that the most remarkable statement ever made by Jungian analyst and psychologist, James Hillman, “is that the soul leads us into unconsciousness, and that for our own benefit” (p. 88).

I believe this is central to finding more adequate ways of knowing as disconnection from our unconscious results in loss of connection with a reservoir of human capacities within. We are also disconnected from the darker side of our nature, what Jung termed the ‘shadow’. The shadow is an essential part of our human condition. It is the psychological term used to describe the parts of ourselves we find unacceptable, such as certain attitudes and instincts. It is the storehouse at the base of the psyche that holds all that we have either consciously or unconsciously suppressed controlled throughout life. It can remain silent for many years, but will eventually surface and

claim attention. McIntosh (2008) states: “The psyche has a natural impulse to heal. It won’t forever suffer its blockages and wounds in festering silence” (p. 68). It is in attending to its needs and wrestling with the pain involved, that we find our gold, and discover our unrealised potential. London (1989) states:

When the conscious and the unconscious become acquainted with each other, a new persona is born. A whole awake, compassionate person steps forward from the onewho was previously fractured, incomplete, and at war with himself or herself.

(London, 1989, p. 97)

This is Campbell’s, ‘ journey of the hero undertaken by heroes and heroines of all great myths, by Brendan the Navigator and his monks in the mythic voyage of the ‘Navigatio’, the learners in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, and by all who fashion a personal myth.

The problem, McIntosh (2008) advises, “is not that we and our organisations have shadow selves. The problem is their denial” (p. 68). We need to find the courage to open up and work with the world of the shadow. Hederman (1991) agrees. He states that we are a hybrid reality, made up of darkness and light. To date, we have concentrated only on the light, to the exclusion of the dark (p. 16). In the third phase of the project, entitled ‘Súile le Solas’(Eyes with Light), the learners in their exploration of colour associate black with darkness. “*Comh dubh le poll*” (*as black as a deep hole*), they state, as they link the darkness to fear and emptiness, and sink to the ground, turning in on the self, to explore its message for them. Turning away from darkness has not served us well as a society as we now struggle to deal with atrocities of the past century, perpetrated by church and state. McIntosh (2008) advises that in these troubled times it is important to do what we can outwardly, but, “most important of all, do it alongside doing your inner work” (p.69).

Doing inner work calls for a relationship with soul, which McNiff (1992) defines as “the force of creative animation and vitality” (p. 2). In this regard, imagination may be our greatest ally, the most important faculty we possess, as Allen (1995) states:

It can be our greatest resource or our most formidable adversary. It is through our imagination that we discern possibilities and options. Yet imagination is no mere

blank slate on which we simply inscribe our will. Rather, imagination is the deepest voice of the soul and can be heard clearly only through cultivation and careful attention. A relationship with our imagination is a relationship with our deepest self.

(Allen, 1995, p. 3)

Malchiodi (2002) states that: “Art is an authentic language of the soul and a mirror of the true nature of the soul’s experience” (p. 3). Moore (1992) states that, “the soul prefers to imagine” (p. xi). Hillman (1989) equates soul with imagination, our ability to dream, image, fantasise, create and form a mental image of something that is not present to our senses (p. 21). Malchiodi (2002) states that imagination can give us joy, hope, pleasure, comfort and that for this reason it is central to our capacity to confront and find solutions to problems in life (p. 3). This, she declares, is complemented by something unique to humans – “our capacity to use imagination to create tangible visual images” (p. 3). During the third phase of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, entitled, ‘Suile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light), one learner reflecting on the wheat field and rolling stone he had made to represent his connection with the land and nature, reflected that making these creations brought “*a renewal of the feeling of life into my hands*”. The miracle of this gift lies in our ability to create images with meaning. This need and capacity to imagine and create images, Malchiodi (2002) believes, “is what sets us apart from all other species” (p. 3).

In this section, the value of, and differences between, story and myth, were explored and discussed. Story-telling is part of life and is intrinsic to most cultures. Telling our story enables us to make sense of the world and gain a deeper understanding of our life experiences, joys and hardships. In contrast to story, myths are derived from beliefs and they are concerned with our inner relationship with the unknown and with the divine. Myths are sacred stories that reveal their truths through the use of symbols. Our personal myth or sacred story was also discussed in this section. The personal myth is where we come to know the deepest truth of our own experience of life. It follows the same three-part pattern of the traditional myth, that of separation, initiation, return. When we understand how this pattern has played itself out in our lives, we find a deep connection with the lives of others – past, present and future. Today, in our hypermodern world, myth is devalued as we look to material possessions to provide meaning in life. This emphasis has brought with it negative

experiences of isolation, disconnection and lack of relatedness. These have been explored and a process to enable a healing of this wound discussed. The next section will explore how the healing process can be facilitated through art.

## **Section Two**

### **Art: A vehicle for uniting conscious and unconscious, for restoring soul, and creative healing**

McNiff (2004) states that:

Wherever the soul is in need, art presents itself as a resourceful healer. I have consistently discovered that the core process of healing through art involves the cultivation and release of the creative spirit. If we can liberate the creative process in our lives, it will always find the way to whatever needs attention and transformation.

(McNiff, 2004, p. 5)

This section explores the age-old tradition of the capacity of the arts to heal and transform whatever needs attention in our lives. This vision of the arts is contrasted with the modernist one, where art works are symbols of worldly success. The question of aesthetics is also discussed – from both the modernist and the newly emerging ‘relational’ perspectives. This is followed by an exploration of Knill’s (2005) theory of intermodal expressive arts. This theory highlights the interdisciplinary tradition of the arts. Central to this theory is what Knill (2005) terms the ‘Rites of De-centering and Restoration’. This theory, along with Atkinson’s (1995) blue-print for personal myth-making, form the conceptual framework for this study.

McNiff (1992) believes that rather than seeing the pathology in a dream or a painting as something sick and negative “we need to embrace it as part of soul’s nature” (p. 25). The learners demonstrate in each phase of their journey the healing that occurred for them through embracing difficulties that surfaced during their expressive arts work. For example, during the sixth phase of the project, entitled ‘Cé tusa istigh? (Who are you, inside?), one learner embraces an exploration of: “*Sadness about the fact that days can seem black. Resentment and anger. Grey skies and black clouds*”.

McNiff (1992) explains that:

As soon as a painting is made or a dream remembered, the images that constitute their being are experienced as wholly other. This autonomous life of the image is a revolutionary treatment of our psychic diseases. We see the dogs, houses, rivers etc. in our paintings and dreams, as parts of ourselves. Everything is reduced to the perspective of the experiencing 'I'. It is through others that we discover who we are. When we learn how to step aside and watch ourselves, the other becomes an agent of transformation.

(McNiff, 1992, p. 2)

McNiff advocates responding to these images through speaking and listening to them, meditating on them, dramatizing them through bodily movement, telling stories about how we created them, and dreaming about them. All these methods, he states, are dedicated to ensuring the ongoing release of art's expressive and healing medicine (p. 3). One learner, who lost his sight in middle years, reflecting on his exploration of colour during his participation in the third phase of the project entitled, 'Súile le Solas' (Eyes with Light), highlights his experience of this healing:

*Colour in the inner eye of a blind person is a wonderful image and I am privileged to have experienced it, delighted that this project has reinforced this beautiful part of life back into my mind's eye. It is a bit emotional for me to write about this, but the feeling is truly wonderful.*

Analysis and reason make many contributions to these reflections, but they do not dominate.

Therapists and others involved in this process as guides and witnesses make their contributions, but McNiff believes that "the medicinal agent is art itself, which releases and contains psyche's therapeutic forces" (p. 3). A learner's reflection highlights this point, following his participation in phase six of the project, 'Cé tusa istigh? (Who are you, inside?): "For me, after it all, there is a great sense of hope and inner peace".

According to McNiff:

Dialoguing with images is a method for expanding ego's singular vision. In opening to others we do not have to give away our place in the interaction. Others have experience of us that might be quite different from our experience of ourselves. All of these perspectives are elements in the psychic stew. Reality is an ever-changing interplay, never a fixed position.

(McNiff, 1992, p. 2)

Gablik (1991) sees this new view of the 'inner and outer' as a continuum, as a welcome replacement for the Cartesian subject versus object model of cognition. "This fundamental continuity of psyche and cosmos alters the traditional sense of mind as subjective, private and "in here", and the world as external, objective and "out there" (p. 55). Experiencing the outer world as part of the inner one was familiar to the learners. These lines from one learner's story, in phase five of the project, 'Súil Isteach' (Insight Out'), where he familiarises his new guide dog, Yale, with the journey to the local post office, highlights this: "*So, when I came to Starry's Cross, I said, Yale, that's the waterfall boy, take care here now, we are moving out to a real road*".

But the vision of the arts as agents of healing and connection is no longer the dominant one in society. Word-based therapies dominate, compartmentalise and medicalise human suffering. When we turn to the arts for healing, Levine (1992) states, we are re-discovering an old tradition, as in early societies, all healing took place through ceremonial means. Shamanic healers joined with the community in an endeavour to find the form to contain and release the suffering of the person who was ill. "Music, dance, song, story-telling, mask-making, the creation of visual imagery and the ritual re-enactment of myth are all components of a communal process in which suffering is given form" (p. 10). As stated earlier by May (1991) and Campbell (2004), by participating in a rite, one participates directly in a myth. Art and healing have been divorced, Levine believes, in the historical development of Western culture. Art works have become property and symbols of worldly success, with monetary value placed on that which we consider great art. The healing power of art is lost, Levine (1992) continues, as "artists lose their connection with a living community. Healing itself becomes the property of medical or psychological specialists who see the world through non-artistic vision" (p. 12).

London (1989) states: “Our current conceptions of what art is and what it does seem such pale dilutions of what could be” (p. 13). He outlines three misconceptions about art. The first is that it is about beauty, secondly that the artist needs to have both dexterity and an accurate eye, and thirdly that if standards of good form are applied in the process, then works of beauty will be created (p. 14). He believes that each of these has a correlated dimension, which can bring about work of greater worth for both the artist and the general public.

The correlate of “art as beauty” is “art as meaning”. The correlate of a prepared hand and eye is a prepared heart, mind and spirit. The correlate of the formulas of good design is the absence of any formula, where imagination serves as a better guide than memory, and where courage fuels the journey from the known to the unknown.

(London, 1989, p. 14).

Yet, these co-relates have been largely lost in the modernist approach to art.

### **Aesthetics**

McNiff (1992) sees the creative arts therapies as “contemporary manifestations of ancient shamanic continuities” (p. 18). He states that:

The commercial art world is allied with a particular set of economic values, and we make an error when we perceive this context to be the exclusive or the highest realm of art.

(McNiff, 1992, p. 53)

This brings up the issue of aesthetics. Gablik (1991), quotes Hillman, who says that the new aesthetics will not be found in museums or beautiful art works, but in some visible appearance of the “soul’s desperate concerns” (p. 114). Gablik refers to this focus as a “reenchantment of art”, where art can return to its traditional form as a reflection of the self, and become again, both a powerful source and force, in the lives of individuals and communities.

Moon (2002) states that the term ‘aesthetics’ has traditionally dealt with the question of what defines beauty in art. “In this quest to define beauty, the traditional focus of the aesthetician has been on the formal aspects of the art object” (p. 133).

Levine (2005), states that traditional aesthetics, “takes “classical works” as the norm and sees them as possessing an autonomy that separates the realm of art from that of everyday life” (p. 69). The catastrophes, and the senseless and almost total self-destruction of the twentieth century, he believes, force us to question the autonomy of art and its role in embodying a “higher” sphere of life. In this sphere, works of art could be seen as “deceptive glosses which have prevented us from seeing the true horror of life” (p. 69).

The separation of art from everyday life and its ownership by professionals is typical of modernity. It renders art incapable of coming to terms with the necessity of poesis (our capacity to shape things) today. This necessity demands, Levine states, that, “we find the forms of formlessness, allowing the chaos of our experience to break through the strictures of our culture to arrive at new shapes” (p. 70).

Art produced in art therapy sessions, which can often be awkward and disturbing, and work by artists which is challenging to the established standards of art, does not identify with the traditional standard and notion of beauty. This, according to Moon calls for “an expanded view of the concept of beauty in art” (p. 136). This standard would incorporate a range of experiences including struggle, imperfection, pain, fear, confusion. The concept of “art making as it occurs within relationships” (p. 139) is central to this new understanding of aesthetics and leads to a valuing of art based on its ability to foster and deepen relationships to “oneself, the art object, other people, and the environment” (p. 139). One learner, reflecting on the group collage made during the third phase of the project, ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light), highlights the value of this approach:

*The idea of this being made into a collage in the shape of an Ogham Stone (ancient Celtic writing stone) and the contribution of other students in the class, their views of what they had seen, and for the blind who had never seen, through our collective ideas made up a wonderful picture of a living world.*

In contrast to the modernist approach to art-making, Cajete (2000) states that in indigenous societies the emphasis was placed on “getting to the heart, the spirit of an event or entity” (p. 46). The “aliveness” of an artifact was the primary aesthetic



criterion, rather than the “beauty” (p. 46). This does not mean, he states, that indigenous artefacts were not beautiful. “Instead, their inherent beauty was a natural by product of their “life” (p. 46).

Gablik (1991) also talks of modern aesthetics as being “inherently isolationist, aimed at disengagement and purity” (p. 4). She predicts that the future will see engagement with art that is more connected and socially responsible. For her:

The subtext of social responsibility is missing in our aesthetic models and the challenge of the future will be to transcend the disconnectedness of the aesthetic from the social that existed within modernism.

(Gablik, 1991, p. 5)

She believes that Cartesian philosophy, which focused on individual experience, removed us from a sense of wholeness. This, she states: “narrowed our aesthetic perspective as well due to its non-interactive, non-relational and non-participatory orientation” (p. 7). The emerging new paradigm of interconnectedness she believes, “involves a significant shift from objects to relationships” (p. 7). A learner highlights the value of this in her reflection on phase three of the project, ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light), when the group collage was completed: “*None of the group had ever done anything like this before and it was great to be able to achieve this together as a group*”.

Knill, Barba and Fuchs (2004) speak of the necessity to focus on the phenomenon of the aesthetic response. “This phenomenon occurs within persons who engage in the artistic/creative process as artists or performers or as witnesses” (p. 71). It involves participation. The notion of witness is distinct from that of audience and allows engagement by those who did not participate in the creation of the work. This phenomenon does not measure art’s beauty against some objective ideal. Rather, “the aesthetic response describes characteristic *ways of being in the presence of a creative act or work of art* – ways that touch soul, evoke imagination, engage emotions and thought” (p. 71). This view, for them, also brings to the fore the question of aesthetic responsibility. Here, the focus is on a “phenomenon concerning the artistic process” (p. 73), and involves attention to the theme and the process of making the object, and love of the object. It differs from aesthetic response, which is a “phenomenon

existing in the presence of an artistic product” (p. 73). The beauty is in the ways and means in which the art work, or ‘emergent’ which was created in “loving affection” (p. 74) – approaches us. “When we respond to the emergent responsibly in an artistic process we are exhibiting aesthetic responsibility” (p. 74). During the mask-making process, in phase five of the project, ‘Cé tusa istigh? (Who are you, inside?), one learner demonstrated this aesthetic responsibility when he spoke of the change he experienced while making masks on the faces of the other learners: *“I know everyone’s features. I still have the feel of them in my hands”*.

And how can we react responsibly when the emergent, whether in art or in any other facet of life, is unbearably painful and chaotic? John Moriarty (1994), the late Kerry philosopher and mystic believed:

Order will be seen to emerge from chaos. And there is, in any case, an aesthetics of emergent order, just as there is an aesthetics of achieved order. And it might indeed be that in our quest for a vision by which to live, we will sometimes have to be content with an aesthetics of chaos.

(Moriarty, 1994, p. ix)

Atkins (2005) in her poem, ‘Chaos Theory’, says, we see:

The dark ones  
These are not monsters  
But just the shape things want to come in.

(Atkins, 2005, p. 9)

In the fourth phase of the project, entitled ‘Deir mé, Deir tú’(I say, You say), the emergence of the poem, ‘The Challenge’, brought to life the feelings of the learners as they confronted sight loss:

The first day I met you  
I was afraid  
I was angry.

Poetry and music provided the containers for their expressions of inner turmoil and pain. McNiff (1981) states that “Art allows for the expression of inner chaos and pain through a reassuring external order” (p. vii).

Moore (1992) believes that exterminating that which is painful and chaotic is not the answer. Yet, this is the most usual modernist response. The answer is found through looking at pain and chaos in ways that shows their necessity and value. “When people observe the ways in which the soul is manifesting itself, they are enriched rather than impoverished” (p.6). Reflecting on his experience of externalising his feelings about disability, through a mask, during Phase Six of the project, ‘Cé tusa istigh? (Who are you, inside?), a learner states that he knew that people would “*see me as me*”, but that the mask helped him to express his feelings more honestly. Zepperlin and O’Brien (2009) confirm this: “We can often soothe discomfort and frequently limit destruction without stamping out symptoms before we have read them as signs” (p.66). Another learner’s reflection during the ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ phase of the project, suggests how this might easily happen:

*I found making the mask strange at first, but as it was being made, I felt I was exposing something in myself that I didn’t think was there and would be able to reveal.*

Moore believes that there is a need to go with the symptom, not against it, to feel and imagine its drama intensely, and to honour the voice of the soul:

To feel and imagine may not sound like much. But in care of the soul there is trust that nature heals, that much can be accomplished by not-doing. The assumption is that being follows imagination. If we can see the story we are in when we fall into our various compulsive behaviours and moods, then we might know how to move through them more freely and with less distress.

(Moore, 1992, p. 12)

### **Intermodal Expressive Arts**

An exploration of intermodal expressive arts is important at this point, as this framework, along with Atkinson’s (1995) personal mythmaking one, forms the conceptual framework for this study. Intermodal expressive arts enables the living out of Atkinson’s framework, which can be seen and experienced, through the journey of the learners in the six phases of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project.

It is not new. Rogers (2000) states that people have known since earlier times that song, dance, music and art were all part of the same process enabling humanity to

become creatively human and fully functioning. She stresses that people “also used the arts as a connection to each other and the forces of nature” (p. xiv). Lambert (1993) in her introduction to Langloh Parker’s collection of Australian Aboriginal myths, states that, originally, myths or Dreamtime stories were not only expressed in verbal or written form, but were “enacted, chanted, painted, costumed, danced, sung, and imagined, sometimes in deep hypnotic and hallucinatory states” (p. 6). In this way, the creative energies and relationships hidden beneath the natural world were brought into the realm of consciousness.

McNiff (1981) states that each of the arts has a distinct value and that “together they are greater than the sum of their parts” (p. xix). He believes (2009) that creative expressions unite the conscious and nonconscious workings of the psyche and enable us to move between spheres of consciousness that are not possible in verbally based therapies. Using all the arts together, he explains, facilitates possibilities for expression and understanding beyond what can be done with a single medium (p. 13).

Malchiodi, (2005) states that an integrated, intermodal/multimodal therapy approach involves two or more expressive therapies to promote growth and it is grounded in the interrelatedness of the arts. She further states that Knill and others observe that each of the expressive therapies has inherent differences.

For example, visual is more conducive to more private, isolated work and may lend itself to the process of individuation; music often taps feeling and may lend itself to socialization when people collaborate in song or in playing instruments; and dance/movement offers opportunities to interact and form relationships.

(Malchiodi, 2005, p. 3).

The Appalachian Expressive Arts Collective describe expressive arts therapy as:

the practice of using imagery, storytelling, dance, music, drama, poetry, movement, dreamwork, and visual arts together, in an integrated way, to foster human growth, development and healing. It is about reclaiming our innate capacity as human beings for creative expression of our individual and collective human experience in artistic form. Expressive arts therapy is also about experiencing the natural capacity of creative expression and creative community for healing.

(Appalachian Expressive Arts Collective, 2003, p. 3-4)

Knill, Levine & Levine (2005) believe that their intermodal approach is a discipline unto itself with its own theoretical framework. Knill et al. call for a specialization in the interdisciplinary tradition of the arts, as epitomized in performance arts. The principles of polyaesthetics and crystallization make the intermodal process quite clear. Knill's theory developed from his background as a performance artist and his interest in polyaesthetics. Estrella (2005) explains that central to the theory of polyaesthetics is the idea that all of the sensory and communicative modalities exist within each individual art form. So, for example, within music lies the rhythm of dance, the colour of art, the lyricism of poetry and the stories of dramatic enactment. She states: "These continuities among the arts are intuitively experienced and provide a means by which communication can be enhanced across arts-based expression" (p. 193). Each art form holds within it the seeds of the other arts, through aesthetics and sensory perception. This, she suggests, is what makes the media of television, advertising and film so powerful (p. 193). In the theory of 'crystallization', Knill, Levine and Levine (2005) explain:

the metaphor of crystallization is used to explain how in an environment "saturated" with artistic imagination, a small creative act, seen as a 'seed', will grow. The growth, following ancient traditions of the arts, reveals the seed's full power with the clarity and order of a crystal.

(Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005, p. 123).

Intermodal theory rests on the process of intermodal transfer and intermodal superimposition. Estrella, (2005), states: "Intermodal transfer involves the shifting from one art form to the other, while intermodal superimposition involves the adding on of art forms in order to amplify the imagination" (p. 194).

McNiff's (2009) perspective on the arts is also integrative, but his approach differs from that of Knill et al. Estrella (2005) states that his approach is founded on the belief that all the elements of creative expression work together because they are elements of the human imagination and cannot be separated. He is less concerned with specific techniques of intermodal process and more concerned with activating creative energy (p. 195 - 196). He believes that the imaginal realm can be activated by the invitation to engage in multiple forms of art making. McNiff advocates that

the images and expressions that come forth in this environment are messengers of healing. He states (2009): “My work is characterized by two distinct features, the integration of art forms and the use of different modes of expression” (p. 11). He sees the arts as both separate and integrated – “when we paint, we paint; when we sing, we sing and we always immerse ourselves in the distinct aspects of a particular medium” (p. 11). But, he emphasises that “the process of arts integration and the use of multiple modes of expression is a thoroughly natural and organic occurrence that happens on its own accord” (p. 11).

McNiff’s approach fits best with the approach taken in developing the various phases of the ‘Hidden Voices From the Dark’ project. For example, in the first workshop, in phase one of the project, ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand), creative energy was activated in the learners, through engaging with traditional implements used by the Siamsa Tíre Performing Company in their productions, and experiencing their enactment of a segment of their performance work, ‘The Corncrake’. Work on rhythm exercises with the learners followed the performance. At the end of the workshop, the learners felt inspired to continue this creative work. The learners immersed themselves in each medium as they developed their talents in song, dance and movement. Moving from one mode of expression to another happened naturally and organically throughout the six phases of the project. The seamless transformation from walking “in beauty” to a dance of celebration at the end of the ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ performance highlights this point.

### **The rites of passage and restoration**

Central to Knill’s (2005) intermodal theory is his framework, which accommodates what he terms, the ‘Rites of De-centering and Restoration’. This is important for this study, as it captures the group’s process of personal mythmaking through expressive arts, which brings to life Atkinson’s framework for inner journey. These two frameworks also re-echo the journey of St. Brendan the Navigator on the mythical voyage, ‘The Navigatio’. Knill et al (2005), Atkinson (1995) and O Donnachadha (2004) refer to this journey as a ritual process. Knill et al (2005) use the term ‘rites of restoration’ to “give credit to the fact that we can look for a restored cultural binding without necessarily presupposing a complete “healing” of the individual’s distress or

condition” (p.77). Present day rites of restoration include psychotherapy, counselling, life coaching, religious healing rituals. For the learners, healing was not focused on regaining sight, but on re-connecting to self, community and environment.

Knill et al (2005) refer to the fact that within the ritual of restoration, the phase of the alternative world experience is framed by an entrance and an exit (p. 83) and that “there are universal characteristics in all rites of passage and restoration” (p.77). One of them is the practice of leaving everyday space, taking time out from everyday life and concerns. This fits with the first archetype of Atkinson’s (1995) framework, that of Separation, where the person undergoes a process of accepting and beginning the challenge of exploring the inner world. Following this, Knill (2005) sees the person entering ‘liminal’ or ‘devotional’ space for a period of time, during the decentering process. Liminal time is that which is experienced during the second archetype of Atkinson’s model, that of Initiation. This is the phase, in both models, where dark and difficult parts of the psyche can be explored and worked through. It is exemplified in the time St. Brendan and his monks spent sailing deep into the psyche and the times the learners faced exploration of their most difficult trials and tribulations, in each phase of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project.

Knill (2005) believes that using an intermodal expressive arts approach during the liminal phase, increases the range of play and the possibility of a way out of ‘stuck’ situations (p. 78). Allen (1995) states that: “Our images reveal that we are holographic creatures, living multiple stories. We often get stuck in one view of self and lose the richness of our multiplicity” (p. 10). In this study, the learners felt they were stuck in the ‘medical model of disability’ and needed to move to a ‘social model’, which was participatory and connected. They were separated from many experiences because of the stories they operated from, but there were many other possible stories to choose from. Knill, Barba and Fuchs (2004) state: “The work of art, as a phenomenon of the inter-structural relationship between everyday and imaginal realities, is a remarkable entity within rituals of restoration” (p. viii). Using the different arts media provides for a variety of options in finding solutions to difficult problems. During the six phases of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, the media of art, music, dance, movement, mime, song, poetry, guided imagery, works of art - experiencing the art work of Des Dillon in the third phase of

the project, ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light), exploring traditional implements, sound and rhythm work, body language and its imaginary potential, and the use of metaphor were all used as a means of entering or embarking on a journey. Knill, Levine and Levine (2005) state that at the exit the person is “challenged with the difference as a confrontation” (p. 83). This ‘exit’ stage corresponds with Atkinson’s (1995) archetype of ‘Return’, where the hero or heroine returns to everyday reality and begins to integrate their new knowledge with daily living. The process of engaging with the arts to express the inner journey of life for the learners, finds connection with Cajete’s (2000) belief that: “Art in traditional Native societies, in effect, reflected the ritualization of the life process” (p. 46). One learner reflected on this following the first phase of the project, ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’(Give me your Hand): “*When you see your life out there in front of you in the art and the drama, you know what you have to do*”.

### **Do we need a new myth?**

Johnson (1990) wonders if our heroic quest, in modern times, is “to learn to love – if our planet and our civilization are to survive much beyond our present era?” (p. 95-96). He suggests that the great quest is no longer that of the conquering, or masculine, hero,

who defends his territory, his principles, his woman, his rights, but that of the embracing hero, who finds the right place for each relationship in life, who nurtures and protects and comforts so that growth can take place, not in a field of illusions, but in a field of love and wholeness.

(Johnson, 1990, p. 95-96)

Feminine and masculine values are inherent in all of us. From the time of the Enlightenment, our values have centered on the masculine, which predominantly focused on modern scientific and technological accomplishments. This has meant that worlds that embody the feminine principles of feelings, connection, creativity, have been lost to us, creating for us, a limited experience of life. These are the values that underpin life for indigenous people, whose world-view sees and honours, the connection between the energies in all life.



Whelan (2006) states that a fundamental theme found in Irish mythology is “that of the feminine, where the feminine is understood as the ground of being” (p.35). For example, Brigid, is present to us as both goddess, from a pagan time, and saint, from the time of Christianity. Celtic cosmology honours both masculine and feminine energies, understanding the necessity of both for balance in life. In seeking to restore balance to life in the western world today, we need to reinstate the feminine and honour its interplay with the masculine. Time has shown us that dominance of one energy over the other, doesn’t work. In seeking to portray how limited life has become through reliance on the fruits of masculine energy only, it is important to acknowledge also how much poorer our world would be without the accomplishments of science, medicine and technology. This point is important for the journey of the learners, whose learning programme comprised of both technological and creative work. One learner highlights the importance of both for him: *“Between the workshops and the computers, I feel I’m up at the top again”*.

Spretnak (1999) speaks of the universe as “a mythic drama of creativity, allurements, relation and grace” and states that this is surely not a situation that needs new myths (p. 183). However, she believes, we need to see our story in “fuller, richer terms”, in order to correct the destructive course of the modern age (p. 184). Making this connection begins with connecting to the fullness of self, embracing our darkness as well as our light. We need, as Hederman (1999) states, “to get back to a mythological state while retaining consciousness” (p. 14). In this way, we consciously connect again with the wisdom of the past, which can guide us towards a future where we re-experience connection with all life. But, it’s not about trying to re-create the past. It’s about taking ancient wisdom forward in new ways, which are appropriate for the unique challenges of our times. Cajete (2000) states that our metaphoric mind is our oldest mind, but as our rational mind develops, it recedes into the subconscious, where it lies in wait until called on by the conscious mind (p. 28). The journey of the learners highlights how art can create the bridge to re-build these connections. Hederman (2007) believes:

Art like the divine evangelist reaches the place of resurrection first. Each of us must find our own symbols and our own mythology: the symbols which open to us the door to another world and the myth which expresses our journey to and through such openings.

(Hederman, 2007, p. 49)

This section discussed the arts from modernist and indigenous view-points. The issue of aesthetics was also explored from these perspectives. The healing power of the arts was highlighted. Knill's (2005) theory of intermodal expressive arts was introduced and its capacity to facilitate the expression of Atkinson's (1995) blue-print of personal myth-making, that of separation, initiation, return, discussed. The journey of the learners on the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project highlights how life and learning were transformed for them through the healing powers of personal myth-making and expressive arts. The next section explores literature relevant to a theory of transformative adult learning that can accommodate these contributions within its domain.

### **Section Three**

#### **Transformative Adult Learning**

Hederman (2007) states, "We have been educated out of myth and magic. We have had our capacity to symbolize erased from the desktop of our internal computers" (p. 41). Today, much of our learning in education is scientifically based. Since the Enlightenment, we have lost connection with knowledge and wisdom that fed our human spirit, with the result, that we live within frameworks that primarily value success in the market-place. Moore (1996) agrees with Hederman (2007): "As a culture we seem to have lost sight of the soul in learning, while we focus on gathering information and acquiring skills" (p. 226).

Others also recognise the imbalance in this way of learning and call for systems that allow more indigenous ways of knowing to be accommodated. Palmer (1998) is critical of the modernist mode of knowing that dominates education today, stating that

it is rooted in fear and “creates disconnections between teachers, their subjects, and their students” (p. 52). He believes that true knowledge involves a mutual relationship between the person and the world: “Knowing of any sort is relational, animated by a desire to come into deeper community with what we know”. (p. 55). Miller (2000) states that the emphasis in education today is primarily economic and rarely takes the needs of the whole person into consideration. He calls for a need to bring soul back into the classroom (p. 4). Greene (1995) and McNiff (2003) emphasise the importance of developing imagination, in education. Mezirow (1991) also acknowledges the role imagination can play in transformative adult learning:

Imagination is indispensable to understanding the unknown. We imagine alternative ways of seeing and interpreting. The more reflective and open to the perspectives of others we are, the richer our imagination of alternative contexts for understanding will be.

(Mezirow, 1991, p. 83)

Although Mezirow states this, his theory is more cognitively based, with his belief that the core of the learning process itself is largely mediated through reflecting rationally and critically on one’s assumptions and beliefs. His vision of transformative adult learning could not adequately accommodate the deeply connected ways of knowing experienced by the learners in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. From my experience of walking this journey with the learners, I feel and believe that two theories of transformative learning are relevant to our experiences. These theories are provided by O’Sullivan (2002) and Cajete (1994). At the Transformative Learning Centre, Ontario, ‘transformative learning’ is defined by Edmund O’Sullivan and his colleagues (2002), as follows:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

(O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 11)

This definition facilitates our experiences on the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, in a way that the more cognitive approach put forward by Mezirow and Associates (2000) could not. Through the ritual enactment of their own personal myths or sacred stories, the learners discovered and expressed dimensions of their own inner dramas in a mode that was both safe and creative, that of, intermodal expressive arts. This approach led to transformation of their sense of self, other, space, place, community, ways of living, learning, relating and interacting in community. One learner stated, following a performance that: “*Blind people have come on to the stage of life and we are not for going away*”, highlighting a shift in his consciousness of his way of being in the world.

Cajete (1994) states that in exploring the foundations of American Indian education we are “tracking the earliest sources of human teaching and learning” (p. 33). These foundations teach us that “learning is a subjective experience tied to a place environmentally, socially and spiritually” (p. 33). The purpose of education in these cultures is to connect people to their distinct place on the earth and to their heritage. Cajete gives a detailed account of how this is achieved through mythopoetic rather than reductionist teaching methods. Storytelling, sacred art, ritual, immersion in nature and daily involvement in the life of the community are the methods used to provide an on-going process of connection to living and learning.

For the learners, on the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, beginning their journey through connections with traditional ways of knowing re-connected them to an indigenous ‘self’. During the first workshop for the first performance, ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand), they held and used traditional implements, used by people from past generations. In these workshops also, through finding the feet of the older dancers who needed the support of chairs to dance, they found their way to walk and dance in a new way, in a new space and time. This is illuminated in chapter six.

Cajete (1994) speaks of the importance of this method of learning in the Mayan tradition (p. 28). At the end of each Mayan dynasty, he states, that the nobles of the ascending order would commemorate their new order by building a ceremonial pyramid which encased an older one (p. 28). Building on earlier realities was an

important aspect of life for them. Cajete (1994) advises: “A constant building upon earlier realities is a basic characteristic of indigenous process” (p. 28). The new reality may seem different from earlier ones, but its essence remains tied to the older ones it encases. Education is always in a process of being built from the foundations of previous structures. Cajete (1994) suggests that by extending the metaphor of the Mayan pyramids to building a contemporary indigenous education, “we engineer the new reality built upon earlier ones, while simultaneously addressing the needs, and acting in the sun, of our times” (p. 28).

When we began our journey on the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project in 1999, we were unaware of either O’Sullivan’s (2002), or Cajete’s (1994) wise thoughts, beliefs and ways of knowing. As I complete this literature review, it is profoundly amazing to discover that we did so intuitively, what had been done by indigenous people before us. Through connection with our own indigenous past on the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, we brought ancient wisdom forward in new ways, which are appropriate for the unique challenges of the times we live in.

The theories of transformative learning described by Edmund O’Sullivan and his colleagues (2002) and Cajete (1994) highlight a paradigm shift away from a model of education focused on achievement, individualism and material success, towards one based on a more integrated worldview. Their theories, based on indigenous ways of knowing, honour the development of the ‘whole’ person – individually, emotionally, socially, communally, spiritually, ecologically, cosmically, through ways that are mythopoetic, creative and relational. They provide a home for the experiences of the learners and all of us, present and past, who are part of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project.

In this chapter, literature relevant to the transformative experiences of the learners on the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, was discussed. In Section One, literature on story, myth and healing was discussed and the differences between life-story and personal myth-making, explored. Section Two focused on art as a vehicle for uniting conscious and unconscious, for restoring soul and creative healing. The central theoretical concepts for this study, which are provided by Atkinson’s (1995) personal myth-making process and Knill’s (2005) theory of intermodal expressive arts, were

discussed in detail in this section. Theories of transformative learning relevant to the study, and provided by O'Sullivan and his colleagues (2002) and Cajete (1994) were discussed in Section Three. The next chapter will outline and discuss the methodology used in the study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### STORYING THE STORY OF JOURNEY (Methodology)

#### **Introduction**

Chapter three explored through literature, subjects relevant to the journey undertaken by the learners, and to the conceptual frameworks of this study, which outline the map of their journey. These concepts were provided by Atkinson's (1995) blue-print of the sacred story – the inner journey of separation, initiation, return, and Knill's (2005) theory of intermodal expressive arts which provided the ritualised space where this journey could be lived out. The research focus of this study centres on how the arts enabled the telling of these personal stories, the personal transformation experienced by the learners in the process, and how this in turn, transformed their learning experiences. Chapters six to eleven of the study illuminate the personal transformation experienced by the learners during the course of their journey. Chapter twelve highlights further illuminations by three of the learners following the performances. My own personal illumination is expressed in chapter thirteen. This chapter describes the methodology used in the study, to create these illuminations.

#### **The Mandorla as the holding symbol of the study**

For me, the mandorla represents the holding symbol for this study. It holds the story of the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project and the sacred story of the journey of the learners. It also holds the part of my own sacred story I explored as I journeyed with them as their guide and mentor, and which is illuminated in chapter five. The findings of this study are held in the mandorla as are our connections to place and community. In the image I have constructed below, the top and bottom of the mandorla are left open to facilitate the movements of these connections, in and out of the liminal space. In this chapter, the mandorla holds my efforts to describe the methodology for the study, which illuminates the transformative process of the journey of the learners.

The mandorla is an ancient symbol created by two circles coming together and overlapping to form an almond shape in the middle.



The Mandorla

The mandorla symbolises the interactions and interdependence of opposing worlds and forces. Cooper (1978) interprets the symbol of the mandorla thus:

The *vesica piscis*, or *ichthus*, the almond-shaped aureole, the ‘mystical almond’ which depicts divinity; holiness; the sacred; virginity; the vulva. It also denotes an opening or gateway and the two sides represent the opposite poles and all duality. The mandorla is also used to portray a flame, signifying the Spirit or a manifestation of the spiritual or soul principle.

(Cooper 1978, p. 103 – p.104)

Cirlot (2002) interprets the mandorla as a symbol of “the perpetual sacrifice that regenerates creative force through the dual streams of ascent and descent (appearance and disappearance, life and death, evolution and involution)”, (p. 203 – p. 204). The



mandorla, for the learners, represents what Atkinson (1995) refers to as “a long deep retreat”, moving backward and inward, “deep into the psyche” (p. 43), and what Allen (1995) describes as the “back and forth between the past and present, the self and other, the personal and the archetypal” (p. 109). Johnson (1991) states that when we are torn apart by the demands of opposites, “the mandorla instructs us how to engage in reconciliation” (p. 99). It represents what Knill, Levine and Levine (2005) refer to as the ‘devotional’ or liminal space (p. 77), where one leaves one reality but has not yet entered another. In this study, the liminal space provides a place where the process of transformation can be realised, through creatively exploring alternative realities.

### **Searching for a methodology**

Finding a research methodology to suit the study of the journey undertaken by the learners was a long process for me. On reflection, this is due to the fact that the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project was undertaken long before I ever considered undertaking a thesis. The project ran from 1999 to 2006. It was started in response to the needs of the learners, outlined in chapter five. When the project ended, my awareness of the transformation experienced by the learners, my own experiences and those reflected by the audiences in both verbal and written responses, made me realise that the journey we had undertaken together was special, and ought to be shared. One learner’s comments on how seeing his life out in front of him in the art and drama enabled him to make decisions, and his belief that this approach would benefit all ages, in education, inspired me to explore it in this study, in fulfilment of my Doctorate in Education, which began in 2008.

Many stories live inside this project, but I chose to focus on the story of the learners, as their stories are the ones that I witnessed transform from the core. I walked beside them as they found these stories within themselves and I too found my own story, as I did so. Following the first performance, ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand), one learner suggested that I ask their families how they had been affected by it. He stated that it “*had a wonderful effect*”. This suggests that there are family stories, waiting to be told. The Siamsa Tíre performers also hold a story, yet untold. During the evaluation at the end of the first performance, these performers spoke of

feeling apprehensive at first due the difference in backgrounds, but stated that they gained confidence once the work started. They spoke of it as being a learning experience for them, saying that the approach they used in the workshops was not all that different from the usual one. They also spoke of how it had changed their attitudes. These responses leave the door open for another journey of exploration. While the effect of the project on the community was not researched here, its effect was palpable throughout the duration of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. Letters and phone calls expressing appreciation of the work followed after the first performance. Members of the community returned to the performances each year, and asked about the “next show” during casual encounters on the street. Following the sixth performance, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?), one man spoke of how this show was “all about us”. The learners too, were aware of their effect on the community, with one learner reflecting on the fact that they were educating them. Together, the learners and the community were co-constructing knowledge. The stories of the learners have left ripples of other stories, yet to be told. Transforming from the core of their own lives, created ripples of transformation experienced by others. The sacred stories of the learners are the source of inspiration for this study, and the primary resource for its illumination.

The assistive technology learning programme, attended by the learners, comprised of thirteen members, progressed to twenty-one and dropped to nine, over the thirteen year life of the programme. Participation in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project was elective and open to all learners during its duration from 1999 to 2006. Nine learners chose to participate in the first phase of the project, ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand). Six of these were men, two of whom were in their late forties, two were aged sixty years, and two were in their late twenties. Two women were in their early forties and one was in her early twenties. This group also participated in the second phase, ‘Cos, cos eile...’ (One step, another step). By phase three, ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light), one learner who had participated in the first two phases, had graduated from the learning programme, but she was replaced, both on the learning programme and on the project, by three new learners, two men and one woman, increasing the number of participants in the project, to eleven. By phase four, ‘Deir mé, Deir tú’ (I say, You say), in 2003, two beloved members of the group, one man and one woman, were lost to us, through death. This phase was performed

for the then Minister for Education, Mr. Noel Dempsey T.D., at the opening ceremony of celebration to mark the one hundredth year of Kerry Education Services, and for the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, at its closing ceremony. Two new learners participated in this phase. They were joined specially for the occasion by three of the programme tutors and the programme co-ordinator. Eight learners participated in phase five, ‘Súil Isteach’ (Insight Out), seven men and one woman. At this point, one woman was unable to participate due to reduced participation in the learning programme. The programme co-ordinator, who had participated in the phases one to four of the project, withdrew due to an increased work-load. The sixth phase, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?), was comprised of eight men. The woman who had participated in phase five, was unable to participate for health reasons. One new learner, a man, joined the programme and participated in this phase.

Four men who had participated in the project from 1999 and three men who joined in 2003 made up a core group who held the space, the energy and the depth and vision of the inner journey of the project up to its conclusion in 2006. This was profoundly important for all those who participated in the project on a more fluid basis. The Siamsa Tíre company were involved in all phases of the project, in different capacities, including performance, artistic and musical direction, stage lighting and management. The company also provided free use of the theatre facilities during the life of the project. More profoundly, they journeyed with us, moving in and out of our experiences, as we needed them. They also held the physical space where we brought the fruits of our journey, to share with community. The theatre stage was a special place for the learners. They named and called the classroom where we worked ‘Tearmainn’ (safe place). It is in this space that we devised and developed our performances in journey. When we moved to the stage from the classroom for rehearsals and performance, the learners stated that it felt *‘different’*, they experienced a different energy in their bodies. The stage was the place where journey was revealed and shared. Our collaborations with collage artist, Des Dillon, and Kerry writer, Paddy Kennelly, were profoundly significant for us also as they drew us into new forms of creative expression, particularly those of art, poetry and speech.

Being heard, seen, understood and recognised in the community, was very important to the learners. This they achieved through their public performances, press and

media coverage, programmes, dvds and cd, accompanying the performances. Deeper layers to their experiences are reflected in their reflections following performances. Some of these were written directly by the learners, others dictated to me, which I processed. As I compile this thesis, I am conscious of honouring the depth of the stories they shared publicly through illuminating them as vividly as possible here. I also hope to honour their desire to be known for who they are, deep down inside. All their documented reflections were shared with me privately and some were shared within the group. These were not shared publicly. More spontaneous reflections were shared generally in rehearsal and in discussions inside and outside the group. Their names are highlighted with images of their individual masks in the dvd of the sixth performance, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?), and in the programmes for each performance, which are included in Appendices 1 - 6. This was done as part of each public performance, and prior to undertaking this study. The learners are not identified by name in the study, to honour the confidentiality of their more private reflections.

My contract of educational work with the learners finished in November 2010. These learners have now graduated from their programme. Six learners, who participated in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, along with four others who joined the assistive technology learning programme when the project had ended, have started their own learning and support group, in the town. I meet with some of the learners casually on an ongoing basis and they tell me of their progress. Two of the learners, who participated in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, have contacted me for details of drama facilitators to do “*something like what we did before*”. They have organised art, computer and physical fitness classes and they plan to organise talks by people with different expertise, visits to local sites of interest, and social events, “*like we used to do with you*”. It is profoundly satisfying to see them bring forward the learning from their old programme, into the community, widening out the ripples of transformation for themselves and others. What is exciting also, is to witness them now do “without” me, that which they did “with” me. Taking their learning forward in this way highlights for me, the power of a genuine community project.

In this study, I speak with three different voices. Firstly, with my voice as founder and facilitator of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. In this role, I was

present with the learners as they explored the thoughts and feelings they needed to voice in the performances and their journey through this process. Knill (2005) defines this role as that of “change agent” (p. 77). He states that change agents have to be “ordained or graduated; this is a universal characteristic of the profession” (p. 77). It is a definition that does not sit comfortably with me, as this role, for me, arose from my intuitive response to work through the arts, to meet the needs of the learners, not from being a trained professional in the area. The word ‘agent’ evokes a more business-like association for me and this also, does not describe my journey with them. What O’Donohue (1999) terms the ‘anam chara’ or ‘soul friend’ (p. 35) describes my role more accurately, for me. In the early Celtic Church, O’Donohue (1999) states, the ‘anam chara’, was someone who acted as “a teacher, companion or spiritual guide” (p. 35). With the ‘anam chara’, he explains, “you could share your innermost self, your mind and your heart” (p. 35). The learners shared the sacred stories of their inner lives with me as we journeyed together to find meaningful expression for them. I believe that having professional training as an art therapist, for the final performance, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?), did give me the professional skills Knill (2005) states are needed by a ‘change agent’. But, the most salient outcome of that training for me, was the deepening of my understanding of how art connects us to soul, discussed in chapter three, and due to this connection, the depth of my role as ‘anam chara’, ‘soul friend’, or soul guide. This understanding brought the work to a deeper level for the learners and for me.

The learners were very aware that I was journeying with them, and on a number of occasions throughout the project mentioned this: “*What’s good is that you’re on the journey with us*”. From this place, comes the voice of my own process of inner journey through image and reflection, which is explored in chapter five. Walking with the learners through experiences of pain, confusion, fear, disappointment, frustration, despair, loss and grief, but also those of humour, joy and hope, touched these places in me. I held these experiences within, and as I began my journey in art therapy in 2005, prior to beginning the sixth performance, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’, they poured forth, showing me the depth of my own losses, but also the potential for hope and healing within me.

These experiences inspired me to undertake a thesis on this process, where I now struggle with my voice as researcher, searching again for all the pieces to re-create the journey of the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project. This is a very different experience for me, with both inner and outer aspects to it. Searching for the notes made prior to and during workshops and rehearsals, records of the learners' reflections, dvds, cds, press cuttings and letters relating to the performances involves the physical act of locating this material, but much time is spent in reflection also. For example, while compiling the notes on the first workshop session for the third performance, 'Súile le Solas' (Eyes with Light), I am immediately drawn into that moment when I witnessed the excitement of the learners as they explored the collage work of Des Dillon, the visual artist who collaborated with us on that production. This re-remembering and mulling over material did not make for an efficient process of collection! But, it did prepare me for the long process of re-experiencing the six performances through watching and listening to their recordings on cd and dvds, as this chapter will later show.

But, this process is not confined to reflections on written material, notes, rehearsals, performances and memories. This thesis is a work of the heart, soul and spirit, as well as the mind. Place, landscape, tradition, history, culture and the people who have lived in this region before us, consciously and unconsciously influence this methodology. They are all here. They have shaped me and they move through me as I create the methodology. Present also, in spirit and memory, are all those with whom we collaborated and the community, who witnessed the journey as it unfolded before them, in performance. I'm not separate from any of them as I create this methodology. Our connections remain. My methodology is a way to make explicit, that which we know implicitly, through living, feeling, connecting, and sharing of experiences in journey.

I found it difficult to decide on a methodology. I was clear on the fact that it would be arts based, with the emphasis on intermodal expressive arts. But then, there was the question of whether it was phenomenological, heuristic or hermeneutical? I spent much time trying to see the journey of the learners through these different lenses, feeling drawn to the heuristic, but still uncertain that this was the path to follow.

Reading O'Neill's (2005) study, illuminating women's personal journey of self-transformation through artful, heuristic inquiry, opened a doorway to creating a framework for my own methodology. Her visual representations of the women's art, illuminated their individual journeys, in a way that text alone could not. Engaging with their images and reading their accompanying reflections, was a deeply moving experience for me. I could feel the connections between their stories, the stories of the learners and my own story, on the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project. This inspired my decision to use an expressive arts-based, heuristic methodology. These methodologies have strengths and weaknesses as the following exploration will show, but they provide me with the best way to illuminate the learners' inner journey of separation, initiation, return, in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project.

### **Expressive arts**

McNiff (1981) states that each of the arts has a distinct value and that "together they are greater than the sum of their parts" (p. xix).

He believes that:

Unlike the dream, creative expressions integrate the conscious and nonconscious workings of the psyche and give them tangible expression within the present moment. This special quality of the arts enables us to move between realms of consciousness in ways that are not possible in therapies based on verbal communication. Similarly, the use of all the arts can further possibilities for expression and understanding beyond the limits of what can be done with a single medium.

(McNiff, 2009, p. 13)

This interrelated view of the arts is also shared by others in the field of arts therapy and is explored in greater detail in the literature review, chapter three. Rogers (2000) states that people have known since earlier times, that song, dance, music and art were all part of the same process enabling humanity to become creatively human and fully functioning. She stresses that people "also used the arts as a connection to each other and the forces of nature" (p. xiv).

A human life is the most complex story of all. Atkinson (1995) believes that: We each have the potential to express the three-part archetypal pattern of separation, initiation and return, “in a form and to a degree consistent with and appropriate to our own experience” (p.33). But, our emphasis on verbal communication, in the modern world, closes off possibilities for such expression. We sometimes glimpse possibilities for this, in dreaming. But, modernity keeps the dream in the box. Art gives tangible form to our personal myths and enables connection to humanity’s diverse treasury of myths. Allen (1995) states that: “Our images reveal that we are holographic creatures, living multiple stories. We often get stuck in one view of self and lose the richness of our multiplicity” (p. 10). Speaking with the learners prior to the start of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, their expressions revealed situations where they felt ‘stuck’ and limited in terms of participation in life. One learner spoke of needing to “*feel part of things where my contribution will be taken seriously*”. Another learner spoke of how the doctor told him he was sorry that nothing could be done for him, as he was blind. This man spoke of needing an opportunity to be involved in activities with others. The learners were stuck in the ‘medical model of disability’ and needed to move to a ‘social model’, which was participatory and connected. They were separated from many experiences because of the stories they operated from, but there were many other possible stories to choose from, which they were unaware of at that point. Allen (1995) believes:

We receive many versions of where we came from and who we are. Using the image-making process, we can explore our many layers, loosen outworn ideas, and try out new images for ourselves. We enter a world created by others, but we can also create and re-create our world through art-making.

(Allen, 1995, p.10 –11)

Having witnessed the transformative effect of training in indigenous expressions of Irish music, song, dance and mime/movement, on young people, in Siamsa Tíre, I was aware from the outset that this integrated arts approach could give a fuller expression to the multiple meanings of the learners’ lived experience, the complexities and the emotions of each layer of that experience, that a textual form could never reach. As they moved through each performance of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, this approach facilitated a storying and re-storying of their individual experiences. Their performance work connected with the audiences on a deep level evoking



compassion, as distinct from pity, and an understanding of their situations. Atkinson (1995) believes that: “Life stories make up the thread that connects the human family. It may well be that we can leave no greater legacy than the story of our life” (p. 16). It also opened the audiences to other ways of seeing and experiencing the world. Leavy (2009) states:

Arts-based practices can also *promote dialogue*, which is critical to cultivating understanding. The particular ways in which art forms facilitate conversation are important as well. The arts ideally evoke emotional responses, and so the dialogue sparked by arts-based practices is highly engaged.

(Leavy, 2009, p. 14)

An arts-based approach opened the doorway to a symbolic exploration of that which was hidden and abstract and yet essential, in their lives.

### **Heuristic Research**

This study meets many of the criteria associated with heuristic research. Moustakas (1990) states that heuristic enquiry begins with a question or problem, which is a source of puzzlement for the researcher, who is seeking an answer or solution to it (p. 15). As stated in chapter one, my puzzlement revolved around how engagement with the arts led to deep transformation for those involved. Though the heuristic process is ‘autobiographic’ (p. 15), yet every question that is of personal significance is also of social and, perhaps, universal significance. In the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, it is in the significance of our very particular experiences as participants that universal resonance and significance can be found.

The research question of how the arts led to transformation is one that has been with me from early adulthood. Hearing and reading of, and observing how experiences in the arts led to personal transformation, had always left me wondering how this happened. The ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project began as a response to the human needs of the learners. It was never intended to be a study. Yet, the reflections of the learners at the end of the cycle of six expressive arts performances, highlighting their transformative process, compelled me to understand its depths. I could not ignore this desire for understanding on hearing their reflections, and those of one

learner in particular, who stated, that seeing his life out in front of him in the art and drama, pointed to a direction in life for him.

Heuristic research fits within the framework of phenomenology, which aims to describe the lived experience of phenomena. Levine (2005) states that the results of phenomenological inquiry are to “re-insert the subject into the sensible world and to open up this world to conscious awareness” (p. 22-23). This results in experience appearing ‘as the foundation for all knowledge’ (p. 23). However, heuristic research differs from phenomenology in that it is more relational, emphasising a connection to experience, rather than a studied detachment from it. In heuristic research, Moustakas (1990) explains, the focus is on recreating the lived experience, as fully and completely as possible, from the frame of reference of the experiencing person (p. 39). This challenge, according to Moustakis (1990), can be fulfilled through a wide range of media, including art and other documents (p. 39).

Moustakas (1990) outlines a number of differences between heuristics and phenomenology. While phenomenology leads to definitive descriptions of structures of experience, heuristic research leads to the depiction and portrayal of the personal significance of the meanings of experience. Phenomenology loses the persons in the experience, whereas in heuristics, the participants remain visible as whole persons. Visibility was very important to the learners in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, as due to sight loss, they felt invisible to the self, and to society. An important outcome of their performances was being recognised and spoken to, in the streets of the town. Moustakas (1990) ends this comparison by stating that while phenomenology aims to discover the essence of the experience, heuristics seeks to discover the essence of the person in the experience (p. 38-39).

O’Neill (2005) critiques Moustakas, asserting that what is lacking in heuristic research ‘is any critical reflection on the effects of power differences on those relationships, including the relationship between researcher and participants’ (p. 15). As the journey for the learners was one of returning to education with the aim of changing their worlds of disconnection to one of connection, this is an important point for this study. A medical model of disability – in which they had been firmly positioned - sees the person with the disability as a problem and the reason for their

isolation. There is no openness to an understanding that a narrowly organised society needs to change to accommodate different needs. This is a point emphasised by the learners in the programme note on their fourth performance, 'Deir mé, Deir tú - I say, You say', when they state that, we're all the same, but we're different too. Cherishing both our similarities and differences is vital to our human condition.

The medical model of relating to people emphasises the powerful and powerless, the dominant and submissive, and never sees equality. Neither does it see the richness that is missing from encounter with the diversity of life, in all its manifestations. For all that is different, there is always connection. This was true also in my relationship with the learners as guide/leader. Their understanding of my position with them is reflected in their often repeated, comment: *'What's good is that you're on the journey with us'*. Walking through their experiences with them, guiding, waiting, moving, holding spaces, places, feelings and thoughts with them, left no outside position in view. Walking the journey with them drew me right into walking my own journey also.

Walking through the media of art, drama, music, movement, dance, storytelling, poetry, our experiences were embodied, causing us to move, relate, and 'be' differently in the world. Now, there was a greater degree of being grounded in one's being. Embodiment of feelings, both positive and negative, gave us a fuller understanding of the truth of the self. Sharing the experiences with others on the journey, reflected a bigger image back to us.

Although Moustakas's theory has advantages, it has disadvantages also, as outlined in O'Neill's (2005) study, which is freed from what she terms 'Clark Moustakis' (1990) positivistic subject-object splits, uncritical assumptions and set stages' (p. 14). One of the salient features of intermodal, expressive arts theory, is that, according to Knill (2005), it 'increases the range of play' (p.79). This is the very opposite of the reductionist tendencies of modernity, which includes the medical model of disability, which was a restricting force in the lives of the learners. Thus, in the liminal, or in-between space, using many different art forms allows for greater flexibility in finding a way out of a 'stuck situation'. This approach emphasises what Knill (2005) terms, 'low skill, high sensitivity', and calls for a new concept of aesthetics, one that is more

relational – to what is created and to the creator. This approach differs from the modernist version, where art is separate from everyday life and its value determined by professionals. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter three. I agree with Knill (2005) on the need for a new concept of aesthetics, and while I accept his term ‘low skill, high sensitivity’, as a way of distinguishing between the modernist appreciation of art and that which emerges from spaces where people use the arts to express the story of their lives, the term, ‘low skill’, undervalues these expressions, for me. The understanding provided by Cajete (2000) is better suited to this study. He states that in indigenous society, art was such a natural form of expression, that there wasn’t a word for it. This view is also further developed in chapter three.

### **Concepts and Processes of Heuristic Research**

For all the problems associated with Moustakas’s (1990) theory, it is still very useful as it provides a means for the researcher to probe the research question in depth. He states that it is only through ‘exploratory open-ended inquiry, self-directed search, and immersion in active experience’ (p. 15) that the researcher is able to get inside the question, become one with it and in doing so, understand it. This involves a process that begins with ‘Self-Dialogue’ where one gives space to the phenomenon to speak to one’s experience. ‘Tacit Knowing’, involves knowledge that is implicit in our experiences and actions. It’s about knowing more than one can explain. Tacit knowing precedes intuition and is capable of guiding us into unexplored sources of meaning and direction. ‘Intuition’ forms the bridge between tacit knowing and explicit knowledge. Moustakas states that ‘Intuition makes possible the perceiving of things as wholes’ (p. 23). In the search for what will best express the depths of this study, I need to keep referring, testing, exercising and shifting in method. The conscious and deliberate process of turning inward to seek a deeper understanding of aspects of the human experiences of the learners was ongoing throughout the study. Another component of this process is ‘Focusing’, which can best be described as inner attention, staying with a sustained process until the central meaning of an experience is contacted and known. Gendlin (2003) describes ‘focusing’ as, “a process in which you make contact with a special kind of internal bodily awareness. I call this awareness a felt sense” (p. 10). The outcome of any heuristic process in terms of

human experience and knowledge is based on the internal frame of reference of the experiencing person(s) and not on any external frame. Only through 'feeling into' and re-connecting with the processes involved in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, can I attempt to portray the experiences of the learners, with validity, in this study.

Moustakas (1990) outlines six phases (p. 27-32) as comprising the basic research guide. In this study, the initial phase of 'Engagement' involved meeting with the participants and discussing their needs and wondering how these could be met. During the following two stages of 'Immersion' and 'Incubation', the words 'hidden voices from the dark, integrate and interact', kept going round in my head, until their meaning revealed itself to me. The 'Illumination' phase of this method involved putting the plan for the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project together. The 'Explication' phase was met through the six performances devised and presented to the public, by the learners. The 'Creative Synthesis' is achieved in this thesis.

### **Challenges posed by these methodologies**

Working with these methodologies to illuminate the journey of the learners, was not without challenges. One of these involved recognising and accepting the loss of experiences, in translating from one medium to another. This was apparent as I watched the dvds of the performances. My deep gratitude goes to John Lynch, of Listowel, Co. Kerry for reproducing performances one to five, in dvd format. John, a brother of a learner who participated in the performances, is a documentary filmmaker whose beautifully crafted films are acclaimed for their meticulous observation of a variety of aspects of social and traditional rural life in Kerry from 1970 to the present time. He painstakingly translated these performances from video format to that of dvd, for this study.

The medium of dvd cannot capture the feeling of connection between performers and audience, or the sense of being in another space, in another life, while being part of that web of connection. But the dvds of the performances and the cd of poetry did provide me with records through which I could re-live the journey of the learners. I sat for hours watching the dvds and listening to the cd, re-walking the journey with

the learners, step by step, through their performances, re-reading their reflections, and re-remembering what we shared and worked through in rehearsal work and in devising the performances. Then, I faced the challenge of how to represent these experiences visually, in the thesis. Quite by accident, I saw a colleague working on a computer, with the Windows7 operating system. One of the features of Windows 7 is that it has a 'Snipping Tool'. When I enquired about its use, I discovered that it enabled the user to 'still' an image in a dvd, capture that image and insert it in a document. This was a great moment for me, as now I had a tool to illuminate visually the experiences of the learners, in the thesis.

Then, I needed to decide on the experiences to be illuminated. This was difficult, as each dvd and the cd, needs to be seen, heard, and experienced as a 'whole'. Breaking up the performances to illuminate certain experiences is quite a modernist approach, difficult to reconcile with the feeling of wholeness and unity generated during the performances. But, it was necessary to find a way in the thesis to illuminate the sacred journey of the learners. As the conceptual framework of the thesis is provided by Atkinson's (1995) blue-print of the sacred journey, that of separation, initiation, return, and Knill's (2005) theory of intermodal expressive arts, both described in chapter three, this provided a way to see and understand the experiences that needed to be illuminated. Neither the learners nor I ever used these terms to describe their experiences during rehearsals or discussions, even though they did refer to their journey, all the time. As I began to use this framework, I felt a deep unease about taking their sacred stories and describing them in this way. It felt like an imposition, as the truest illumination occurs while sitting in their presence as they unfold the stories of their lives before us. In that space, at that time, we experience the truth of their lives, and also where our lives and stories, meet theirs. But, the combined frameworks provided by Atkinson (1995) and Knill (2005) meet the need for a conceptual framework for the thesis. From the moment I read Atkinson's (1995) blue-print for the sacred story, I could feel it converge with the journey of the learners. He states:

It helps us move from one state of being, or status-even though we may be stuck or comfortable there-to another. And as the pattern completes itself, it can begin all over again. Becoming conscious of the pattern is what enables us to recognise it each new time it comes into our lives, and to become transformed by it. Our stories are blue-prints of what is humanly possible.

(Atkinson 1995, p. 30)

Having read Atkinson's (1995) blue-print, I could see how Knill's theory of intermodal expressive arts provided a place where this pattern could be lived out, in performance. Together, they have a capacity to facilitate and honour the expression of sacred story for the learners. They provide a lens for the reader, to enter the story with them from a point of sacredness, and they provide me with the truest and most respectful way I can find, to illuminate this in the thesis.

Using this conceptual framework as a guide, and starting with the first performance, 'Tabhair dom do Lámh' (Give me your Hand), I sat and read the profiles and needs analysis of the learners, the plans for the workshops leading up to the performance, the rationale for the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, the reflections of the learners and the responses from the public and the media. I then began to watch the dvd of the performance, and I began to 'feel into' and re-experience the journey with the learners, as it unfolded before me. I watched it again, this time with a consciousness of where they separated out from day to day living, where they became initiated into the liminal phase, and the point at which they returned with new understanding of their lives and situations. I then moved away from doing this, coming back again at a later stage to re-experience this performance, with the same consciousness of the conceptual framework. I repeated this process until I could feel and see a repetition of the pattern of separation, initiation, return, in the same, familiar places, in the performance. Once I reached this point, I began to play the dvd again, this time freezing the images as we reached the places of separation, initiation, return, and other places of significance which were identified during rehearsals, snipping them and saving them in a folder, for insertion into the thesis. As I inserted each image into the illumination chapters of the thesis (chapters 6 – 11), I paused to 'feel into' and reflect on the experience captured in the image. I have described the experience in written form, beside the image. Again, I found the process of

translating the learners' experiences from a living performance to text, difficult. My descriptions cannot capture the feelings and emotions experienced during the performances.

I have included some reflections from the learners, both from their written and more private ones, and those expressed informally, to amplify their expressions in performance. Included too, where available, are the words that give voice to the reflections of the community and the media. Underneath each image, I have also included a link to a dvd, where this image is illuminated in performance. This is done to give the reader the opportunity of experiencing each of these illuminations individually. This facility was skilfully produced by Billy Donegan, in his recording studio in Causeway, Co. Kerry. Billy also produced the cd of the fourth performance, 'Deir mé, Deir tú...(I say, you say)' and the dvd for the sixth performance, 'Cé tusa istigh? (Who are you, inside?)'. This facility is very necessary for a number of the images, which are dark and sometimes unclear, due to the quality of the original recordings of the performances. In relation to all images in the thesis, this gives a quick link back to those particular moments of performance, but I emphasise the importance of watching each performance and experiencing it as a 'whole', prior to using this individual link facility. I repeated this process for each of the six performances in the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project.

Throughout the illuminations in chapters six to eleven, and the thesis in general, I looked for a way to distinguish between quotes from performances; learner reflections; my own descriptions of, and reflections on, workshops and performances; text from literature; and my own journey. I decided on colour coding as a means of differentiating between texts. The result was not successful as it looked quite confusing and so the text of the thesis is written entirely in black, but the voices of the learners are highlighted throughout, in italics.

As I'm presenting the performances in this way, I am highlighting the transformative process of the learners, for the reader. From the first performance, 'Tabhair dom do Lámh' (Give me your Hand), where the learners begin to explore space from the point of rest of a chair, this process is illuminated. The following elements begin to manifest, as the performances progress - the indigenous postmodern, including



instances of body, embodiment, nature, place (especially County Kerry), spiralling – the non-linear nature of the journeys; soul, spirit, community, folk expression, narrative, relationality – ‘seeing, hearing and loving each other into being’ (O’Neill, 2005: 60), where healing/wholeness is taking place – it’s not therapy, but it has therapeutic effects; a truly postmodern aesthetic – this is a genuine move on from the modern and a move into an indigenous postmodern. The archetypes of separation, initiation, return, and their motifs, have provided a way to trace the journeys of the learners in the study, but their suitability for tracing the community learning, needs to be considered. This will be discussed in chapter fourteen.

I found it difficult to decide on the placement in the text, of the illuminations of the learners, which continued beyond the life of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project and also my own personal illuminations, which came to the fore in parallel with the sixth performance, ‘Cé tusa istigh?’ (Who are you, inside?). Chapter five, which describes the rationale for the pilot project, was suggested as a possibility. As these illuminations were part of a parallel process of transformation with the performances, I included them, as separate chapters – twelve and thirteen, in part two of the study.

I purposely refrained from ‘analysing’ any of these illuminations, as I believe the expressions of the learners, in their performances, powerfully convey the truth of their experiences. This approach was inspired by, Ó Cruaíoch (2003). In his introduction to his book, which presents stories of the ‘cailleach’ or wise-woman healer, he states that he refrained from trying to analyse what these traditional stories ‘mean’ (p. xii). Instead, his concerns were to “provide adequate access to the stories and to respond to them in a way that, hopefully, points the reader in a similar direction to that of their original audiences by examining the significance of characters, motifs, symbols and so on” (p. xii). Instead of analysis, I have used the archetypes of separation, initiation, return, and the motifs associated with each archetype, to tell the story of the journey of the learners. I am not interrogating these motifs. They are an interpretive device and I am accepting them in this way. I have added commentaries, which connect to the literature reviewed in chapter three, and to literature not included in the review, but which is also relevant. The reflections of the learners, the community and the media are also added to further illuminate their experience of journey. Ó Cruaíoch

(2003) speaks of the relevance of the Irish term, ‘coimcne’, in relation to the imaginative life and cultural knowledge of the Irish people, stating that:

Its literal meaning is ‘shared wisdom’ and it emphasises both the sharing of cultural knowledge and the central importance of the knowledge shared; such knowledge being necessary for the comprehension of life experience and the proper conduct of social life.

(Ó Cruaíoch, 2003, p. 3)

In the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, the learners, through their collaborations with Siamsa Tíre, ‘felt into’ and connected to the well of knowledge, experience, and expressive forms that sustained previous generations through the journey of life. In this space of sharing, and learning from traditional wisdom, drawing it into their own lives, and moving forward from this place of indigenous knowing, the learners created more connected ways of living for themselves. Through expression of these transforming life experiences, in performance, they opened a space where the process of co-constructing knowledge with community began, and new ways of living, learning and understanding, opened up, for all.

Creating a methodology for this study has provided me with a structure through which I can see, tell and illuminate the story of transformation for the learners, in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. Prior to this, when called on to tell this story, I felt overwhelmed. There are so many elements to include, place, history, previous generations, story, tradition, folk theatre, the learners, the community, the arts, indigenous knowledge, learning, transformative adult learning, myself. I was conscious of omitting important elements, each time I told it. Developing this methodology has provided me with a way of seeing a place to locate all the different elements of the project, and especially the experiences of the learners, who are the focus of the study and whose experiences are illuminated in chapters six to twelve.

This was a challenging process for me, but this is not an unusual experience, as arts based research is a newly emerging field, posing challenges for both researchers and supervisors. Sally Atkins (2012), educator, psychotherapist, psychologist and poet, states that: “Art-based dissertations do not look like traditional dissertations” (p. 63). Faculty members, in her experience, typically, look for the standard ‘five chapters’ (p.

63). Often, she states, art-based researchers will have “included more than the content of the five chapters, though the standard content may not be immediately observable”, as researchers tend to use “evocative metaphorical chapter titles” and “interweave their literature review with their own conceptual framework” (p. 63). Working with a newly emerging field, she states, requires researchers to provide “an elaborated rationale and explanation for its use” (p. 63). She emphasises that “the importance of clear, careful and systematic work becomes a necessity” (p. 63). Her poem, ‘To the Gods and Goddesses of Research’, highlights the importance of working with the struggles associated with recognising arts-based methodologies as valid research:

Give us then the courage  
To challenge the privileged paradigm  
To break the illusion of objectivity  
To carry lightly the loud weight of words  
For we are longing for poetry  
Woven through with dance  
And drama performed with music  
Let us look with both eyes open  
At our unexamined subjectivities  
Let us crack the categories of our thinking  
And find an epistemology of the senses  
Where wonder and passion interplay with reason.

The next chapter explores the rationale for the pilot project of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’, the profiles of the learners, and a summary of how the development of the project impacted on life and learning, far beyond what we originally imagined.

## **Part 2**

### **Illuminations of Journey**

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **A PLAN TO JOURNEY**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reveals how I came to understand the message being communicated to me in the words ‘Hidden voices from the dark, integrate and interact’, which kept coming in and out of my consciousness. This poetic phrase held the space for the inner journey of the learners in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. This chapter also contains profiles of the learners and brief descriptions of their native places. Included too, is a description of my own native place. In addition to this, the rationale, concept, aims and objectives, methods of transmitting traditional skills of expression and the outcomes of the pilot project are discussed here.

#### **Profiles of the learners**

Eight learners and their tutor/co-ordinator, six men and three women, took part in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. Two men (late twenties) and one woman (early twenties) were blind from birth. One of these men came from Scartaglin, part of the Sliabh Luachra area, a place rich in a particular style of traditional Irish music. The other, came from the town of Killorglin, renowned for its three-day festival, Puck Fair, which is held every August, celebrating the custom where a goat, known as King Puck, presides over a fair in the town, from his throne, in the town square. The woman came from Tralee, the largest town in County Kerry, and famous for its International Rose of Tralee Festival. This festival is held annually in the town and takes its inspiration from a ballad of the same name, about a woman named Mary, who because of her beauty, was called the Rose of Tralee. One man (late forties) and one woman (early forties) had visual problems from childhood and had light perception. One came from Listowel, a market town in North Kerry, famous for its writers, namely, the late Bryan Mac Mahon and John B. Keane. The other came from Ardfert, the birth place of St. Brendan, the Navigator. One man (sixty years) lost his sight in middle years, due to a genetic disorder. This man came from Knocknagoshel, a village in North Kerry. The place is remembered in Irish history for the banner

carried by local men at a rally addressed by Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891, with the infamous words: “Arise Knocknagoshel, and take your place among the nations of the earth”! One man (sixty years), from Killorglin, developed an eye disorder in middle years, which left him with light perception. One man (late forties) came from Castleisland, a market town in the county renowned for the width of its main street and also for its description by one of its best-known citizens, journalist, Con Houlihan, as “not so much a town as a street between two fields”! A woman (early forties) came from Listowel. Both learners acquired blindness through road accidents, while in their twenties and forties, respectively.

### **Personal Profile**

Though living and working in Tralee when I started the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, I was born and reared in the village of Finuge, situated three miles from Listowel town, close to the River Feale. Finuge is renowned for the number of talented GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association) football players that have come from the area. It is also the site of one of Siamsa Tíre’s two rural folk theatre training centres and in addition, is well-known for its salmon-fishing tradition. One of my neighbours, Kathy May Lyons, now deceased, whom I met each day on my way to and from Primary School, penned these lines describing Finuge and her love for the place, in her poem, ‘The Village’:

There nestles in a peaceful plain  
Some miles from Listowel town,  
A peaceful little village  
Of beauty and renown.  
I write a line of verse today  
To express the love I feel  
For that dear old place they call Finuge  
On the banks of the River Feale.

(Finuge Heritage Survey & Anco, 1986, p. 18-19)

Finuge was also home to the late Seán McCarthy, a writer who composed the songs ‘Red Haired Mary’ and ‘Shanagolden’ and in whose honour a festival is held each year in the village, during the August bank-holiday weekend. The village has a

central location in the North Kerry area. Being aware of the significance of the 'centre', both in terms of geographical location in relation to the learners and of its deeper meaning for life, was important for me in developing the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project. MacEowan (2007) explains its importance in the Irish tradition: "Ultimately, the Center is about our life force and whether or not we are in good standing with its flow and wisdom" (p. 55).

### **Needs of the Learners**

During my conversations with the learners, they spoke of their reasons for engaging with the workshop programme as revolving around a desire to become 'part of', as opposed to being 'apart from' (cf. Appendix 7). One man expressed his needs in this regard: *"I want to feel part of things where my contribution will be taken seriously and valued and where I'll have opportunities which will provide long-term opportunity for participation"*. Other learners spoke of needs to: *"integrate socially"*, *"develop spatial and mobility skills"*, *"confidence and independence skills"*. One man spoke of needs he wanted fulfilled:

*I need to re-develop confidence and independence skills within my new and unfamiliar limitations of visual impairment. I feel these needs could be met through involvement in activities with others, especially those relating to matters of heritage and tradition. I also need to develop mobility skills.*

Another man spoke of his needs regarding independence: *"I need to develop independence outside of my own environment"*. Three learners, two men and one woman, spoke of needing to develop their musical talents. Integration with others was a key need for one man in his forties: *"I need opportunities to interact with others"*. Developing good posture and spatial skills were important for one woman: *"I need to develop spatial skills and an awareness of good posture"*. An ability to assert her needs was also important for her: *"I need to develop confidence in stating my needs especially in group or authority situations"*. Listening to the learners made me aware that there were places in their inner landscapes that would remain untouched by technological learning and skill alone and that a more fulsome response was required to meet the needs they expressed.

## **Hearing and Answering the Call**

‘Hidden voices from the dark  
integrate and interact’

Throughout 1998, this phrase drifted in and out of my consciousness, at various times. It’s meaning puzzled me. I wondered if it was a poem about to reveal itself, but it never developed. At the time, I was working in Siamsa Tire - The National Folk Theatre, and I had just completed a Master of Arts Degree in Education. My final research project for the degree focused on the new, distance learning programme in adaptive information technology for these adult learners with visual impairment, which would open up to them, all the channels of communication available to sighted people. Kerry Education Service (Co. Kerry VEC) initiated the setting up of the programme and shared responsibility for its delivery and management, firstly with the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB), and then FÁS (An Foras Áiseanna Saothair – Training and Employment Authority), up until the early part of the new millennium. At that stage, Kerry Education Service, in agreement with FÁS, assumed sole responsibility for the programme. In 1998, I interviewed the learners in relation to their expected life changes on completion of the programme. As I listened to them, I became aware of their isolation and need for social as well as educational integration. I returned to my work in arts administration, but their expressions of longing and need for greater social participation stayed with me. They had given openly and generously of their thoughts and feelings during the research work. This touched me deeply. I was haunted by a desire to give something back to them in return for what I had received. There is an old belief that very often the answer to a problem is right in front of one. I began to look to my work place, the National Folk Theatre, for a solution to their situation.

I found it through reflecting on the personal transformation experienced by young cast members following their training with the company. From observation, I was aware of the positive changes in them, through undergoing training in the language of folk theatre expression, namely, Irish music, song, dance and mime/movement. Ranging in age from eight to twelve years, many of these young people, in the initial training sessions, were shy and awkward at expressing what was in their imaginations. Their



performance work at the end of the first year's training reflected ease of movement and confidence in expression, indicating that this had been a transformative process for them. Using the media of music, dance, mime/movement and song seemed like the key to opening the doors to the fulfilment of the learner's needs.

I approached the Dance Master and members of the National Folk Theatre's professional company with a view to working on a series of workshops with the learners. I discussed the idea for the integrated workshops and performance with the learners. They greeted it with both eagerness and apprehension. And so, what I called the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, was formed. 'Borradh agus Trá'.. the wave of puzzlement regarding these words, had spent itself on the shore, leaving a new reality, for me. The journey began, for the group, for those we collaborated with, and for me, showing us all that, as London (1989) believes, "what we are and what we were is not yet all that we might become and that the creative process is a powerful vehicle to probe what might lie ahead" (p. xv). In discussions, we planned a 'once off' series of eight workshops, and depending on the outcomes, the presentation of a performance of the work, immediately following the final workshop. The learners were very focused on presenting their work to the public, to raise awareness of their abilities and their need for greater inclusion in society.

## **Preparing to Journey**

### **Rationale for the Pilot Project**

The reason for developing folk theatre as part of the educational experience for the learners with visual impairment, was to make a distinctively Irish experience part of their living. Through participation in distinctively Irish cultural experiences, a distinctively Irish sense of self evolves. This, in turn, creates a sense of self-esteem, contributing significantly to general self-confidence.

### **Concept**

Siamsa Tire's distinctive dance style is based on the traditional dance taught by a North Kerry travelling dance master, Jeremiah Molyneux. The company members

recorded and learned the dances from Jeremiah's pupils. At that stage, these dancers, due to age and infirmity, danced with the support of chairs. The chair assumed a central role in the communication of a distinctive style of dance, for Siamsa Tire. The company highlights this method of passing on the dance steps, in one of its stage presentations, and demonstrates how its now distinctive style has developed from it.

Taking inspiration from this, the participants with visual impairment, while seated, begin their experiences of using space and movement as a means of communication. The chair is the starting point. All movement begins from a point of rest. From this point, they learn, supported by their sighted partners, how to move out into a world which is dominated by an awareness of space and movement.

### **Aims**

The aims of the workshop series were:

- 1 To create an awareness of the space in which all movement takes place and all life is lived.
- 2 To use this awareness of space to enrich all experience and to create an awareness of the richness of communication through Irish music, song, dance and movement.
- 3 To ensure that folk theatre is open to, and inclusive of all, and that the confidence and communication skills of participants grow and develop through participation.

### **Content**

The workshops, which were sixty minutes in duration, began with rhythm work to traditional sounds, progressing to the expression of emotions by gesture involving the disciplined use of the body, to learning traditional songs, basic dance steps, the use of traditional implements, and to the development of combined movement and expression of emotion in space. A specially adapted version of 'The Corncrake' piece, was performed by the Siamsa Tire professional company, and discussed and analysed with the participants, to introduce them to the concept of folk theatre. Workshop sessions 1-5 focused on the development of these fundamental skills of

folk theatre. Sessions 6-8 drew these skills together to produce an integrated performance piece with the Siamsa Tire company.

### **Methods**

The methods used in communicating these skills were largely a following and mirroring of disciplined movement to traditional rhythms, songs and music, which were communicated aurally. The pattern began from the security of the chair, developing into more independent movement. Prior to beginning the workshops, the sighted performers closed their eyes as they moved and danced in space, to fully appreciate what was involved for the participants without sight.

### **Objectives**

On completion of the programme, it was envisaged that the participants would have:

1. The experience of co-devising and co-performing a piece of folk theatre with the Siamsa Tire professional company.
2. An appreciation of the central importance of the dimension of space in which all movement takes place.
3. The ability to communicate more effectively in traditional forms of expression.
4. An appreciation of the distinctively Irish culture, which produces a unique use of space and movement.
5. Developed a greater confidence both in themselves and in their communication with others, thereby increasing their ability to integrate and interact.

### **Outcomes**

In the workshops, both groups began to draw each other into their different worlds. A twenty-minute performance entitled, 'Tabhair dom do Lámh' (Give me your Hand), showing interaction and integration between the worlds of the sighted and unsighted,

was produced and presented, following the eighth workshop. The title, in Irish, was taken from a tune composed by the Irish harpist, Turlough O'Carolan, who was blind. All participants reported an improvement in their spatial and mobility skills. Their posture and self-confidence had improved: *'I felt that I was walking with my head in the air'*. They danced, sang and moved to traditional tunes and rhythms, establishing friendships with their sighted partners, throughout the process. It also afforded them an opportunity to work together as a group, an opportunity denied them due to their social isolation. One learner's comment during the evaluation following the performance captures the level of integration and interaction which occurred during the process: *'Ye took us as we were. There was no special treatment. We felt like we knew all of Siamsa Tíre all our lives'*.

Public reaction exceeded all expectations, with the group receiving a standing ovation for their work. This was followed by letters and telephone calls expressing appreciation for an experience which was described as: 'wonderful and emotional', 'uplifting and all inspiring', 'impressive and moving, like some proverbial miracle, where the impossible occurred right before our eyes' (Cf. Appendix 1). The performance was covered in the local newspapers and local radio. It also received coverage on national radio and one national newspaper, 'The Examiner', described it as a 'cross-cultural piece of heritage in the making'.

The healing had begun for the learners, and the new feelings of connection and confidence were too good to lose. There was a hunger in the group for more: *'I hope it doesn't end. Can we do more in the winter?'* The next chapter illuminates in detail, the process of transformation for the learners, as they journeyed through the workshops and the performance of 'Tabhair dom do Lámh' (Give me your Hand), which was the outcome of this pilot project. The experiences and reflections of the learners during, and at the end of this process, highlight why this journey would continue far beyond its planned for, once-off, performance. These too, are illuminated in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PERFORMANCE ONE: ‘TABHAIR DOM DO LÁMH’ (GIVE ME YOUR HAND)

#### Introduction

O’Donohue (1998) states: “Ideally, a human life should be a constant pilgrimage of discovery. The most exciting discoveries happen at the frontiers” (p. 29). Chapter five outlined the concept and the plan of pilgrimage for the learners. This chapter illuminates the first of the six performances of the journey or pilgrimage of the learners as they walk the heroic path and reach new depths of discovery at the frontiers of the self, in the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. They called this performance ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand), to illuminate the possibilities for connection and integration through journey with the sighted community, and their joy in their experiences.

The illumination of each phase of their journey, involved for me, their guide and witness, a “walking back” into these experiences through re-viewing the workshop plans and contents, re-living the performances through watching their recordings, and reading again the reflections of the learners throughout the process. The performances represent the culmination of each phase of the way. As the salient points in each performance are re-experienced, they are connected to the conceptual frameworks of the study. These are provided by Atkinson’s (1995) theory of personal myth-making, that of separation, initiation, return, and the Rites of Restoration as outlined in Knill’s (2005) intermodal expressive arts framework. The journey of the learners through each of the six performances of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project fits within Atkinson’s (1995) personal myth-making frame. This framework is given space to come alive and live, in performance, through Knill’s (2005) Rites of Restoration. These frameworks, as experienced by the learners in each performance, are illuminated visually through images, with accompanying dvd links, and complete dvds of each performance, in Part Two of the thesis, ‘Illuminations of Journey’. This process of illumination holds for the analysis of each of the six phases of the project.

The dvd of ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your hand), programme notes and learner reflections on their experiences, in addition to press cuttings and letters of response from the community relating to the performance, are contained in Appendix 1.

### **A summary of the workshop process leading to the performance of ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand)**

The process leading to the performance of ‘Tabhair dom do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand) consisted of seven two-hour workshops, which took place at Siamsa Tíre Theatre, located in Tralee Town Park, from 11am – 1pm. The workshops began on July 13<sup>th</sup>. and ended on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1999. The process culminated in a twenty-minute performance of ‘Tabhair Dom Do Lámh’ (Give Me Your Hand), which the group presented in the theatre, at lunch-time, on August 4<sup>th</sup>.

As St. Brendan and his crew prepared to separate from the land and set sail from Fenit in search of the Land of Promise, the process of separation began for the learners, on the first day of the workshops. During the planning phase, we decided to operate the ‘buddy’ system, with one performer from the Siamsa Tíre company working with a learner throughout the process. This connection, I felt, would enable greater participation for the learners. This was later confirmed by the course co-ordinator, also a participant in the process:

*I found it excellent to have one partner. The “one to one” is very important. The support from our partners, in such an unobtrusive way is great – they made us laugh at ourselves.*

When the learners arrived in the theatre, we guided them through the narrow corridors, leading from the foyer to the rehearsal space at the back of the stage. There was much excitement and nervousness on all our parts. Seated in a circle, the group was welcomed by the theatre manager. This was followed by brief personal introductions, and a short talk on folk theatre given by the company’s dance master. We then passed around some traditional farm implements used by the company in its work, to break the ice and generate discussion and connection. A specially adapted and abbreviated performance of ‘The Corncrake’, part of the Siamsa Tíre repertoire,

was then performed by the participating company members. There was a discussion on this piece during tea break, at which stage, the ice was broken, and people were talking freely and animatedly. Some of the older learners shared stories of their memories of hearing the corncrake, a very diminished sound at that stage, and one now no longer heard.

Following the performance, one learner remarked to me that he remembers tea spilling due to awkwardness and unfamiliarity during the break, and at that stage he remembers thinking: *“I thought you were mad to believe that we could ever do this”!* I was oblivious to this, feeling only relief that the engagement had begun. Time spent working on rhythm exercises concluded the first workshop. Checking in with each other at the end of this session, we decided we would continue. In workshop two, we worked on voice and songs, while workshops three and four consisted of work on movement and dance.

Following the third workshop, time was given to the participants for self-reflection and evaluation of the sessions. At this point, I was aware of the learners’ dedication to the project, their high levels of focus, participation, interest and motivation. *“I find the movement work very helpful, I feel very confident with it. I’m very interested and motivated”*. It was amazing to discover how quickly they were acquiring new skills in dance, movement, singing and rhythm work. It was very heartening to see their confidence and self-belief growing with each workshop. *“I find this very enjoyable. I think I’m improving a bit. I’m not sure, but I think I’ll be able to get through it”*.

These observations were confirmed by other learners who spoke of growing confidence, improved co-ordination, movement, balance, mobility, high motivation and interest levels and therapeutic and relaxation benefits, from the work. The positive benefits of participation in the project with members of their own group, and the Siamsa Tire performers, were also articulated.

*I find this great, for these reasons: Before, when I came to Siamsa Tire, I was in the audience, apart from the group – now, I’m part of them. I find the hand and leg co-ordination work great; the moving around to the sound of the bodhrán is very helpful; and working with our own group of blind people is great – we’ve never been together as a group like this before.*

*I feel great after the workshops. I feel much better. I'm in better form. The movement work is great, it's helping my balance, and my walking.*

The fifth workshop introduced the skills of using farm implements, accompanied by rhythm and song, while the sixth involved revision of what had been learned to date and putting the performance piece together. Workshop seven involved rehearsal of the performance piece, as did the final workshop, which was followed by the performance of 'Tabhair Dom Do Lámh'.

### **How the performance of 'Tabhair Dom Do Lámh' (Give me your hand) illuminates the Archetypes and Motifs of Personal Mythmaking and the Rites of Restoration**

**Opening Scene:** The performance opens (Appendix 1, DVD 1) with a female learner singing the song: 'Now I walk in beauty, beauty lies before me, beauty lies behind me, above and below me'. Other learners join in singing with her. They are seated, using chairs to support them (DVD 1 – S1 below). This segment marks their withdrawal from day to day reality, what Knill (2005) terms 'de-centering', the process of "leaving the every day situation and entering into a devotional space for a period of time" (p. 77). They enter a place where they begin their journey of exploration and transformation of space, with each other, and with performers with sight. This represents what Atkinson (1995) identifies as the **first phase of the Archetype of the Hero myth – Separation**. He illustrates that within the first two phases there are four smaller elements or motifs, and two within the last phase. At this point in the performance, the learners are responding to the **first motif – the Call to Adventure**. Here, they have made a choice to go with the new life that is unfolding, rejecting the comfort of staying in their familiar world. Moving from the rehearsal space, to the stage, during preparation for the performance, was always significant for the group. One learner stated, as we approached the stage, that "*everything changes when we go on to the stage. There is a different feeling*".





**DVD 1 – S1**

**Scene 2:** This is followed by Siamsa Tíre performers singing the same song, marking their entry to the space with them (DVD 1 – S2 below). The **second motif** of ‘**Assistance**’ is obvious here, as the learners realise that they are being protected and guided on their journey. This heralds the start of the co-creation of a new space, and of transformation for all participating – the learners, Siamsa Tíre performers and the audience. The learners and the Siamsa Tíre performers open to each other, anticipating the beauty of exploring space together, supporting each other and experiencing connection.



**DVD 1 – S2**

**Scene 3:** The Siamsa Tíre performers kneel in front of the learners, who are seated. The groups connect through their hands and mirror each other’s movements as they explore space together (DVD 1 – S3 below). The **third motif** of ‘**The Initial Challenge**’ becomes apparent here, as this marks the beginning of the transformation of fear of space, for the learners. There is a sense of impending danger as they move deeper into new realms of space, but as they proceed, the danger fades. One learner

explains this fear: “*Space is a problem for us – we have no horizons – these workshops helped that*”. Without sight, it is impossible for them to know and set the boundaries of their environment. The danger of the unknown and what it might bring, is always fearfully near.



**DVD 1 – S3**

**Scene 4:** This process of transformation continues as the Siamsa Tíre performers hand the bodhráns to the learners (DVD 1 – S4 below).



**DVD 1 – S4**

The Siamsa Tíre performers dance to the beat of the rhythms created by the learners (DVD 1 – S4a below). This is an empowering experience for the learners as they take the lead and guide the dancers with the rhythms they create. In hearing the response of the dancers on the stage to the traditional rhythms they created, the learners become aware of the possibilities for setting the boundaries for movement in safety.



**DVD 1 – S4a**

**Scene 5:** Roles are reversed as the Siamsa Tíre performers take the bodhráns from the learners (DVD 1 – S5 below). This is the point of initiation into confronting their fears of space. Taking the hands of the learners, who leave the security of their chairs, the Siamsa Tíre performers draw them into the space where they guide and lead them to dance and move, unaided, to the beat of the bodhrán. Atkinson (1995) speaks of experiencing the connection between our own life themes and those of others (p. 11). At this point, the learners, through rhythm and dance, connect with the Siamsa Tíre performers. But, they also connect to the ancestors who left the legacy of this dancing style. Their dances live through the learners as they give expression to this inheritance, in a new space and in a new way, reflecting their own particular life experiences.



**DVD 1 – S5**

This demonstrates a transformation in their confidence in moving through space, and also a ‘trust’ in their partners to guide them into independent movement (DVD 1 S5a below). One learner remarked:

*The enthusiasm of everyone is great – the enthusiasm of your group (the Siamsa Tíre performers) is marvellous – they want to experience things as we do. I feel very motivated. The movement work is very good.*

Developing the capacity to move confidently in space was a salient aim for the learners. A reflection shared by a learner highlights this transformation: *‘It has*

*helped my sense of space – I used to go freaking in a strange environment, whereas now my confidence has improved an awful lot in this regard’.*



**DVD 1 – S5a**

**Scene 6.** This changed experience of moving in space prompts the learners to dig deeper, right down into the inner darkness, to release this grip of fear. The music changes and the learners sink deep into the self, as seeds into the earth (DVD 1 S6 below). This illustrates the **fourth motif** of the first stage of separation, which is that of **‘Retreat’**. The learners find themselves in a stage of withdrawal, of being cut off from the world, of turning inwards, reflecting deeply on their feelings in that dark place. Following this experience, the Siamsa Tíre performers hold up the bodhráns, as symbols of the sun, to aid this process of inner growth.



**DVD 1 – S6**

**Scene 7:** The **second stage of ‘Initiation’** is reached here as the learners experience the first motif of **‘Greater Challenges’**. This stage of Atkinson’s (1995) framework connects with Knill’s (2005) theory of entering liminal or devotional space for a period of time during the de-centering process (p. 77). Levine (2005) understands liminality as one in which “all familiar structures have been given up and new ones have not yet appeared” (p. 43). He states that it is a time of confusion and



powerlessness, but also a “time of great creativity, in which one is free to invent new forms of meaning for oneself and for the group to which one belongs” (p. 43). For the learners, at this point, they feel the sun’s warmth touch the inner self, now enveloped in the darkness, and they experience the process of pushing upwards through the self to reach the open space again. They begin to transform as they grow and open to the light, and to space, at their own pace, and in a new way (DVD 1 – S7 below). This new experience of space will involve facing more difficult tasks and struggles, which they will need to overcome.



DVD 1 – S7

**Scene 8:** Once opened, they move their outstretched arms and experience space with a new confidence. The Siamsa Tíre performers re-connect with them and mirror their movements. The **second motif** of **‘Further Assistance** is met here, through the support of the performers and the awareness of a new aspect of their inner selves – a new confidence in space and movement which they have now embodied. This is reflected in one learner’s comment: *“I’m more secure in space around me”*. Both groups then move freely through space together, forming a semi circle and singing ‘Now I walk in beauty...’ (DVD 1 – S8 below).



DVD 1 – S8

**Scene 9:** A male learner, moves to the churn and in doing so, reconnects with his work as a farmer, prior to losing his sight (DVD 1 – S9 below). This is an enjoyable and transforming experience for him, meeting his need to express his talents relating to the Irish tradition. The entire group support him, through churning with him in their imaginations, and through singing and beating out the rhythms of the churn with their feet. This scene is part of Siamsa Tire’s repertoire, depicting rural living and tradition. Reconnecting with this tradition of butter-making, is a familiar one for this learner. But, as the beating sound of the butter being churned rings out to the accompaniment of the learners singing the accompanying work-song in the Irish language: ‘Buail, buail, buail a bhuachaillín... (Beat, beat, beat, little boy), the learners begin, as MacEowan (2007) says, to awaken “something in the ancient blood coursing through our veins” (p. 16).



**DVD 1 – S9**

**Scene 10:** Transformation continues as another male learner takes on the role of a visiting shoemaker and realises his dream of singing, and beating out the rhythm and sound of shoes as they are being mended, all the time accompanied and supported by the group (DVD 1 – S10 below). This scene is a variation of one from Siamsa Tire’s repertoire.



**DVD 1 – S10**

**Scene 11:** The **third motif** of ‘**Temptation**’ is highlighted here. A female learner, moves forward towards the front of the stage, singing ‘Now I walk in beauty...’ (DVD 1 – S11 below). This highlights her transformation in confidence and empowerment as she signals the arrival of a new way forward in independent movement, for her and the other learners. The learners have been exposed to a new way of movement in space. There is always the temptation to stay with the familiar. Her independent movement forward, symbolises a clarity and commitment to a new way of being in the world for the learners. This highlights Atkinson’s (1995) point that in telling our stories we can experience “many forms of release, recovery, resolution and renewal” (p. 16).



**DVD 1 – S11**

**Scene 12:** Following this, the Siamsa Tíre performers move the chairs to the back of the stage. The learners stand and wait, as their old symbols of support are laid aside (DVD 1 – S12 below). This highlights their ‘**Renewal and Rebirth**’ – the **fourth motif** in the stage of ‘Initiation’. They have died to the old way of being and are re-

born in a new way. Their fear has dissolved, as this learner's reflection on his experience of participating in the project, highlights:

*I feel better in myself – more confident moving around. I thought I was useless before – only good for listening to the radio. Now I think I'm more useful, that I can do more. My family are very proud of me now – they thought I wouldn't be able to do it. But, with a bit of help it's amazing what you can do.*

(**Note:** This demonstrates a significant transformation for this man, who had stated in his earlier reflection that: "I think I'll be able to get through it").

They have now integrated their new experiences of space and are ready to move with a transformed ease and confidence. There is a new future near at hand, but there is still a vulnerability having emerged from the old, to the new way of being. Their vulnerability was palpable, as they stood on stage alone, waiting to reconnect with the Siamsa Tíre performers.

#### **DVD 1 – S 12**



**Scene 13:** Both groups join and walk through space freely, singing ‘Now I walk in beauty....’, as an expression of the beauty of their new-found freedom in space (DVD 1 – S13 below). This marks the **third phase** of the journey, ‘**The Return**’ where the **first motif** of ‘**Responsibility Accepted or Denied**’ is played out. In Knill’s (2005) framework, this describes the ‘exit’, where the person is “challenged with the difference as a confrontation” (p. 83). At this point, the learners have accepted responsibility for a return to day to day life, which highlights a new way forward for



them, and there is a sense of wanting to give something back for what has been received, of needing to share the fruits of their experiences.



**DVD 1 – S13**

**Scene 14:** This walk transforms into a dance of celebration for what has been experienced and achieved (DVD 1 – S14 below).



**DVD 1 – S14**

**Scene 15:** At the end of the dance, the performers form a line, raising their arms to communicate the end of their journey, to the audience (DVD 1 – S15 below). The **second motif** of ‘**Living Consciously**’ is reached here. The learners’ experiences of moving in space, firstly with support, and then independently, have been transformed. One learner comments:

*I think that now I feel much more confident at the end of it. I feel now that I'd have no problem getting up on stage. I feel that I'm walking better – a lot more confident.*

In consciously knowing the struggles involved in this journey of growth, there is the realisation that we are all unfinished works, we are always in the process of becoming, and that we are interdependent with others. A learner highlights the benefits of connection with others, for him:

*It has made me do things – exercises that doctors couldn't get me to do. The main thing we got from all of ye – warmth – which made us react. We came from a very low ebb. It was so important for us. There was a bond there and it was growing as time went on. What I got out of it, money couldn't buy anywhere.*

For now, there is a peace with what has been achieved, but a realisation that the journey may have just begun, a sense that there is more to come. Learner reflections indicate this: *“I was shocked at the audience response. There was no patronising. After the performance, I felt a little down – I thought: Is this the end?” “In future, blind people must move into this type of training. As a blind person, I feel it's a wonderful exercise in mobility”. “I hope it doesn't end. Can we do more in the winter?”* One learner's reflection uttered to himself as he left the stage following the performance and later shared with the group, proved prophetic: *“Something has happened here today in Siamsa Tíre. Blind people have come on to the stage of life and we're not for going away”*. Expressive arts had connected the learners with what McIntosh (2008) describes as “what it takes to bring that person alive from within” (p. 34). This is the seed of healing. O'Donohue (1998) states that: “Each of us should travel inwards from the surface constraints and visit the wild places within us. There are no small rooms there” (p. 145).

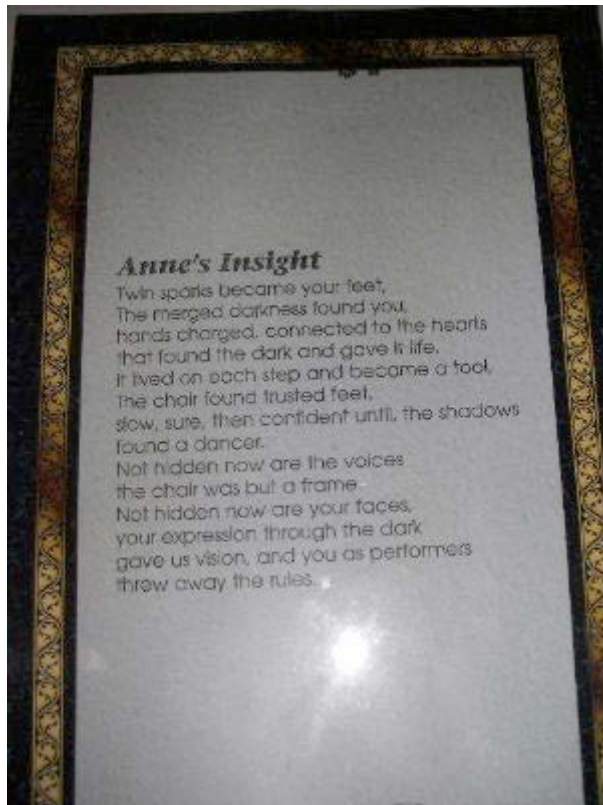


### **DVD 1 – S15**

In response, the audience rises to its feet, in appreciation of what they have witnessed, experienced, and for what has been transformed for them. In the following days, letters, telephone calls of appreciation and requests for repeat performances, poured into the theatre (cf. Appendix 1). What Kenyon and Randall (1997) term, ‘the outside-in’ level of lifestory (p. 35 – 36) was beginning to change for the learners. A deep connection to the lives of others, past, present and future, was forming for them. One woman, a local poet and children’s storyteller, composed the following poem, had it framed (cf. image - next page) and brought it to the theatre for us.

#### ***Anne’s Insight***

Twin sparks became your feet,  
The merged darkness found you,  
hands charged, connected to the hearts  
that found the dark and gave it life.  
It lived on each step and became a tool,  
The chair found trusted feet,  
slow, sure, then confident until, the shadows  
found a dancer..  
Not hidden now are the voices  
the chair was but a frame.  
Not hidden now are your faces,  
your expression through the dark  
gave us vision, and you as performers  
threw away the rules....



The learners, in their 'mind's eye' designed and worded an appreciation to the Siamsa Tíre personnel involved in the project, and came to the theatre to present it to us. The appreciation was written in Irish. It is included below, accompanied by an English translation of its text. The learners put a lot of thought into the images to be included in the picture and then looked for someone to create their ideas visually, for them. Images of a person with visual impairment with a guide dog, featured in the centre of the picture, with an image each of the four seasons in each corner. Their names were signed at the bottom of the picture.



Glórtha an Dorchacht

Tabhair dom do Lámh

Do gach duine I Siamsa Tíre mar chamhartha buíochas as ucht a ndea-oibre le muintir dhall Chiarraí agus d'Anne Kennelly, ach go háirithe, a bhí mar chrann tacha dúinn.

(Hidden Voices from the Dark

To everyone in Siamsa Tíre as a token of appreciation of their good work for the blind of Kerry and especially to Anne Kennelly, who was a tremendous support to us).

For me, it was inspiring to observe the transformation in the group members following their journey from fear of space, to confidence in self-expression through dancing, singing, movement, rhythm work, in space, in the presence of an audience.

Noticing their improved posture, in particular one female learner, who now walked with her head held high, influenced, I believe, by the workshop exercise inviting them to imagine that:

You are a celebrity walking through the streets, there is a rope tied in your hair and somebody is pulling your head upwards with it. Show me how you walk, when this is happening.

Their self-evaluations became freer and more expansive, indicating a transformed confidence in self-expression. Their courage and openness to the process of creation of a new space for life had brought a richness to their lives. One learner's comment reflects this:

*The strongest feeling of all – it makes me proud to have lost my sight and to have gained this confidence. I am very proud of being blind now, and being up on the stage the last day has taken away a barrier from the front of our faces.*

The course co-ordinator, who also participated in the project, believed that the experience would transform learner commitment to academic course work: *“All of my trainees would give a firmer commitment to my course if they thought there was more of this – it has given them a lift”*.

The plan for the one-off presentation, which would highlight the necessity for greater integration of people with visual impairment, in society, now needed to be revised. I took a year's sabbatical from my position in Siamsa Tíre and took up a teaching post on the learners programme in 2000. At that stage, their programme had changed from being a distance education, to a centre based one. A second performance of 'Tabhair dom do Lámh' was presented during Easter 2000 as part of a local community arts festival. At that stage, the learners were already planning phase two of the 'Hidden Voices from the Dark' project, which is illuminated in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PERFORMANCE TWO: ‘COS, COS EILE... (ONE STEP, THEN ANOTHER STEP...)

#### Introduction

When I began working with the learners full-time in February 2000, we discussed the benefits of participation in the first performance, ‘Tabhair Dom Do Lámh’ (Give me your Hand), in greater detail. The word ‘healing’ came up again and again, and this was something we began to explore. All the learners had made pilgrimages to shrines such as Lourdes in France, Knock in County Mayo, or local holy wells, in search of healing. They decided that they would explore the theme of healing at a holy well for the second phase of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project. At this stage, I believed that it would be important to start integrating their growing competency in adaptive information technology with their communications and performance work. Siamsa Tíre devises all its own stage material and researches its themes meticulously prior to developing each new work. I suggested that each learner would conduct and write up some research on holy wells, and that the Siamsa Tíre performers would do likewise. I set up a ‘Presentation of Research Day’ at the theatre, where both groups presented and exchanged their research findings. At the end of the day, the learners presented their findings, in written form, to the Siamsa Tíre company as a source of reference for future work in relation to holy wells and healing.

Healy (2001) believes that there can hardly be a townland in Ireland that is without at least one well or spring that by tradition is sacred or holy and that each of us has ‘at least one in close proximity to where he or she lives’ (p. 10). Some learners wrote about holy wells in their localities, others researched the topic on the internet, and one learner interviewed a woman to hear of her experiences of living near a holy well. Another learner visited ‘Tobar na Molt’ or the ‘Well of the Wethers’, near Ardfert, County Kerry. This well is dedicated to St. Brendan, the Navigator. This was an empowering experience for the learners. It represented the first motif, the ‘Call to

Adventure’, in the ‘Separation’ phase of this part of their journey. This was the first sign of a new phase of life unfolding and the learners were choosing to go with it.

One learner reflected: *“I found doing the research very good, very positive – I was blocked before it. I didn’t know how to research”*. Another learner spoke of her difficulty in engaging with the research, but stated that she *“enjoyed it when I got used to it”*. A male learner wrote and spoke of his memories of visiting the well nearest his home, yearly, during the month of May, from the time he was five years old to his then age of sixty. Healing began at this point for him:

*I was a little apprehensive that healing would take place as part of a show instead of at a holy place. The most important part of the healing happened at the start of the programme when I presented the results of my research. I was shocked when I was asked to be the first to present my research – I spoke what I thought were the free thoughts of my mind. I was absolutely amazed when I got a round of applause and that there were tears in many eyes when I completed my presentation. There was confidence in myself and in my mind from that minute on and I think this was a great start to the healing process for me. The healing continued in listening to others research and hearing their dedication to the show. I knew we were together in something good and good could only come out of it.*

This learner’s reflection at the beginning indicates how he had “bought in” to the modernist idea of the work of art as something separate from everyday life. He did not equate it with healing, but this changed for him, as he experienced the response to his own research, and listened to the research of others. Also, the sacredness of the path they were about to tread was dawning for him – he knew they were in ‘*something good*’. The research work achieved its goal of integrating well with other aspects of their learning programme also. One learner reflects on this:

*I also found the research work very helpful – I had no interest in that kind of thing before, but it was great to put the book on the scanner and find out about things. Writing the research was a great help with the spellings too.*

Another learner remarked:

*As a learning experience I learned how to concentrate and pay attention. Part of the learning process for me was doing the research, keeping a learning journal, evaluating the progress we were making, getting to understand working with blind and sighted people. The preparation of my mind to go on stage, making sure that I understood correctly what the show was all about.*



*This learning process will help me in my personal life to understand and prepare myself to achieve personal goals. I found it very useful to learn to respond to instructions.*

From these results, we began work that day on our next presentation, which we named, ‘Cos, Cos Eile... (One step, another step...). The title was based on a well-known Irish rhyme, used to teach body parts to a child, in the Irish language. As in the previous presentation, each learner was paired with a partner from the Siamsa Tíre company. Seven learners and their co-ordinator participated in this presentation. Similarly, we decided on a series of eight two-hour workshops, culminating in a performance at the end. Dividing the participants into three smaller groups, work began on creating scenes and images relating to pilgrimages to holy wells and sharing chants and prayers that form part of these experiences. Appendix 2 contains the dvd of this performance, its programme notes, learner reflections on their experiences and a press cutting relating to the learners’ work.

**A summary of the workshop process leading to the performance of ‘Cos, cos eile...’ (One step, then another step....)**

The first full workshop session, the following week began with exercises on shapeshifting – a process whereby a human being demonstrates the ability to change or transform its shape into that of another human being, creature or form. Abram (2010) states that “the human body is precisely our capacity for metamorphosis” and that we mistakenly think of our flesh as a “fixed and finite form” (p. 229). On the contrary, he believes that it is “a sensitive threshold through which the world experiences itself, a travelling doorway through which sundry aspects of the earth are always flowing” (p. 230). When it came to putting the production together in session five, the artistic director of Siamsa Tíre and I wondered how the learners would portray the symbols of the well, the cross and the tree. Would they portray them literally or reach into themselves and become these symbols? We were amazed and uplifted to see them choose to transform bodily, from one symbol to the other, without any prompting or suggestion from us. Kumar (2002) states that: “We are an integral part of nature” (p. 76). We became aware then of the depth of their connection to the language of folk theatre, ‘self’, the ‘other’, the earth, and especially to the sacred

significance of water, the essence of life. Healy (2001) confirms that: “We ourselves are largely made up of water and the water in our cells responds to the pull of the planets” (p. 15).

The session continued with exercises in acting – showing different emotions, moulding partners into shapes depicting different emotions, such as joy, anger, grief and isolation. One learner reflected:

*I found the work on my emotions excellent because it gives me the idea that when I feel negative I can change that to a positive in life. I feel that because of the quickness of the change in emotions I experienced in the exercises in the workshops.*

Another learner remarked: “*I find the work on the emotions very good – it will help me in life – I feel away better inside me and my memory is better too*”. The learners had chosen the symbols of the cross of Christ, the tree and the well to feature in the performance. The tree signifies the place where rags, thought to represent the ailment, are tied to the tree, with the belief that as the rag disintegrates over time, the ailment will fade away also. There are local variations in this practice. In some areas, the rag is dipped into the water of the well, then rubbed on the ailment and tied to the tree. In other places, the rags are again dipped in the well and tied to the branches while prayers for healing are recited to the patron saint of the well, or in pre-Christian times, to a goddess. The performers then began to create a pattern of movement out of their experiences of participating in the ritual of ‘rounds’ at a holy well. The ‘rounds’ involve circling the well a number of times, while praying. Session two began with revision of what had been created in the first workshop, progressing to singing warm-ups and learning the theme song for the presentation: ‘Gabhaim Molta Bhríde’ (I give praise to Brigid). The session ended with movement to chants and song. Session three focused on working on the dance element of the presentation, while in session four, the group worked, firstly in pairs, then in the larger group on identifying their personal giftedness and ways of expressing it. Work on putting the production together was undertaken in sessions five and six, while sessions seven and eight focused on rehearsal. The work was performed for the public following the eighth workshop. The audience again, responded with a standing ovation.

## **How the performance of ‘Cos, cos eile...’ (One foot, then another foot) illuminates the Archetypes and Motifs of Personal Mythmaking and the Rites of Restoration**

**Scene 1 - Opening Scene,** (Appendix 2, DVD 2). Every journey begins with a step – cos, cos eile, a haon, a dó.... The research work represented the first phase of the archetype of the hero myth, **Separation**. At that point, the performers were responding to the first motif in that phase – **The Call to Adventure**. This stage is also representative of Knill’s (2005) entry into what he terms ‘devotional space’ (p. 77). One learner stated that:

*I found the ‘Presentation of Research Day’, listening to the other participants presenting their research - great. I felt part of a team that had achieved our goal for our new show. And during this, I felt a lot of emotion.*

This motif represents the promise of the beginning of a new phase of life, and one that moved the learners to go with it. Here, in images (DVD 2 – S1a and S1b) below, they begin the process of movement into the experience awaiting them, in the unknown realm. One learner remarked: *“I like the idea of having our own space and making our own steps”*. They chant the phrase ‘cos, cos eile, a haon, a dó ...’ and begin to take their first steps into this new experience. The second motif of **‘Assistance’** is obvious here as they find they are being guided and protected on the way.



**DVD 2 – S1a**



**DVD 2 – S1b**

**Scene 2.** Image (DVD 2 – S2) below, depicts the beginning of the descent into new realms. The group begins to reach up in exaltation with one arm, down in adoration through genuflecting, beginning to move forward, all the time keeping a hand on the person before them. There is a feeling of impending danger in this, the third motif - **The Initial Challenge**. But as the journey begins to progress, the danger begins to fade for the group. One learner reflects on this process, stating that:

*The journey where we reached up in exaltation and down in adoration, where blind people put hands on blind people, leading each other on, was very powerful and healing for me.*



**DVD 2 – S2**

**Scene 3.** Images (DVD 2 – S3a, S3b and S3c) below, depict a retreat from the world of the known, the familiar, by the learners. This is the fourth motif of **Retreat**, in the

**Separation** phase of their journey. They are in uncharted territory, reflecting on their situations. They have formed a human chain of support to journey into this unknown place. Through this human chain, they find comfort in their connection to each other, as these reflections by the learners testify:

*Basically, during the journey today I felt and knew that I was on a path of hope with the other blind members of our group. I found the fact that we walked in a chain, touching the person in front who was helping me along, and I found a great strength in my own back when the person behind me touched me and I was helping him on.*

Another learner remarked: *“I like the ‘clumping’ – when we’re all grouped in together – it gives a sense of a crowd – we’re all as one – coming to the well with our own individual needs”.*



**DVD 2 – S3a**



**DVD 2 – S3b**





**DVD 2 – S3c**

**Scene 4:** Image (DVD 2 – S4) below, highlights the **second archetype** of the hero myth, that of **Initiation**. It also represents what Knill (2005) refers to as the entry into liminal space. The learners now face **Greater Challenges** – the **first motif** of this archetype, as they arrive at the place where the deepest part of their journey awaits them – the well. Abram (2010) believes that the body is precisely our capacity for metamorphosis as it is incomplete on its own. He states: “The sensing body is like an open circuit that completes itself only in things, in the surrounding earth” (p. 254). In this scene, the learners complete the healing experience for themselves and each other by, in turn, becoming, and journeying to, the cross, the tree and the well. This scene captures the beginning of this process of metamorphosis. A learner remarks on the healing power of the process: *“The young and old, their bodies forming a shape of a holy well, the kneeling down, making a powerful Sign of the Cross was very healing – you’ve no idea, Anne”*.



**DVD 2 – S4**

**Scene 5:** As they begin the ‘rounds’ to the well, the cross and the tree, images (DVD 2 – S5a, S5b, S5c, S5d and S5e) below, the learners experience the second motif, that of **Further Assistance**, which gives them a glimpse of what is possible and what may yet come. Their growing awareness of their capacity to probe the depths of the inner self provides this support. The body, Abram (2010) states, is a sensitive threshold through which aspects of the earth are always flowing. Sometimes they remain unchanged as they move across the threshold. But: “Sometimes they are transformed by the passage. And sometimes they reshape the doorway itself” (p. 230). Understanding of the very essence of the cross, the tree and the well as these became a felt presence in their bodies and as they encountered them in the bodies of the ‘other’ was transformed for the learners. One learner’s reflection captures this:

*Drinking the pure water, taking up a stone and making the Sign of the Cross on a human being representing Jesus Christ was very emotional and healing. I stood before crosses before, but this time the cross was human – that was very emotional. The tying of the knot to release the pain from my mind and the minds of my friends – I prayed at that time – that was healing for me.*

MacEowan (2002) confirms the importance of connecting to these ancestral traditions:

The healing of our exile from the life-affirming expressions of our ancestral traditions comes from opening ourselves to these traditions of primacy in the same way that our ancestors did, whoever our particular ancestors were and whatever unique spiritual traditions may have shaped and sculpted them”

(MacEowan, 2002, p.6)

The **third motif** of **Temptation** was encountered in this scene as exposure to this experience tested personal values and standards, and made true standards clearer for them.



DVD 2 – S5a



DVD 2 – S5b



DVD 2 – S5c





DVD 2 – S5d



DVD 2 – S5e

**Scene 6:** The **fourth motif of Rebirth and Renewal** manifests in image (DVD 2 – S6a) below. The pilgrimage to the well is now complete and it is time to reflect on the healing that is being experienced. Fear is dissolving with the realisation that it is possible to die to some of the old beliefs and be reborn in a fuller way. An awareness of the gifts being reborn begins to fill body, mind and senses. One learner reflected on his awareness of this experience:

*What I really liked was the ‘gifts’ – I felt it gave the audience an idea of the person and what we were like. This was very healing for me – I felt depressed one day when I came in – and I felt great at the end of the session, so it helped.*

Mehl-Madrona (2005) states: “While we can’t command transformation, we can create and enriched environment that makes it possible” (p. 9). The learners created an environment that allowed them to connect to the ancient energies of healing at a holy well. In this space, they travelled down into the depths of the inner well. Healing is brought about by entering this terrain and engaging with the emotional wounds of exile, from the self and other. This highlights McIntosh’s (2008) point, referred to in chapter three, that healing begins with the “inner house, or inner life”.



**DVD 2 – S6a**

Images (b) and (c) capture a time of thanksgiving for the gifts received. The performers reach up in gratitude for what they are experiencing. They join together, form three circles, moving and singing in gratitude.



**DVD 2 – S6b**



DVD 2 – S6c

**Scene 7:** In images (DVD 2 – S7a and S7b) below, the gifts are revealed. The learners reveal a new awareness of their gifts of communication, good listening skills, ability to console, support and comfort others, skills in music, rhythm work, fishing, and the capacity to connect with others. One learner’s reflection highlights the transformative element of this experience:

*The recognising of the gifts within me was beautiful. There was life and hope in that expression. I think differently about myself now – I am stronger, more positive, I don’t despair as easily. I got no ‘black-downs’ this week-end and I was expecting to. I found the formation of the three rings on stage to be very spiritual and healing.*

Again, this reflection highlights the deep connections made by the learners to their ancestral past. Cooper (1978) states that: “Three is a particularly significant number in Celtic tradition” (p. 114). “The ‘power of three’ is universal”, he continues.

It is the tripartite nature of the world as heaven, earth and waters; it is man as body, soul and spirit; birth, life and death; beginning, middle, end; past, present, future; the three phases of the moon etc.

(Cooper, 1978, p. 114).

He states that the circle is a universal symbol of totality, wholeness and that roundness is sacred as the most natural shape:



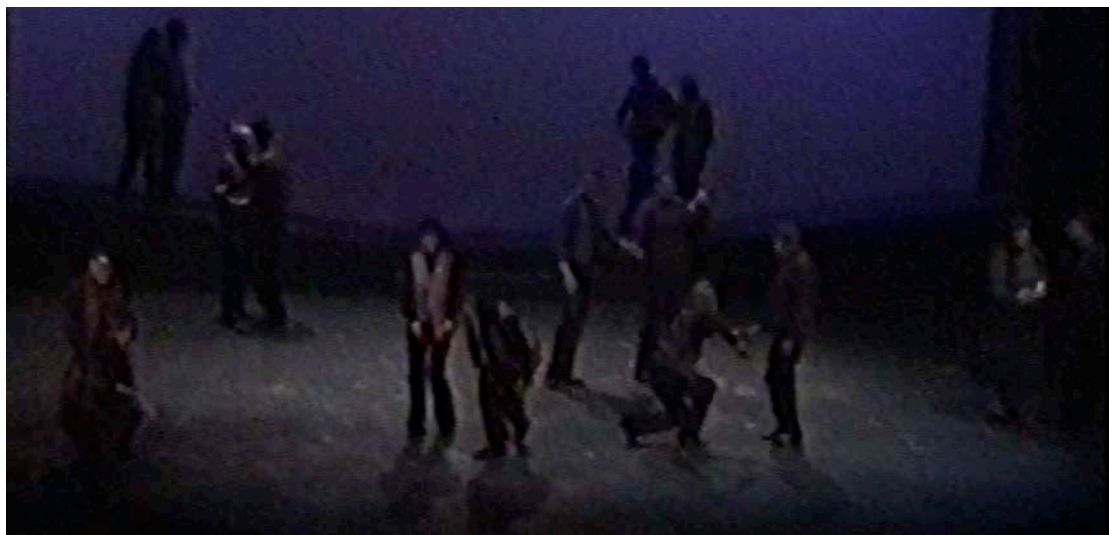
As the sun it is masculine power, but as the soul or psyche and as the encircling waters it is the feminine maternal principle; also the circular or infinite symbolizes the feminine as opposed to the 'bound', straight, masculine, paternal creative power.

(Cooper, 1978,p. 36).

The symbol of the circle was a significant one for the learners as we always sat in a circle during our group personal development sessions. The themes for the performances were born, nurtured and developed in these sessions.



**DVD 2 – S7a**



**DVD 2 – S7b**

**Scene 8:** This scene highlights the **archetype** of **Return** and the two **motifs** of **Responsibility Accepted or Denied** and **Living Consciously**. It is the exit stage of Knill's (2005) intermodal expressive arts model. The learners return from their experiences and share and celebrate their joy with what has been achieved, with all present, in images (DVD 2 – S8a, S8b and S8c) below. As they bow to the audience, they receive a response of a standing ovation. The reflection of one learner captures the circle of growth for both participants and audience:

*The celebration dance and happiness at the end was wonderful. The final part – where I was able to face about 300 people with a smile on my face, confidence in my heart, brought down the curtains on a very beautiful day for me. One of my friends said to me afterwards: I would love to have done and achieved what you achieved on the stage of Siamsa Tíre today.*

Mehl-Madrona (2007) states that ceremony is a story we co-create.

It provides the context from which we dialogue with the Universe, with angels, spirits, ancestors, and the Divine. It guides into the world of the soul and its healing – providing a road for personal and spiritual transformation as well as community revitalization. Ceremony gives us a path to follow away from our limitations.

(Madrona, 2007, p. 55).



**DVD 2 – S8a**



DVD 2 – S8b



DVD 2 – S8c

Learner reflections following the performance are a testament to the process of transformation experienced by them, from the research phase to the end of the stage presentation. The initial apprehension gave way to a growing confidence:

*When we got to workshop No. 4, I got used to the movements. When we got to workshops no. 5 and 6, there was no problem. I was a bit nervous the day of the show, but it went very well for me. Once I got up on the stage the feeling was unreal. It was a very positive experience.*

The experience of emotional healing featured strongly in learner reflections. One learner reflected:

*I found the workshops beneficial, especially the work on emotions. They made me look at things in a different way. You can do things in a different way – not always verbally. I know now that I can look angry even though I don't always say so. I'm more aware of my body language.*

Another remarked: *“I find the work on emotions very good – it will help me in life – I feel away better inside me and my memory is better too”*. For one learner, the process was profoundly healing and transformative:

*I found it a healing journey for me. The last seven months have been very difficult. But, since I came down to the workshops, it has lifted me a lot. It has done wonders for me. I can feel it. I haven't felt this good in myself for ages. I'd like to perform it again. The friends I've made here are great – we have friends outside of class now – we often meet the lads here for lunch. Friends like that are very important. The important part is the way I've come out of myself after the last seven months.*

Learner reflections also focused on awareness of how their performance work was developing an understanding of visual impairment among the general public.

*I think it was a very good exercise. I think the public are more aware of what we can do – they were inclined to ignore us before. Before, they thought we could only listen to the radio.*

For another learner, creating public awareness that visual impairment was not a barrier to living a full life, was important:

*I think it raised public awareness of visual impairment more than booklets printed or radio programmes broadcast on the subject. I think people are now beginning to understand and listen to us when we say that blindness is not the terrible disability it was in the past.*

During workshop sessions, discussions frequently centred on the importance of process and presentation. While the emphasis was always placed on the process and the learning and understanding that could develop from it, the learners were very focused on performance also. For them, it was a way of making their lives understood by others, and completing each part of the inner journey for them.

*It gives us a chance to show the public what we can do – that's very important – they think we can't do things because we can't see. This proves we can. You get the sense of, we can, and we will.*

Ó Cruaíoch (2003) concurs with the learners stating that within the ‘symbolic and imaginative universe of discourse life experience is thus *intensified* and *affirmed* through artistic and ritual performances...’ (p. 5). Another learner believed: “*I think it is a very good idea to put a show together at the end of the workshops. You learn how to put things together, especially with the research*”. The co-ordinator stated that he would be “very strong on performance”. Another learner remarked:

*I think it is very important to do a show at the end of the workshops – there is no point and no finality without a show. You learn from each workshop – but you complete the jigsaw with a show.*

And reflections confirmed that this was another step on the inner journey, but that more could follow: Learners articulated this hope:

*I would like to do another show because I’d get to know more people in Siamsa Tíre and I’d be more confident after it. And it would be good for my mobility.*

*I hope we do another one next year. We are certainly learning for life.*

*I’m looking forward to the next show.*

*If there is going to be another performance, I would hope it would be sooner rather than later.*

‘Cos, cos eile, a haon a dó..... Their feet were already walking towards the next dimension of soul, which is illuminated in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### PERFORMANCE THREE: ‘SÚILE LE SOLAS’ (EYES WITH LIGHT)

#### Introduction

The concept of inner healing continued in this, the third phase of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, with the learners looking inside themselves, exploring the light of their being, their existence, and celebrating their discoveries.

Up to this point, the learners had used the language of folk theatre expression, namely, Irish music, song, dance and mime/movement, as a tool to aid self-development, expression and discovery. For this project, I thought that it would be an empowering experience for them to exploit the tactile, through the medium of collage, and to merge it with performance. Since most of them had very little experience of this medium, and in the words of one of the participants, ‘*we don’t want anything childish*’, providing an introduction at an adult level was important. Inviting Des Dillon, a collage artist from County Tipperary, who had exhibited his work in the Siamsa Tíre gallery, certainly provided this.

This chapter gives an account of the workshops leading up to the creation of the collage, the process of making the collage and the performance of ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light). A dvd of the performance, programme notes, learner reflections and press cuttings relating to the performance are included in Appendix 3.

#### An account of the workshops leading to performance

The theme of this phase of the project was ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with light), which was envisaged as a mixed media production, involving the visual arts (collage) and performance (Irish folk theatre). A more detailed account is given of the process involved in this performance, than in the previous two. This is due to the fact a new medium of expression was introduced – that of collage – to produce a visual representation of this phase of the learners’ journey. The collage needed to be

completed first, as the performance would be built around it. This phase of the learners' journey drew its inspiration from the poem 'Mise Raifteirí' (I am Raifteirí), written by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Irish folk poet, Antaine Ó Raifteirí, who was blind. The programme plan for the project was as follows:

- Feb. 27<sup>th</sup>. & 28<sup>th</sup>.: Two introductory workshops to the medium of collage, involving Des Dillon and the course participants.
- July (1 week): Participants produce individual collage works. Members of Siamsa Tire collaborate with the group during this process.
- Sept. (2 days): Participants put any necessary finishing touches to work.
- Mid-Oct.-Mid-Nov: Series of eight collaborative performance workshops, resulting in a 20 minute, performance based on the interpretation of the collage works.

**February Workshops:** The following were the aims and objectives of the two introductory workshops in February. The workshops were six hours long on each of the two days – from 9am-1pm and 2-4pm. This intensive timetabling was due to the fact that the artist was available to us only on these two days.

**Aims:**

1. To develop tactile awareness – both as a means for making and appreciating collage.
2. To provide an understanding and knowledge of the medium of collage and an awareness of the broad range of materials used in this medium.
3. To provide an opportunity of experiencing and analysing the work of a collage artist.
4. To provide an opportunity to express ideas, feelings, insights, relating to '*Súile le Solas*' concept, through this medium.

**Objectives:** Following this workshop, participants will be able:

1. To demonstrate greater tactile awareness and an appreciation of the medium of collage.

2. To show a greater understanding of the broad range of materials used in this medium.
3. To critically evaluate the work of Des Dillon (collage artist).
4. To discuss the concept of the '*Súile le Solas*' project and their vision for its expression through the medium of collage.

The following was the session plan for the two-day workshop on collage:

## **Day 1**

**Aims & Objectives:** Numbers 1 to 3, listed under these headings above.

**Materials:** Examples of artist's work – pictures, 3-D objects, figures, plus samples of materials used to make these works.

### **Part 1**

The learners introduce themselves to Des, who then talks to them about his work.

### **Part 2** (Collage experience)

Des introduces various pieces of his work to group. Exploration of pieces through touch, and questions, as follows:

What is this piece about?

What is it made of? (Ask learners to describe the texture – smooth, rough etc.)

Why was this material used? (Permanence, texture – cold, hard, matches shape)

What kind of shapes can you identify? (Rounded, curved, fat, solid, natural, abstract, representational).

Which shapes do you prefer? Why?

What kind of moods does this collage describe? (Strong, weak, calm, angry, friendly threatening). Why?

Ask learners to respond to these moods e.g. 'Show me an angry/friendly pose etc.'

– freeze and hold pose 1,2,3 – let go.

–

Discuss concept of unity between shape, size and effect.

What is Des saying with these shapes?

How is your reaction to the collage affected by size? Why did he choose to create large/small collages for these?

What is the figure in the collage doing? Can you recreate this pose?

Divide the learners into two groups – group one take up poses, group two examine them in this shape. Group two then re-create the pose, while group one examine them to see if they have expressed it correctly.

What is the artist's purpose in this work? (Celebration of the human form, gesture, ...).

**Conclude Day 1** by playing a piece of music to the group.

## **Day 2**

**Aims & Objectives:** Number 4, listed under these headings.

**Materials:** Examples of artist's work and materials used to create works. Sewing equipment – needles, thread, scissors, material samples to sew.

**Open Session with:** Brief discussion on the previous day's work.

## **Part 3**

Read translation of 'Mise Raifteirí' ('I am Raifteirí')

I am Raifteirí, the poet, full of courage and love,  
my eyes without light, in calmness serene,  
taking my way by the light of my heart,  
feeble and tired to the end of my road:  
Look at me now, my face toward Balla,  
Performing music to empty pockets!

Discuss poem. Follow with a discussion on the project concept – ‘*Súile le Solas*’ – eyes with light, showing the joy and celebration of insights and understanding of life as a visually impaired person.

#### **Part 4 (Creating with Collage)**

Ask the learners to sit comfortably in chairs. Play some music and invite them to relax. Ask them to imagine that they are in a cinema and the movie is about to begin. This movie will be their vision for ‘*Súile le Solas*’.

Can you create the ‘*Súile le Solas*’ concept through the medium of collage? How? – picture – abstract/representational? - piece of clothing you’ll wear? - 3-D piece? etc. ... Can you see what you are going to create, in your head?

#### **Part 5**

Discuss ideas for collage work: Will it be a group effort or individual works? Describe your visions of work. Experiment with materials on offer. Practise sewing. Plan to start collecting materials for collage workshop in July.

**Conclude Day 2 with** by playing music to the group.

#### **Reflection on Session, Day One (27<sup>th</sup> February 2001)**

##### **Pre-Session Thoughts**

I was looking forward to the session. I thought that it should be a transformative learning experience for all of us – learners, artist and myself. I just hoped it would go well and that my planning was appropriate. I felt that a good start was very important – if the interest and curiosity of the group was aroused, then I knew that they would embrace the experience wholeheartedly. I was concerned that the two learners who would arrive late, due to transport difficulties, could be assimilated easily and quickly into the group work.

## Description of Session

Des talked about the background to his work – how his interest in collage began, and the life experiences which provided the inspiration for his work. He recounted details of the time he spent living with the Aboriginal people in Australia and of their closeness to, and understanding of, nature. This immediately provoked an intense interest among the group, many of whom have farming backgrounds, and all of whom have a deep interest in, and affinity with, nature.

We then went on to introduce some of the materials Des works with, to the learners. Their tactile understanding of the world was very obvious here, in that each time a material was introduced, there was a response to recount a previous experience of the material. Des talked of the techniques he uses to create the effects and textures he requires for works e.g. painting tweed to give the hard effect of hardened earth etc. This led to a questioning approach by the group, to each material introduced e.g.: *'Was this material always like this or did you do something to it,?'* A relationship with an indigenous understanding of art was beginning to emerge at this point. Cajete (2000) states: "Indigenous artisans select the features of what is being depicted that convey its vitality and essence and express them directly in the most appropriate medium available" (p. 46).

We then introduced some of Des's work to the learners. The response was inspiring. They explored the pieces hungrily and quickly, in order to determine what was being expressed. Responses such as: *'This feels like the sea – I can feel the waves'*, and *'I think this person is sitting on the beach, trying to talk up to the person on the cliff'*, followed quickly on the tactile experience. Interestingly, and unexpectedly, the whole question of the 'colours' used, emerged as being very important to all group members.

One learner, who plays music perfectly on the mouth organ, without ever having had a music lesson, responded with a tremendously immediate affinity to one piece – a bodhrán (drum made of goat-skin) that contained ball bearings, and had been covered with material to create the effect of the sea lapping on the beach. He kept moving it from side to side, quickly and slowly, seeking different sound effects, and spoke of how important sound was for him.

The shapes and materials used in the works were easily identified by the learners, as were the moods of the pieces. There was much discussion on the moods of the sea – *'calmer in this piece than in the other'*, and of the characters and the overall works – *'this feels like fun – I think this fellow is turning head over heels and everything is upside down'*.

During this part of the workshop, we also went on to recreate the poses of the figures in the collage and to convey their moods in the poses. This was well done, better by the learners who have good mobility, but, it was in asking learners to re-shape their partners into these poses and moods, that one became aware of how well they had captured the essence of what was expressed in the works being analysed – they re-shaped them almost perfectly, in most cases. Emerging here, is the idea that 'perfection' is not necessary. More important, are communication and relationship, as well as 'becoming'. An understanding of what Gablik (1991) refers to as a more relational type of aesthetic was emerging.

I had intended concluding the session by playing some music, but when one learner discovered that Des played the mouth organ also, the group decided that they would like both men to play a tune each, while they clapped along, and this concluded the session.

### **Brief Commentary on Session**

I was very pleased with the outcomes of this session. I felt that the overall aims of developing tactile awareness, an understanding and appreciation of the medium of collage and of the broad range of materials used in the process, and the opportunity to experience, and the capacity to analyse, the work of collage artist, Des Dillon, were achieved.

The learners derived great enjoyment from the experience, and more importantly, by the end of the session, they believed that this was a medium they could work in – they wanted to make a piece using these materials – they saw it as a language of expression for themselves.

### **Brief Reflections on Personal Responses to Session**

I think that the greatest surprise to me, and also to Des, was the importance of ‘colour’ to the learners. We had both discussed this before the workshop began and thought that it was something we would have to avoid, thinking that the learners inability to see would mean that it wasn’t important to them. We both totally underestimated their ‘sense of colour’ and the moods and emotions ‘colours’ express for them.

The big question at this stage was: ‘Will the learners opt for individual works or a group piece, in this medium?’. Either way, the idea of ‘colour’ will now need to be taken on board in relation to the piece/pieces. Tomorrow should be a very interesting day!

### **Reflection on Session Day Two (28<sup>th</sup> February 2001)**

#### **Pre-Session Thoughts**

Following on the success of Day One, I was less anxious before this workshop. In fact, I was quite excited, as I felt that the enthusiasm of the group should make for an interesting realisation of the concept being undertaken.

#### **Description of Session**

The session began with a brief discussion on the previous day’s work. I then read the English translation of the poem ‘Mise Raifteirí’ (‘I am Raifteirí’) and we discussed the thoughts and feelings expressed in the poem. This led to the learners talking about ‘*seeing with the mind’s eye*’ and sensing being observed, in crowded situations, even though they cannot see the observer. They also talked about how they are often pitied because of their visual impairment, and of the public’s misconception that because



they cannot see, they cannot understand, or visualise. One learner's comment highlights this:

*They think that because we can't see, that we don't understand, but we do, because you sense things – you know the same things they do, even though you can't see them.*

They believed that this could be a wonderful opportunity to create public awareness and an understanding of the world of visual impairment: *"It will be wonderful to show people what we can do"*.

I then played some classical music, and asked the learners to imagine that they were at the cinema and that the movie was about to begin. This movie was their vision for 'Súile le Solas'. What was it going to look like? How were they going to create it?

A lively discussion ensued from this exercise. The decision to work together as a team and to make one large piece, was unanimous. The learners spontaneously spoke about their vision for the piece. What emerged was an idea for a three dimensional piece (approx. 6ft. high), in the shape of an Ogham Stone, which would reflect their inner light, through images of the sea, sand, river, grass, wheat, fish, birds, clouds, sun, and one learner especially, wanted sound to feature in it. All wanted their individual footprints incorporated into the piece.

When asked about colour, all were adamant that the piece should have various colours depicting various ideas. Des and I asked if this could be expressed through texture alone, using one colour – e.g. white, and the answer was a very definite 'No'. There would have to be colour – one learner, who has been blind from birth insisted that the sea had to be blue and that we should hear the sound of it lapping against the cliffs. Another learner, who lost his sight in adult years, insisted that the wheat be golden, just like he remembers it. He reflected:

*Colour in the inner eye of a blind person is a wonderful image and I am privileged to have experienced it, delighted that this project has reinforced this beautiful part of life back into my mind's eye. It is a bit emotional for me to write about this, but the feeling is truly wonderful.*

The co-ordinator wanted some of the lush green grass, which he remembers growing by the river.

We then discussed making the frame for the piece and the materials we would use. Even though the piece was going to be a joint effort, all agreed that individually, they would make a small piece that represented the light of existence for them, and attach it to the overall work when finished. We discussed ideas for their footprints – should members make an imprint of their foot on concrete, or should they draw an outline of their foot and cut around the outline? We postponed a decision on this until July, when we go into workshop to make the piece.

This led to experimenting with the possibility of sewing, and Des and I offered squares of material and large threaded needles, and worked on sewing some large stitches. All, with the exception of two learners, who work with one hand only due to stroke damage, managed this exercise with reasonable dexterity.

Prior to finishing off, we discussed ideas for using the piece in performance with Siamsa Tíre and what we would do with the piece following the performance. All agreed that we should keep it in the classroom.

### **Brief Commentary on Session**

I felt that this session achieved its aims and objectives in that the learners formulated a vision for the concept of ‘Súile le Solas’ and reached a decision to work together on a group piece.

They were very enthusiastic about the whole idea, they feel that this is achievable and that it will create an awareness and an enlightenment of visual impairment. They also felt strong ownership of the piece – following the performance they want it in their classroom, as a reminder of their achievement.

I felt that this was a very empowering exercise for the group. They discussed the lack of public awareness and understanding of visual impairment, and of how people

equate lack of sight with lack of understanding. They feel that this work, which will have a public forum, will help to change this. This is a very significant belief for them – they see themselves as agents of change, which demonstrates a perception of, and a belief in, a ‘self’ that has power.

### **Brief Reflections on Personal Responses to Session**

Notes made by me at the time, reflect the following:

“I felt very energised after this session. I work with the learners on a daily basis and their courage and their capacity for creative expression never cease to amaze me, and this session reinforced these feelings for me. My concern at this stage is: ‘Will we get the piece more or less completed in the week we have assigned for the task, in July?’. But, even if we don’t we can timetable in some time to do this, prior to going into workshop with the Siamsa Tire Performing Company, in October. It is not too early to begin collecting materials, and to begin writing down thoughts on the work, in readiness for July.

Because there are long time spans between the introductory workshops and the collage process, and again between this outcome and the performance workshops, it will be important to keep up the energy and enthusiasm for the works, and also to keep alive, the sense of empowerment that the outcome will bring for them”.

This two-day workshop drew the learners into the **archetype** of **Separation** for this phase of their inner journey. The first **motif** of the **Call to Adventure** offered a new way of re-experiencing and re-creating an aspect of their inner worlds and they were ready to embrace what it would bring. The workshops also marked their entry into Knill’s (2005) area of ‘devotional space’. One learner remarked that,

*as a person who once had sight, it re-awakened a dormant part of my brain to see once again the countryside that I enjoyed in my youth, the movement of animals and wild-life, and almost the picture of life on the beautiful face of another human being.*

The presence of the second motif of **Assistance** became obvious as their vision for their finished work became clearer.

*The idea of this being made into a collage in the shape of an Ogham stone and the contribution of the other students in the class, their views of what they had seen, and for the blind who had never seen, through our collective ideas made up a wonderful picture of a living world.*

### **Creating the Collage**

In July, work began on creating the collage. The school was closed for holidays and we were the only inhabitants of the science room – the space allocated to us to create the collage. There was great excitement as the learners began to share their ideas for their individual pieces, but apprehension also, as one learner explains: “*None of the group had done anything like this before...*”. The **second motif** of **The Initial Challenge** is obvious here as a new situation is faced, but as the work begins the danger begins to fade. But first, we had to make the structure showing the world of nature as they experienced it. Des guided us through making a wooden frame, in the shape of a tree. We then wrapped a layer of chicken wire around the frame, followed by a layer of wadding and lastly, a layer of white material (Images (a) and (b) below).



(Pic a)

All but two learners, who were unable to participate due to physical disability, took part in sewing the material together. This gave the shape of the Ogham stone, the form requested by the group during the February workshops.



(Pic b)

The learners decided to paint the top in blue to represent the sky, followed by the hills with heather growing on them, then the grass, leading on to the beach. Using large paintbrushes, guiding their hands to the places where the sky or grass finished and the mountains or sandy beach needed to begin, the learners, with the light of their inner eye, created their own world of nature Pic (c) below.



Pic (c)

To create the sandy beach, we cut out a wide wooden circle, larger than the base of the Ogham structure. We then cut pieces of carpet and white material the same size as the wooden circle. We painted the carpet with a mixture of sand and paint to give the effect of a sandy beach. When it was dry, the white material was placed under the carpet, each learner placed a foot on the sandy beach. I outlined each individual footprint with a marker, and cut out and removed each shape. This left deeply embedded footprints on the sandy surface, which each learner, with help and guidance then painted, to highlight their journey in life. The ‘footprints in the sand’ piece was then glued to the wooden base. Castors were fixed to the base to enable it to be rolled out for the performance, and the Ogham structure was placed on it Pic (d) below.





Pic (d)

We then placed the Ogham stone structure on top of the circle, and blue/green material around it, to create the sea Pic (e) below. At this point, there was much to reflect on and this fits with the **fourth motif** of **Retreat**, a time of turning inwards to understand what had been experienced. One learner's reflection captures this:

*I made a heather. I chose to do this because I used to love to climb and walk in the mountains, but I can't do that now. I never thought I would be able to do that with one hand. When Anne took me around to feel the collage when it was finished I thought it was wonderful what blind people can do, especially those who have never seen. When I finished feeling it, in my imagination I could hear the water trickling down to the sea. I could imagine everything.*

This learner's experience is re-echoed by Ó Cruaíoch (2003):

A major aspect of the symbolic universe of discourse with which the performer and the ritual specialist operate, is the concept of an otherworld, or alternative, order of reality to that commonly or routinely experienced.

(Ó Cruaíoch, 2003, p.5)





Pic (e)

Des returned in September and we put the finishing touches to the work. In October we began drama workshops. Exploring colour was a salient feature of this work. For the learners, some of whom have never seen colour, their explorations of colour evoked different emotional responses. So, for example, when the colour 'blue' is mentioned, the response is 'calm', or 'feeling blue'. Mention of the colour 'red' evokes responses of 'anger' and 'fear'. These responses became a feature of the performance. The movements, songs and dances necessary for the performance were learned and a way devised to reveal each individual art work placed on the Ogham structure. It was decided to cut squares of black material large enough to cover each individual piece, pin them to the Ogham structure and gently pull them away to uncover what lay beneath, during the performance. A dvd of the performance, programme notes, learner reflections and press cuttings are contained in Appendix 3.

## **How the performance of ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light) illuminates the Archetypes and Motifs of Personal Mythmaking and the Rites of Restoration**

**Scene 1:** (Appendix 3, DVD 3). For this performance, the learners chose to leave the stage behind and present their work in the theatre foyer. During rehearsals, learners decided that they wanted the audience to fully see their art work and to have the opportunity to touch it, following the performance. They felt it would be less accessible to the audience, if it was on the stage. The performance opens with the Ogham structure standing in the middle of the foyer, completely covered in veils of black material. It exudes an air of mystery and there is much wonder as the audience arrive and sit in a semi-circle around it (DVD 3 – S1a) below.



**DVD 3 – S1a**

A learner is guided from the theatre auditorium which is situated at the back of the ogham structure, and he begins to play a haunting Irish tune, ‘Anachuan’, on his mouth-organ (DVD 3 S1b) below. This tune was composed by the poet, Raifteirí, and tells the tale of a tragic accident at sea, where several lives were lost.



DVD 3 S1b

The musicians join with this learner in playing ‘Anachuan’ and this heralds the arrival of the other performers into the space (DVD 3 – S1c) below. It also highlights the second **archetype** of their sacred journey, that of **Initiation**, the first phase of that stage – **Greater Challenges**, as the group begins the descent into their places of connection with the natural world. This also marks the entry to the ‘liminal space’ as discussed by Knill (2005) in chapter three.





**DVD 3 – S1c**

**Scene 2:** This scene explores the colours black, blue, white, green and red, and their significance to their lives. The beating of the bodhrán alerts the audience to this exploration (DVD 3 – S2a) below. It begins with the colour, black. A learner calls out – ‘black’. Another learner responds with the Irish equivalent of ‘*dubh*’. This is followed by a learner calling out a feeling associated with this colour – ‘*darkness*’. This pattern continues as ‘*black*’ is called out again, followed by ‘*dubh*’ and the feeling ‘*emptiness*’. The feeling of fear is explored in the same way. A learner then calls out: ‘*Comh dubh le poll*’ (as black as a hole). The word black and its association with darkness brings up negative emotions, for them. In chapter three, Hederman (1999) points out the importance of exploring our darkness as well as our light, as failure to do so can have serious consequences for us and for society. At this point, the learners sink to the ground, turning into the darkness of the ‘self’ (DVD 3 – S2b) below. The **second motif** of **Further Assistance** is obvious here as the learners become aware of what is possible and what is to come.



DVD 3 – S2a



DVD 3 – S2b

The beating of the bodhrán informs the audience that another colour is about to be explored. A learner rises to his knees and calls out *'blue'*. Another learner rises also and responds with the Irish translation of 'gorm' (DVD 3 – S2c) below. The same pattern of calling the colour in both languages, and following with a 'feeling', is

continued until the list of feelings associated with the colour 'blue' has been exhausted. This colour evokes feelings of 'quietness', 'whiteness', 'coolness', 'blue moon', 'something borrowed, something blue'. The group stands at the end of this exploration. This pattern is also followed for the three remaining colours to come.



**DVD 3 – S2c**

The audience is reminded again by the sound of the bodhrán that a change has occurred, making way for an exploration of the colour 'green'. The performers raise their arms to highlight the feelings of growth vitality, peace and quiet, forty shades of green and the green, green grass of home that are experienced, as they explore this colour (DVD 3 – S2d) below.





**DVD 3 – S2d**

From here, the learners move into exploring the colour red. The feelings evoked for them by this colour include anger, fire, rage, danger, power. They finish the exploration by stating that *'roses are red'*, and dance around the performance space to communicate the energy of this colour, for them.

The beat of the bodhrán heralds the last colour to be explored – white. This colour evokes feelings and thoughts of cleanliness, spirituality and light. One learner states: *"We see the light with our inner eye"*. They begin to move and raise their arms, drawing the light towards them (DVD 3 – S2e) below. The **third motif of temptation** becomes apparent here. Atkinson (1995) believes that in this phase there can be a tendency to want instant gratification, but that temptations enable us to gain a proper perspective on things and 'to learn, perhaps over and over again, that life, especially its bounties, come a little at a time, usually a drop at a time' (p. 97). Whatever the temptation, this is when, he believes, our ideals and values need to be made as clear as possible' (p. 97). It is at this point that the group members move and begin to explore their personal connections with nature. This begins with the image (DVD 3 – S2e below) showing a sighted performer at the rear of the Ogham structure, searching for one learner's percussive art piece, which evokes sounds of the sea for him.

*I used a small bodhrán (drum made from goat-skin) and made it into the sound of the sea, and the sun, for this piece. I painted the sand, sea, and rocks on one side of the bodhrán and this was very important to me. I used ball-bearings in the bodhrán and covered it in, to create the sound of the sea. I experimented with this sound, and when I created this sound, it reminded me that the sea is really there, for example, making the sound soft after saying the colour 'white' and after saying the 'red' colour, making the sea sound rough.*

Unfortunately, the piece was misplaced and not available to him, but he continued his performance without it. He was very proud of the professionalism he showed in doing this: *"I knew something was wrong even though I couldn't see what was going on, but I carried on without it. I'm very proud of being able to do that"*. We later made another one to replace it. He used it in his presentations for completion of FETAC Communication modules, levels three to six.



**DVD 3 – S2e**

**Scene 3:** The performers connect with each other and shape-shift to form waves in the sea, making the sounds of the sea and birds in the air, as they move (DVD 3 – S3a) below. As the larger part of the group form the waves in the sea, two performers – one sighted and one visually impaired, move forward, walking on the shore while the visually impaired performer throws stones into the sea. There is a pause in the



sounds from the sea and the accompanying music changes to that of a drone, as the performer pulls the black veil from his individual art work, revealing his bird of freedom (DVD 3 – S3b) below. The music and sea sounds resume as the performers hand the veil to two performers seated near the musicians. As movement was limited for these two performers due to disability following stroke damage, having completed their individual art pieces, those of a waterfall and heather, their participation in the performance was fulfilled through the holding of the veils following each performer's revelation.



**DVD 3 – S3a**



**DVD 3 – S3b**

The sounds of the sea and the music cease again, the droning sound begins as a second performer removes a veil to reveal her personal connection with nature – interconnecting hands (DVD 3 – S3c) below. *“Hands are important to me because they connect me to people”*, she revealed during the art-making phase of the project. This pattern of sound from music and the sea ceasing, drones beginning and ceasing at end of revelation of art work and music and sea sounds resuming, continued until all individual art pieces were revealed.



**DVD 3 – S3c**

One learner and two sighted performers shape shift from waves back to human form, move forward and unveil this learner's personal connection to nature – a currach (small boat) (DVD 3 – S3d) below. His reflection highlights his closeness to nature:

*The theme, which is about living life by the light of my heart, for me, means being in touch with nature, through the way I live at home. Putting this idea into a collage with the group made me feel that my best would be accepted. Nobody was going to say this was bad. I thought that my piece – the boat, was going to be a disaster, but, it took shape, and suddenly it was part of the exhibition, and this happened without too much effort. It felt good to make the currach (boat), it wasn't perfect, but when it was placed in the big collage, it looked right.*

This learner's comment highlights the power of the collective to harness the "ordinary" for something special. In ecology, nothing is perfect, in the modernist sense. Every tiny organism has a part to play in the whole ecosystem. Cajete (2000) emphasises the importance of the process of art-making over the product:

The sacred level of art not only transforms something into art, but also transforms the artist at the very core of his or her being. This way of doing and relating to art makes the process and context of art-making infinitely more important than the product (p. 46 – 47).





**DVD 3 – S3d**

Following the revelation of the currach (small boat), a learner sings, the performers shape-shift from waves to trees moving in the breeze, as another learner reveals the place where he feels closest to nature – *“running my fingers through the grass”* (DVD 3 – S3e) below.



**DVD 3 – S3e**

As he moves behind the Ogham structure to hand his veil over to the waiting arms of the two seated performers, the group continues to move as trees blowing in the wind and another learner and sighted performer move as if cutting wheat, making the sound of the scythe cutting through the wheat as they do so. He pulls away a black veil to reveal his special connection with nature – through a roller in a wheat-field (DVD 3 – S3f) below. His reflection highlights the meaning he re-discovered through this experience:

*Handling the materials for the collage showed me the great use I had of my hands, and having completed the wheat garden and rolling stone, I believe that I could work with more and more materials and create other images of other scenes from my sighted years. Having handled the materials, I felt a renewal of the feeling of life into my hands once more – a wonderful feeling indeed. Working on it, at the start, seemed a bit ambitious, but, as I succeeded, it was a sheer delight as my task was completed.*





**DVD 3 – S3f**

As this learner moves with his partner to hand over his veil, the performers sink to the ground and shape-shift into fish, making the sounds of fish swimming in the river, through tapping their fingers quickly on the ground (DVD 3 – S3g) below.



**DVD 3 – S3g**

A learner stands and prepares his rod for fishing, thus alerting the audience to his special place in nature (DVD 3 – S3h) below. Removing the veil, reveals a perfectly made fish, which he worked on tirelessly until it felt as he remembered it, when sighted (DVD 3 – S3i) below. The tail of the fish in particular required extra attention: *“It’s not the same as I remember it yet”*.



DVD 3 – S3h





**DVD 3 – S3i**

The learners rise and shape-shift into trees and birds, making the sounds of trees blowing in the wind, the cuckoo and other birds singing. Two learners, a husband and wife, move forward to reveal the image of their special connection to nature – that of tree bark (DVD 3 – S3j) below. *“I worked on the tree bark with ‘J’ and it was lovely to work on this together because we both share an interest in nature and the environment”.*





DVD 3 – S3j

At the end of this scene, the learners have moved through the **fourth motif** of the archetype of **Initiation**, that of **Renewal and Rebirth**. They have been renewed through their personal connection with the earth, nature and each other. Their experiences find echo in the words of MacEowen (2002):

The healing of the soul of the earth and our relationship with her does not come about by closing ourselves off or by separating ourselves through our definitions, categorizations, and Latin nomenclature but rather by opening ourselves, dynamically, to the mysteries of the spiritscape of nature in a soulful and experiential way. To rediscover the sacred world we must reenter it, with wakeful physical and spiritual senses.

(MacEowen, 2002, p. 7).

**Scene 4:** The learners begin to move in a circle singing praise for the light of the sun, in the Irish language. As they do so, a sighted performer retrieves a small bodhrán from the base of the Ogham structure. This bodhrán represents the sun (DVD 3 – S4a) below. Walking inside the group’s circle, she holds up the sun, shining it on the participants as she moves. She then places the image of the sun on the wall behind the structure. It continues to shine on them all as they raise their arms towards its warmth, in thanksgiving for what has been brought into the light for them (DVD 3 –

S4b) below. The music changes and they dance in celebration for what has been experienced (DVD 3 – S4c) below. This represents the **third archetype of Return**, where Atkinson (1995) states, people “encounter a new kind of test. That is the challenge of what to do next” (p. 100). There is, he believes the temptation to remain in isolation and refrain from sharing our new gift of knowledge and insight, with others. This marks the exit for Knill (2005), where the learners are “challenged with the difference as a confrontation” (p. 82). Thus, this phase begins with the **motif of Responsibility Accepted or Denied**. Atkinson (1995) states that fulfilling this motif means returning

with something to show for where we have been and what we have been doing all this time. It doesn't have to be much. It just has to be what we have learned from our experience of transformation, of discovering who we really are in the depths of our being. The successful return is always an illustration of what is humanely possible.

(Atkinson, 1995, p. 101).

Through this performance the participants successfully share the gifts they have received with those present.



DVD 3 – S4a



DVD 3 – S4b





**DVD 3 – S4c**

**Scene 5:** In (DVD 3 – S5a) below, the participants draw the blue-green material, representing the sea, from the base of the structure, towards them. Becoming one with the sea, they form the waves, dancing towards the shore, under the light of the sun, and with the light of their own individual and collective, ‘inner eye’. This highlights the **final motif** of this archetype, that of **Living Consciously**. Living this motif, Atkinson (1995) states, “means always being active, doing whatever our role in life calls for, and being content and pleased with our lot” (p. 102).



**DVD 3 – S5a**

In (DVD 3 – S5b) below, the music stops, and the participants raise their arms signifying the end of this phase of their journey and their celebration of what they have achieved.



**DVD 3 – S5b**

Following the performance, members of the audience spontaneously approached the learners, congratulating them on their journey, questioning them about their experiences, sharing some of their own experiences with them. It was heartening to see people touch the collage, moving their fingers over the individual pieces and lingering on pieces that touched something in them. This experience is in direct contrast to the usual modern experience of public art, where a tactile experience is not provided for, and is thus, according to Gablik (1991) “inherently isolationist, aimed at disengagement and purity” (p. 4). Hyland Moon (2002) believes that we need to provide experiences that lead to “ a valuing of art based on its ability to foster and deepen relationships to the self, the art object, other people, and the environment” (p. 139). The emphasis placed on the fact that their art work was not “perfect”, by the learners, but that it was meaningful and would be accepted, was striking throughout this phase of the project.

Hyland Moon’s (2002) vision came alive in this phase of the project. As sight is either compromised or denied to the learners, art conferred the power to create and re-create their experiences of both their inner and outer worlds, in a concrete form, for them. They spoke of their abilities to create art and their connections to their creations:

*Doing the collage made me achieve something I thought I could never achieve. I always wanted to make things but I thought that I couldn't do it, that I would be no good at it.*

Another spoke of re-discovering the “*great use I have of my hands*”. For another learner, now sadly deceased:

*I felt very good doing the collage. I never thought it would turn out so good. The highlight for me was having my own piece in it, which is the waterfall. It's wonderful to touch it and to feel all those thoughts in such a small area. It gives a feeling of togetherness.*

Here, emphasis is placed again on the importance of being part of the collective.

This learner's reflection highlights how his experiences in the project recreated for him, his connection to people with sight:

*Sharing these experiences with sighted people and seeing them having the same emotions, gives me to understand that the loss of my eyesight does not mean that I do not have a common bond with sighted people.*

Awareness of the power of the collective experiences, for the participants, was evident during this phase of the project. Comments such as: “*I learned that it was good to have people to work with. I wouldn't have been able to do this on my own, but I was able to, with others*”, and “*None of the group had done anything like this before and it was great to be able to achieve this work together as a group*”, highlights this growing awareness, as does this learner's reflection:

*I have feared failure since I went blind, but working on this project with my fellow students has given me great confidence and I believe that, from conversations with other students, they had the same experience.*

Space was given for the fullest expression of intermodal expressive arts in this phase of the project. In chapter three, Rogers (2000) emphasised that people have known since earlier times that song, dance, music and art were all part of the same process enabling humanity to become creatively human and fully functioning. She states that people “also used the arts as a connection to each other and the forces of nature” (p.

xiv). The integrated arts approach used in this phase of the project enabled these connections to be made, for the learners. One learner's comments reflect this:

*The idea of taking this collage to the National Folk Theatre group and giving them an insight into our world, so that both worlds – the world of the sighted and the visually impaired, could express this idea in drama, dance, music and mime, breathed life into our collage work. It gave meaning to our project.*

The growing transformation of personal independence and self-worth in the learners, was quite striking during this phase of the project. There was a sense that though full participation in life had been compromised, there was a richness in the lives lived and a pride in putting that life experience beside that of the sighted performers. One man's reflection highlights this:

*I felt that having worked on the collage piece, that we had a certain advantage over the theatre groups, in the workshops. I was pleased that during the very early parts of the workshop, that each student, and I, confidently explained the meaning of our work and the show that we were about to produce.*

Perhaps the most moving transformation was that of the emergence of 'voice'. The learners always had voice, but these were voices that they felt were never heard. Voice was heard in phases one and two of the project through the media of music, mime, song, dance and movement. These were new forms of voice for them. As the learners spoke of their experiences of 'colour', their individual voices were heard for the first time. As part of this reflective process, I read the chapter 'The Colour of Beauty' from John O'Donohue's book, 'Divine Beauty' which was published in 2003, the same year as their presentation. There was much joy and appreciation in discovering the author's belief that "Each colour evokes its own world of feeling and association" (p. 90), as this sentiment captured for them, their exploration of various colours in nature. Hearing the late author's description of 'colour' prompted them to forward a video recording of their production to him, signifying a confidence in widening the circle of connection for them.

Like buds opening in spring, their voices began to grow, giving greater expression to their being and living, as the next chapter will show.



## CHAPTER NINE

### PERFORMANCE FOUR: ‘DEIR MÉ, DEIR TÚ..’ (‘I SAY, YOU SAY..’)

#### Introduction

Following the performance of ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light), the group reflected on their journey. Much of their discussion centred on the feelings colour evoked for them and the inspiration provided by Raifteirí’s poem. Reading poetry and other texts was an important part of personal development sessions for the group, drawing them into reflection on their existence and experiences, ensuring discussions rich in meaning and a deepening of relationships with one another. One learner described poetry as “the eyes of the blind”. When asked why, he replied:

*Because it’s an artist’s impression. It makes contact between the sighted and the blind. If you cannot understand a description from someone, you can, through a poem. You can see sincerely through poetry. Poetry is not your words or my words, it’s an eternal description that transcends all languages and all mental images between the sighted and blind person. You can dream in poetry. Any blind person can see through poetry.*

His words find resonance with those of Gorelick (2005):

Poetic language is condensed, replete with sensory images, and charged with meaning. It combines conscious and unconscious dimensions, integrates past-present-future states of being, challenges thought, stimulates physiological and muscular responses, and resonates with the paradox and mystery of life.

(Gorelick, 2005, p. 117).

The ‘Súile le Solas’ (Eyes with Light) performance also featured a tune composed by Raifteirí, ‘Anachuan’, to commemorate a tragic drowning in his locality. The title of the first performance, ‘Tabhair Dom Do Lámh’ (Give me your hand), was taken from a tune composed by a travelling Irish harper, Carolan, who was also without sight. Without any conscious attempts to do so, works created by Irish poets and musicians without sight were being chosen by the group, to feature in their stage presentations.

These were not the only works explored. Poetry, prose and stories composed by local (Paddy Kennelly, Bob Boland, Gabriel Fitzmaurice), national (W.B. Yeats, Brendan Kennelly, Patrick Kavanagh) and international writers (Mary Oliver, Vincent Ferrini) were also perused. Discussions began to focus on local writers who wrote about so much that was familiar to us all. A suggestion of collaborating with a local writer to create their own poems, was greeted warmly, but apprehensively, by the learners. At this point, all the learners were writing reflective diaries on their computers. Two learners had written some poems, but for the others, this was a new, and up to now, unconsidered experience. However, they felt this would further strengthen their voice in the community and decided to invite author, Paddy Kennelly, from Ballylongford in North Kerry to collaborate with them. Paddy was chosen as he was known to some of the learners and had earlier in the year published a book entitled, ‘A Place too small for Secrets’, which spoke to many of them, of their experiences of living in small communities.

### **An account of the workshops leading to performance**

In the week leading up to Christmas 2002, Paddy and I conducted a five-day poetry-writing workshop with the learners. The theme chosen for the project was ‘togetherness’. Enthusiasm for the work was obvious, with one learner arriving to class, in the week prior to the workshop, with a poem he felt inspired to write, entitled ‘Togetherness’. At this stage, the learners had decided that if they were successful in their endeavour, they would augment their reading of their poetry with music, perform the work publicly, and record the finished work on cd. They also decided to highlight some of the tools of their literacy such as the new Zoom Text assistive technology software package, and the Braille machine, in their presentation. The cd would be offered for sale locally. The outcome of the five-day workshop pointed to the realisation of this possibility. There was a sense of amazement at hearing the depth, power and strength in the words they had poured forth in their poems, as they didn’t know– “*we had all this in us*”. There was a pride in the truths they had spoken. Deciding to produce and market a cd of their work was a very significant decision for them. They believed that it would enable them to reach a wider audience with their message of greater connectivity in life. One learner remarked on the importance of leaving some copies in the local library as it may yet be of comfort and inspiration to

some person in the future, who might find themselves without sight, or facing sight loss. The learners presented their production, entitled, ‘Deir mé, Deir tú... (I say, You say....)’ to a full auditorium, at Siamsa Tíre Theatre, on March 25, 2003. The title of the performance, based on the conjugation of the verb ‘I say’, was chosen to highlight how much of what they have heard said about them has been so prejudiced, and how often, in turn, they too have been prejudiced in their judgements of others. Their antidote to this lay in respecting our individuality and thereby our differences, and honouring and celebrating our connectivity.

Two thousand and three marked the centenary year of Kerry Education Service – the VEC in Kerry. To honour the occasion, a number of celebratory events were held throughout the year. Following their performance in the theatre, which was attended and supported by the CEO and other educational and administrative staff in the VEC, the learners were invited by the CEO to present their performance at the opening and closing centenary ceremonies. As part of the celebrations, tutors on their programme also participated in the performance. The opening ceremony took place at Causeway Comprehensive School, located sixteen miles north of Tralee, on March 27, 2003. This ceremony was attended by 600 people, which included the CEO, governing body, staff and teachers from the VEC, as well as the then Minister for Education, Mr. Noel Dempsey T.D. The learners received a standing ovation. Mr. Dempsey T.D. walked up on stage to congratulate them individually, prior to delivering his own address to the gathering. The learners also performed at the closing ceremony in Killarney Comprehensive School on December 8, 2003. This performance was attended by the President of Ireland, Mrs. Mary McAleese and Mr. Martin McAleese. The cd was produced and sold throughout the county. This cd and accompanying programme note, a dvd of the performance and a relevant press cutting are contained in Appendix 4.

### **How the performance of ‘Deir mé, Deir tú’ (I say, You say) illuminates the Archetypes and Motifs of Personal Mythmaking and the Rites of Restoration**

**Scene 1 – Opening Scene:** (Appendix 4, DVD 4). The musicians open the entry to the **first Archetype of Separation**, through their rendition of a piece of music entitled, ‘Overture’ (DVD 4 – S1a). This also marks the entry into Knill’s (2005)

‘devotional space’. Learner No. 4 states: “*In the beginning was the word, and our word is togetherness*”. Learner (No. 1) speaks the poem he composed, ‘Togetherness’ (DVD 4 – S1b) below.



**DVD 4 – S1b**

**Togetherness (DVD 4 – S1b)**

*Togetherness is a word that unites people from all walks of life.  
It allows co-operation with others.  
An orchestra plays a piece of music.  
This creates a greater harmony.  
This becomes known as the marching band that brings people together.  
A new word has been created.  
This word is called togetherness.  
The instruments play songs of hope and peace.  
Writing joins in with the piece of music.  
A link has been created between music and writing.  
The composer brailles the word togetherness.  
This is done using uncontracted Braille.  
The word togetherness becomes the new theme for the piece.  
Alone I compose, but together we can perform a beautiful piece of music.*

His poem draws musicians, performers and the audience into the experience of the **first motif** of that archetype – the **Call to Adventure**. It is an invitation to journey. As he finishes speaking his poem, he leads the musicians in playing the tune composed for this phase of the project – ‘The Unknown Journey’ (DVD 4 – S1c) below. This tune was co-composed by him, and the musical director of Siamsa Tíre. The stimulus for the tune was the sound made by the Braille machine as this learner brailled the word, ‘togetherness’.



**DVD 4 – S1c**

The audience responds with a round of applause. Comments following the production indicated that this tune touched many people. One man asked permission to have it played at his funeral whenever that time would come.

**Scene 2:** This scene opens with the learners, individually and collectively, speaking the poem ‘Space’, which explores the need for personal space. This poem, and the eight poems that follow, were written collectively by seven of the learners participating in this phase of the project. As the writer, Paddy Kennelly, and I began to explore individual needs with the learners, in the first workshop, participants were tentative in their expressions. I acted as scribe, taking down the lines as they spoke them. When I read back their composition to them, they were surprised to see, that with making only slight changes to their text, they had actually composed a poem.

## Space (DVD 4 – S2a)

*I need space.*

*I need an equal amount of space to you.*

*I need space to explore and develop my own mind and my other senses,  
to avoid dependency.*

*Please accept that I need my space.*

*Do not take offence if I refuse your help now,  
because one day I may need your help and will  
be happy to accept it.*

From this point, they gradually found the courage to continue. This highlighted the **second motif of Assistance**, where the group felt that they were being guided on their way. Following the composition of this poem, a discussion followed on the experience of not having the space to express opinions. Much of this discussion focused on the situation of newly arrived refugees and immigrants in Ireland, their dependency on the Irish economy for an income and the lack of power and voice that often resulted from that dependency. The learners spoke of encounters they had with young people working in restaurants, with little English, who seemed so subdued. At the suggestion of Learner (No. 4), they focused on one young girl, whom the learner had met in this setting. He called her ‘Helen’. As Paddy and I guided the learners to express how she might be feeling, they gradually began to see that their expressions, showing understanding of her feelings, reflected their own ‘outsider’ experiences. They composed the following poem, which they called ‘Helen’, and which was spoken in performance, by Learner (No. 1). This poem raises an interesting point, one explored Spivak (1988), in which she claims that powerful western discourses exclude the subaltern, especially women, or non-Europeans, from these discourses, and thus prevent us from knowing them as fully knowable, human beings. This poem echoes this experience and highlights the importance of having voice in order to be known, heard and seen, in society.

## Helen (DVD 4 – S2b)

*In order to fit in, I have to pretend to agree with everything.*

*I must have the same opinion as other people.*

*I am not allowed to have my own opinion.*

*Have I to sacrifice my principles?*

*In order to be accepted, I have to change my way of life.*

*I have to make myself fit in.*

*What they say, I say in turn.*

*I have to lose my dignity and my sense of freedom.*

*I cannot disagree.*

**Scene 3 (DVD 4 - S3):** From this point, the learners moved into the **third motif** of the **Initial Challenge**, where they began to explore reasons for human exclusion, in their poem, 'Prejudice'. Learner (No. 1) begins to whisper the first line of the poem – 'Prejudice is blindness in itself'. The other learners join with him, repeating this line until it rises from that of a whisper to being spoken in full voice. Individual learners speak the lines, with the learners as a group, forming a chorus and repeating the first line, in between individual lines.

*If I cannot put myself into the mind of another human being  
without understanding and compassion, then I am more blind than the sightless.*  
Learner (No. 1).

Chorus: *Prejudice is blindness in itself.*

*If I cannot give you a voice without being heard myself, then I am voiceless.*  
Learner (No. 6).

Chorus: *Prejudice is blindness in itself.*

*If I cannot hear your problems without hearing my own, then I am heedless.*  
Learner (No. 5).

Chorus: *Prejudice is blindness in itself.*

*If I cannot touch your heart with words of love, then I am broken-hearted.* (Musician)

The group chorus then repeats the chorus, several times, until it trails away into a whisper.

This marks the **fourth motif**, that of **Retreat**, where the performers turn more deeply inwards, reflecting on where they are on their journey.

**Scene 4:** From this point of reflection, the learners move into the **first motif** of the **Second Archetype of Initiation**, that of **Greater Challenges**. It also marks their entry into Knill's (2005) 'liminal space'. In their poem, 'The Challenge', they illuminate their experiences of travelling backwards and downwards, into the self, re-living the difficult journey of confronting and coming to terms with visual impairment and blindness. In performance, lines from the poem are spoken both individually and collectively.

#### **The Challenge (DVD 4 – S4a)**

*The first day I met you* (Learner No. 1)  
*I was afraid,*  
*I was angry,* (Tutor No. 1)  
*I thought to myself: Why me?* (Tutor No. 2)  
*Maybe if I ignore you, you will go away.* (Learner No. 5)  
*But you insisted.* (Chorus)  
*You stayed.*  
*An unwelcome guest.*  
*I did not like you hanging around me,* (Learner No. 2)  
*But I had to put up with you.*  
*Getting to know you over time, I knew* (Learner No. 1)  
*I would have to beat you at your game.*  
*I took you on in the tunnel of fear.* (Learner No. 6)  
*You held me back.* (Chorus, with bodhrán joining in to highlight the fear and  
*We struggled -* intensity of this part of their experience)  
*Backwards, forwards, up and down,*  
*Never winning, never losing,*  
*Until the day I accepted your hand,* (Bodhrán beat stops, and is replaced with Irish  
*And slowly you led me towards the flickering light.* tune, 'Ar Éirinn ní  
neosainn cé hí).

Writing the last line of this poem, was a slow and deliberate exercise for the group, especially the phrase '*towards the flickering light*'. They had written the words, '*towards the light*', but felt that the full light of acceptance of their situations was not yet shining, for them. Adding in the word '*flickering*' expressed their experiences more accurately for them.

The **second motif of Further Assistance** is evident as the group moves to integrate this new, '*flickering light*', into their lives, in their poem, 'The Response'. It was difficult for them to see themselves as heroes who had conquered what they believed



to be, an unbeatable foe. To assist with this, Paddy and I, in our roles as facilitators, asked them to imagine that someone had entered the room, recounted this process to them, and invited them to respond to that person. Their poem, 'The Response', highlights their appreciation of the experience. The lines are spoken by individual learners, except for the last line – 'You are me', which is spoken by them firstly in chorus, and lastly, individually.

### **The Response (DVD 4 – S4b)**

*You talk from the heart.*

*What is this thing all about?* (Learner No. 6)

*You are a flesh and blood human being,*

*Honest, courageous, vulnerable, open to being wounded.* (Learner No. 1)

*I like you.* (Learner No. 2)

*You seem like us.* (Learner No. 5)

*You speak the truth.* (Tutor No. 2)

*You confront your own strengths and weaknesses.* (Tutor No. 1)

*You face your fears.*

*You are a person of dignity.* (Learner No. 6)

*You are me.* (Chorus)

*You are me.* (Spoken individually by the seven learners and two tutors/musicians).

When the second last line of the poem – '*You are a person of dignity*' was written, Paddy and I asked them who this person might be. At first, answers were general, suggesting persons they either knew or had heard or read about. It took some time for the awareness that it was the 'self', to dawn. This prompted the idea to speak it as a chorus, to convey the strength of this belief, and individually, to hear their own voices sound out their growth and achievement.

The music of 'The Unknown Journey' joins with their voices as they speak the last line, individually. The **third motif of Temptation** comes to the fore at this point as they reflect on a newly discovered aspect of 'self' – that of 'hero'. They are vulnerable at this point. Their perceptions of 'self' have been tested and this new awareness of 'self' needs to be integrated. This is important, as otherwise it may be lost. As their voices trail off, the music continues, leading into 'The Poem' spoken by the writer, Paddy Kennelly (DVD 4 – S4c) below. As Paddy begins to speak, Learner No. 1 accompanies him on mouth-organ, with the tune, 'The Unknown Journey'. The other musicians join in with him. This poem was a collaboration between Paddy and the group as they explored understanding from the perspective of the 'other'. It

highlights how cherishing our similarities and respecting our individuality is central towards being together, in real community.



DVD 4 – S4c

### **The Poem (DVD 4 – S4c)**

*I wanted to write a poem about the challenge  
but I didn't have the vision  
because I could see.  
And I didn't have the feeling because  
I never travelled down that road.  
I wanted to sing,  
but I didn't have the notes to compose the melody.  
Then I met ye.  
Ye invited me into ye're hearts and minds.  
All was changed.  
Ye gave me the vision.  
Ye helped me to understand the feeling.  
Ye hummed the melody.  
And suddenly, a poem was born.  
It was not my poem,  
It was not ye're poem.  
It was our poem, together.*

The music leads the group into the poem, ‘Miss Eily’ which explores the need to listen and be present to others. Lines are spoken both individually and collectively by the group. Tutor No. 1 begins, speaking the first three lines of the poem:

**Miss Eily (DVD 4 – S4d)**

*Mary called to my home, and I did not let her in,  
because I had too much to do  
to listen to her cnámhsheáiling.  
I met Rosie, the beggar-woman, on the street, (Learner No. 6)  
I gave her money, but I didn't give her my ear.  
Tess called me at work. (Learner No. 5)  
I would have helped, but I was too tired.  
The day came when no-one called. (Chorus)  
I wondered why?*

The last line is repeated individually by each learner and tutors one and two.

**Scene 5 (DVD 4 S5a):** The bodhrán signals the start of the the tune, ‘Chase me Charlie’. At the end, the audience applauds, and Learner No. 6 bows and covers his head with his hand and speaks the poem, ‘Danny Carroll (Vision)’. The inspiration for this poem came from a man this learner knew, who was a well-known local singer. He always closed his eyes and put his hand to his head when he sang. This suggested to the learner that the singer sang the song from the inner depths. An inability to shut out the ego and to speak from that inner place suggested a state of blindness to the learners, as the poem shows.

**Danny Carroll (Vision) (DVD 4 – S5b)**

*I am called to sing a song, and so  
I bow my head into the cups of my hands, covering my  
face and shutting out the light from my eyes,  
so that I can reach into the spirit of the song.  
Unimpeded by the light, I see the true meaning of the  
voice behind the song.  
Some people I know cannot shut out the light, and will not  
see the meaning of the song.  
They are blind.*

The tune, 'The Hundred Pipers', leads into the **fourth motif of Renewal and Rebirth**. The learners have reached a new level of self-awareness and self-expression. Through the conjugation of the verb, 'I say', they reflect back to the audience the perceptions society has of them, but also, both individually and collectively, their preferred choice of inclusion and respect. Recognising their own capacity to be prejudiced – "*We're all the same. We too make the same mistakes occasionally*" - implies connectivity through our common tendencies to human weakness. Learner No. 1 calls out the different part of the verb, with responses from the other learners.

### **I say, You say..... (DVD 4 – S5c)**

Learner No. 1 – *You say:*

*Will she have a cup of tea? (Tutor No. 2).*

*I say:*

*Why not ask me? Don't you realise I can hear even though I can't see. (Learner No. 5).*

*He says:*

*There's something odd about me because I don't respond as he expects me. (Tutor No. 1).*

*We say:*

*Why don't you just stop and talk to us? (Learner No. 6).*

*She says:*

*Look at the craythur, he can't see. (Learner No. 1).*

*I say:*

*This shows how little you really know about me.  
(Learner No. 2).*

*They say, in hushed tones:*

*Isn't it a shame to see us that way. (Chorus).*

*We say:*

*Why not speak openly to us and give us a name?  
(Learner No. 1).*

*Ye say:*

*Aren't we really wonderful? (Chorus)*

*We say:*

*We're all the same. (Chorus).  
We too make the same mistakes occasionally. (Tutor No. 2).*

Chorus: *We're all the same.*  
Chorus, in hushed tones: *Prejudice is blindness in itself.*  
Chorus, in louder tones: *We're all the same.*  
Chorus, in hushed tones: *Prejudice is blindness in itself.*  
Chorus in louder tones: *We're all the same.*  
Chorus in hushed tones: *Prejudice is blindness in itself.*

Learner No. 1: *Together we can perform a beautiful piece of music.*

The **first motif of Responsibility Accepted or Denied**, in the third **Archetype of Return**, becomes apparent as all the musicians play 'The Unknown Journey'. Also evident, is Knill's (2005) concept of 'exit' where the learners are confronted with the difference they have experienced, as a challenge. Playing the theme tune brings the performance to an end. As the music plays, a tutor operating a computer using the Zoom Text assistive technology package, shows slides of the word 'Togetherness' and the project title, 'Hidden Voices from the Dark', and finishes with the image of hands joining together – a motif brought forward from the 'Súile le Solas' production (DVD 4 – S5d) below. McAdams (1993) points out, in chapter three, that living in our current existential void, where our world can no longer tell us who we are or how we ought to live, it is important to create our own meanings and discover our own truths of existence, which will sanctify our own lives (p. 34). The truth of existence for the learners lies in their discovery that their lives are sanctified through connection with the fullness of 'self' - its darkness and light, and through connection with the 'other', in community.



**DVD 4 – S5d**

Trusting in an unknown journey has brought the learners to new places within the self and within public perception. O’Donohue (2000) states that: “When you come to know something new, you come closer to yourself and to the world” (p. 29). Through their performance, the learners have drawn the audience into their journey of connection to soul and spirit. This has been a learning experience for the audience also. The learners have given expression to their own individual experiences of Plotkin’s (2003) belief that soul embraces the depths of our particular individuality and that spirit points to what all things and all people have in common (p. 25). They have given life to McAdams (1993) belief, referred to in chapter three, that the mythmaker’s art “should benefit both the artist who fashions the myth and the society that it adorns” (p. 113). For now, it is time to move to the **second motif of Living Consciously**. For the moment, the learners are at peace with themselves, each other, and the way things are. There is recognition of independence and interdependence. But, perhaps, the greatest achievement of all was finding voice to express their inner journey through their own poetry. This was a truly transformative experience for

them. Cajete (2000) points out that: “Creativity and transformation are interrelated in every context or act of art creation” (p. 47).

Voice began to emerge for the learners, in the ‘Súile le Solas’ production. In this phase, writing their own poetry – which comes from the Greek root word, ‘poesis’, opened an opportunity, as Gorelick (2005) suggests, for a “calling into existence that which has not existed before” (p. 117). The learners were amazed at their capacities to express the depth of the thoughts, perceptions and feelings they discovered within and at the sound of their own voices as they did so. Music and sound were used in the production to amplify the sounds of their voices, for example, in the poem ‘The Challenge’, where struggle is amplified by the sounds of the bodhrán. Music is also used to link the poems and provide spaces for reflection between poems. These were felt responses to the various stages of the journey being travelled by the learners.

Perhaps the poem, ‘The Challenge’, is the one the learners quoted most frequently to describe their journey with sight loss and other struggles in life. It is also the poem that made the deepest connection with the general public. One learner spoke the poem on a local radio programme, resulting in the station receiving many calls for the words, as listeners felt it expressed their struggles also. One External Examiner on hearing the poem, which was submitted as part of a Level Four FETAC Communications module wept as she felt it described her struggles with a life threatening illness.

At the end of the workshop series, Paddy Kennelly wrote a poem entitled ‘Blind Gladys’ which is published in his second book, ‘Disciples’ and dedicated to one of the learners and his wife, as it was inspired by the story of this learner’s sight loss.

### **Blind Gladys**

When the letter came from the eye-man,  
Saying I would be blind  
Within six months, I went outside  
To savour the green of the grass,  
To savour the blue of the skies.  
And I cried. And I cried. And I cried.

You followed when you missed me:

‘Gladys, what’s wrong?’ you said.  
I couldn’t say anything,  
So I gave you the letter to read.

Slowly you read and slowly, then, you spoke:  
‘When the green fades from the grass, my love,  
And the blue fades from the skies,  
I’ll tell you of their colour. I’ll be your eyes.’

Their voices continued to grow in strength as they prepared to share their next experience of journey. This experience is illuminated in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER TEN

### PERFORMANCE FIVE: ‘SÚIL ISTEACH’ (‘INSIGHT OUT’)

#### **Introduction**

Reflections following the previous performance centred on continuing the task of creating greater understanding of living life without sight. Learners spoke of being frequently asked: “What’s it like to be blind?”, a question they found difficult to answer. They decided it was one worth exploring in their next stage production.

#### **An account of the workshops leading to performance**

They began by compiling a list of questions often asked of them and the appropriate replies to them. They then picked a cross section of them to create a script that would give the audience a broad picture of how they managed tasks in life. Then, a learner brought in a recording of the song, ‘Welcome to my World’, which they believed should be played to the audience, with the auditorium in darkness, as a means of introducing them to a world without sight. Each learner chose, and with help, recorded a soundscape, related to daily living, which the audience experienced in darkness. As each sound faded out, each learner shown in spotlight, spoke the dialogue that runs internally for them, as they navigate these situations. Sometimes, mistakes are made with humorous outcomes! One learner, who loves to tell stories, decided to recount one such tale to the audience! They decided to end the performance with a slide show highlighting their use of adaptive technology.

The learners felt very empowered putting this performance together. In addition to writing their own script, choosing the music, creating their individual scenes, they made a number of suggestions regarding the production of the work. For example, in the first part of the script, when the questions were asked, they decided that ‘Welcome to my world’ should be played at that point, to create an awareness of a dark world, before they heard the replies. They were proud of the fact that they needed much less

help in producing this show, than those previously. This was proof for them of their ability and growth. They were aware of being the ‘holders of knowledge’ of this world and that they had the power to open up an understanding of it for the sighted community.

The learners felt that people with sight often equate visual impairment with a fragmented and incomplete life. But, the life of a person who is visually impaired or blind is experienced as a whole. Their lives are integrated, just like the lives of sighted people. Because they live in a sighted world, they have an understanding of what it means to be sighted. The books they read and the music they listen to, the language they speak, the means of transport they use, were all created for sighted people. Through these experiences, they can imagine what it is like to be sighted. Their thoughts re-echo those of Klegge ((1999), herself visually impaired, who states that because of the understanding gained from these experiences, she finds it “easy to imagine what it’s like to be sighted” (p. 3). In this performance, they aimed to make the sighted community aware of what it is like to be blind. To do this, they invited the audience to turn their gaze inwards so that they might ‘see’ as they see. In doing so, the learners make visible Kenyon and Randall’s (1997) “inside-out” level of lifestory - “what we make of what happens to us” (p. 34 – p. 35), in this performance. In this way, they highlight what is unique to them and what is universal also, connecting again with Plotkin’s (1993) understanding of the uniqueness of soul and the universality of the spirit that imbues all life. A dvd of the performance, accompanying programme and a press cutting from the ‘Kerryman’ newspaper are contained in Appendix 5.

### **How the performance of ‘Súil Isteach’ (Insight Out) illuminates the Archetypes and Motifs of Personal Mythmaking and the Rites of Restoration**

In his introductory speech to the audience, the Adult Education Officer prepares them for the experience they will share with the learners. He speaks about their educational programme. He mentions the fact that the learners had decided that the best way for them to communicate with the sighted community was through theatre. Mehl-Madrona (2007) states that in the past:

People narrated their lives to their community as a means of teaching and as a form of entertainment. This was how they came to be understood and to understand each other. This is how shared or group identity was constructed. It was how values became consistent among group members”

(Mehl-Madrona, 2007, p. 122 - 123).

The Adult Education Officer speaks of the learners need to tell the community what their world is like, about life as they experience it and go through it day by day. He states that people with visual impairment don't want our sympathy, but they do want our understanding and they want us to appreciate who they are and what their lives are like. Mehl-Madrona (2007) informs us that in the past: “The presentation of one's life story before an audience revealed not only what happened but also gave a somewhat authentic sense of the person telling the story” (p. 123). The Adult Education Officer also explains that this performance will put the audience in the position of experiencing what its like to have a visual impairment. This, the learners hope, will contribute to a change in what Kenyon and Randall (1997) term, the “outside-in” position of others towards them. This position is “what others make of us on their own, without our consent” (p. 35 – p. 36). Now, the learners want to co-create a new understanding, with the audience.



DVD 5 – S1

**Scene 1:** The performance opens with the seven learners – seven males and one female, seated, on stage (DVD 1 – S1) above. A droning sound marks the **First Archetype of Separation**, as the learners are drawn into the **first motif**, the **Call to Adventure**. This also marks Knill’s (2005) entry into what he terms, ‘devotional space’. The learners, individually, begin to speak questions they are often asked by sighted people. The following is an outline of this part of their script:

1. *I’m often asked: What’s it like to be blind? (L)*
2. *A child once asked me: Why don’t you wear glasses? (H)*
3. *Why don’t you open your eyes and see? (J)*
4. *Occasionally, someone will say: How do you know if the light is on? (M)*
5. *People often wonder, and ask: How do you find your way home? (TK) OR:*
6. *How do you know what to do at the crossroads? (TS) OR*
7. *How do you know you’re going down the right road? (K)*
8. *Sometimes, someone will say to me, just as they would to a sighted person: Hadn’t you better go home before its dark? (J)*
9. *When I play my keyboard I’m asked: How do you find the key of ‘C’? (K)*
10. *When I’m gardening, I’m sometimes asked: How do you know your grass/flowers from your weeds? (H)*
11. *Sometimes, people will say: Do you know who you have? (L)*
12. *How do you write? (TK)*
13. *How do you read? (TS)*
14. *Are you really blind? (M)*
15. *How can you tell the different coins apart? (L)*
16. *How do you know your red jacket from your black one? (TS)*
17. *How do you know if your hair is OK? (H)*
18. *Why do you watch TV when you can’t see it? (TK)*

19. *Do you stay at home all day and listen to the radio? (M)*
20. *How do you know what's happening at a football match? (K)*
21. *How do you know when your dinner is cooked? (J)*
22. *Do you see in your dreams? (TK)*
23. *I was once asked: Is it a lonely life to be blind, Liam? (L)*

**Voices together say: 'What's it like to be blind?' (building to crescendo).**

**TK says: 'Why don't you close your eyes, and see?'** The **second motif** of **Assistance** is obvious here. The learners are being inwardly guided to continue and draw the audience into their experiences. This invitation to 'see' inwardly, re-echoes the theme of the poem, 'Danny Carroll' in the previous production, where inability to shut out the light, highlights a blindness to the inner world.

**The auditorium is darkened and a recording of the song, 'Welcome to my world...' is played to the audience as they sit in the dark.**

**Scene 2:** Following this, the lights come up again. The learners are standing now (DVD 5 – S2) below. A learner asks: *What's it like to be blind?* The **third motif** of the **Initial Challenge** is at play here as the learners are challenged to find responses to these questions.



**DVD 5 – S2**

**Then the ANSWERS to the questions asked, start to come, as follows:**

1. *You can carry your disability or let it carry you. (TS)*
2. *Facial expressions can tell lies. The truth can sometimes be found more clearly in the voice. (H)*
3. *I've been teaching myself how to play the mouth organ since I was 5 years old. (TK)*
4. *Radio sports commentaries tell us all we need to know about the football matches. (M)*
5. *In my dreams I see the green fields of my sighted boyhood days. (L)*
5. *I have never seen, and in my dreams I hear the sound of the piano and feel the joy it brings me. (TK)*
6. *I e-mail regularly. (K)*
8. *I text message on my mobile phone all the time. (TS)*
9. *I cook breakfast for my wife. (L)*
10. *I watch TV each night and I'm aware that Damien was kissing Bernie in Fair City, last night! (TK)*
11. *I play music in Scotts every Sunday. (K)*
12. *I travel by bus each day. (J)*

13. *I go shopping. (H)*
14. *I play table soccer. (TK)*
15. *And I play poker!! (L)*
16. *I work-out at the gym each week. (M)*
17. *I go abseiling. (TK)*
18. *I go canoeing on Caragh Lake. (L)*
19. *I swim regularly. (H)*
20. *My friend reads the gospel through Braille Sunday Mass. (L)*
21. *I'm often asked for directions to places. (J)*
22. *Like everyone else, we go from one place to another by learning the routes. (M)*
23. *Changes in sound give us a sense of location. (TS)*

This is a time of **Retreat**, which highlights the **fourth motif** of the first archetype. It is a time to move more deeply inwards, further away from the external world, and reflect on the next steps forward.

**Scene 3:** The lights go out and the audience are drawn into eight individual experiences encountered on a regular basis by the learners. This is the beginning of Atkinson's second archetype of **Initiation**, or Knill's 'liminal' space, for the learners. They are now faced with **Greater Challenges**, the **second motif** of this archetype, as they endeavour to communicate to the audience, their inner dialogues and connections with the environment, in order to navigate it daily.

The audience hears the sound of traffic on a busy street. TK is shown in spotlight, using his white cane and explaining how these sounds confirm location for him (DVD 5 – S3a) below: *I'm in Tralee for the day. I must collect my harmonica at Buskers.*



DVD 5 – S3a



The theatre is plunged into darkness again and the audience hears the sound of feet splashing in puddles. The spotlight is on M (DVD 5 – S3b) below, who says: *I'm in Moyderwell. Potholes as usual.* This evokes a response of laughter from the audience, who are aware of the poor state of the streets in that part of town, due to lack of repair by the local authorities.



**DVD 5 – S3b**

Darkness again as the sound of a cash register being used rings through the auditorium. L is in spotlight (DVD 5 – S3c) below, as he says: *I'm down at the Wounded Knee Pub for a pint. By the sound of the till, business is as good as usual!*



**DVD 5 – S3c**

The audience is in darkness again as they hear the sound at the traffic lights, indicating that it is safe to cross. TS, in the spotlight now (DVD 5 – S3d) below, says: *I'm at the Railway Station now. Time to cross. These lights change so quickly.*



**DVD 5 – S3d**

Darkness once more. The audience hears the sound of hammering. 'A' appears in spotlight (DVD 5 – S3e) below, saying: *Road works. Time to slow down and walk carefully.*



**Dvd 5 – S3e**

The audience experiences the dark again and hears the sound of gravel crunching underfoot. K appears in spotlight (DVD 5 – S3f) and explains: *I'm on the right track for my goal ball session at the Sports Complex.*



**DVD 5 – S3f**

In the darkness, the audience hears the faint trickle of water. The spotlight shows J moving to sit on a nearby chair (DVD 5 – S3g) below, explaining as he does: *The sound of the fountain tells me that there is a seat close by, for a rest in the park.*



**DVD 5 – S3g**

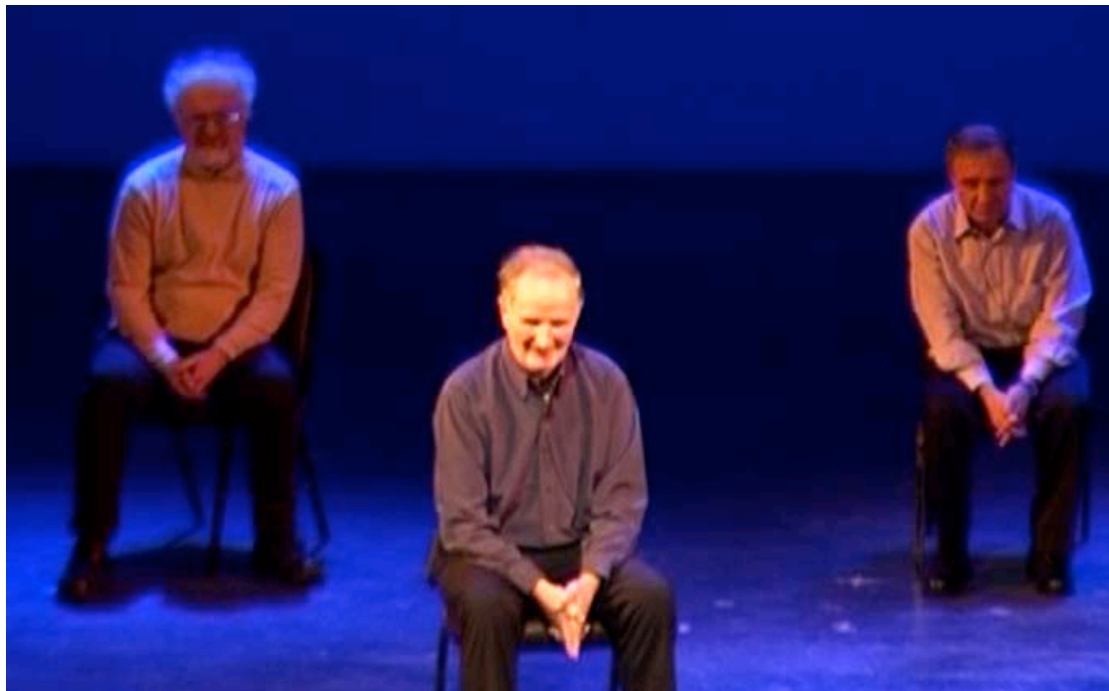
For the final experience, the audience, in the darkness again, hears the sound of people talking in a crowd. H appears in spotlight (DVD 5 – S3h) below, saying: *The sound of different languages on the street tells me Tralee is changing culturally.*



**DVD 5 – S3h**

The **second motif** of **Further Assistance** is at play throughout this scene. The learners are inwardly supported by the belief and strength that is coming from the sense that they are bringing their world alive for the audience. But, the **third motif** of **Temptation** is there too. There are doubts and fears and a questioning of their actions, but this is necessary for clarity and confirmation of the value of their way. From here, they experience the **fourth motif** of **Renewal and Rebirth**. Fear of not being able to make their worlds understood has diminished. Their confidence in being able to communicate this is reborn. There is vulnerability in this new way of being, and a joy in the strength of a larger and greater self-image.

**Scene 4:** The learners now demonstrate their **Return – the Third Archetype** of this phase of their personal myth, and what Knill refers to as the ‘exit’. The auditorium is plunged into darkness again. The **second motif** of **Responsibility Accepted or Denied** is evident as the learners now share further experiences of hope with the audience in return for journeying with them. The lights come up, the learners move to sit down, and L begins to tell a story of how a visit to his local Post Office to collect his blind pension, created great enjoyment for those present! (DVD 5 – S4 below).



**Dvd 5 – S4**



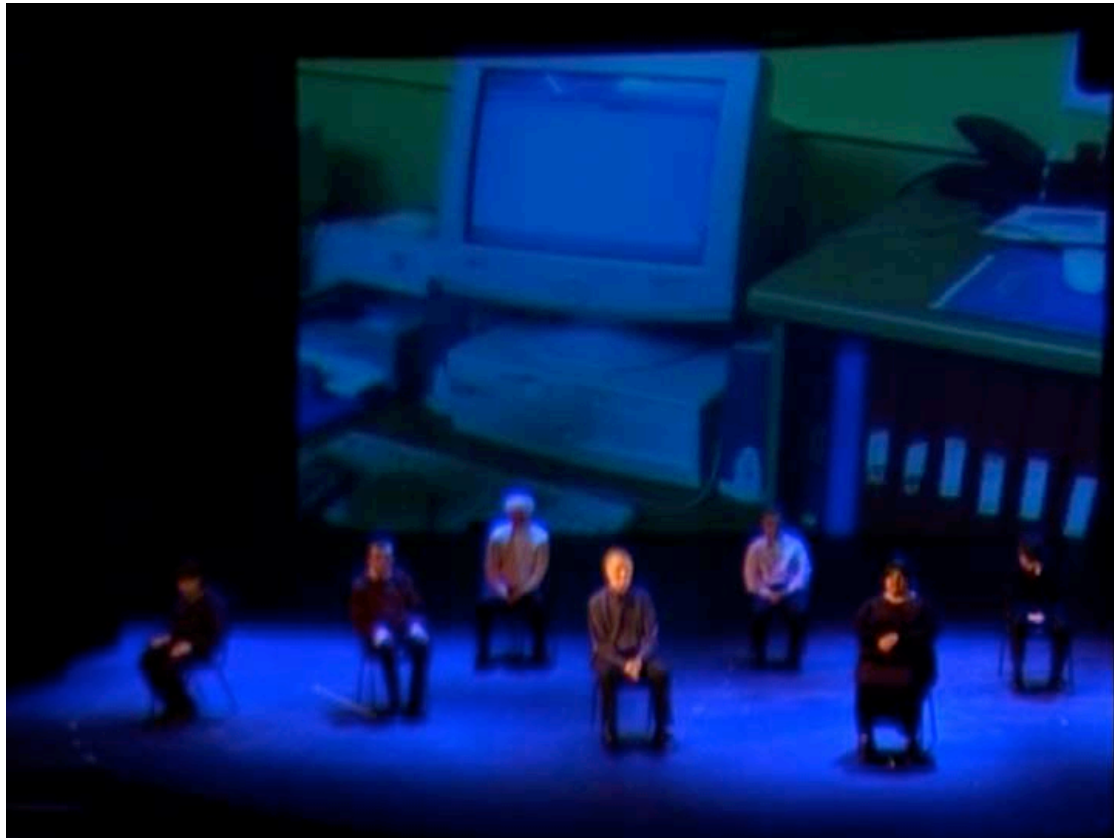
*Well, lads, did I ever tell ye of the funny incident the day I went to Knocknagoshel Post Office to collect my pension. It was my first day with my guide dog, Yale, so in my excitement, I dropped my pension book. I picked it up and soon we were on our way. I will have to take great care as its my first day with Yale, so I'll have to acquaint him with the familiar sounds in the landscape that will help us find the village Post Office. So, when I came to Starry's Cross, I said: Yale, that's the waterfall boy, take care here now, we are moving out to a real road. Good boy. Good boy. Lead on. Oh my God, those old briars and bushes, they tear into my hands and into my clothes. How I wish to God the owner would cut them back. But, as they say down in the local pub, he'd hardly let you eat the blackberries off it, let alone to cut the briars! That's the story of the crows at the crossroads in Knocknagoshel, Yale. Take care, boy. We must take more care. The footpaths have holes. Do you hear the sounds of children playing in the nearby schoolyard, Yale? They're calling out to you, boy. You are a bit of a celebrity around here now. Good boy. That's Murphy's dog. Got to cross the road here now. Oh, good morning Johanna. By God, that must be Dolores. Those two haven't talked for years. Come on, boy. Lead on. The sounds of voices coming and the door banging means we must be near the Post Office. Find the door, boy. Find the door, boy. Good dog, Yale. Oh, good morning L. Good morning, Sheila. There's the book, craythur. Did you get a big increase in your pension lately, L? Ha, if it's written down there Sheila, I must have! I'm not the man to refuse money! Ha, I'm sorry I won't be able to pay you out all the money that's in this book, L. First Prize €3,000. Second Prize €2,000. Third Prize €1,000. Oh Mother of God, Sheila girl, that's a book of raffle tickets I took. I'll see you some other day. Come on, Yale boy. Find the door. I'm afraid it's a prayer in the village chapel today instead of a pint in my local pub, as usual. That's the sound of the Angelus, Yale craythur. If we hurry on home, we should be down in time for dinner.*

The **second motif of Living Consciously** is apparent as the learners demonstrate the technology that ensures their capacity to integrate in modern life. TK explains (DVD 5 – S5a) below: *Technology makes sure that we, just like you, are part of the modern world.*



**Scene 5: (DVD 5 – S5a)**

A large screen shows the learners operating the following adaptive technology: A talking mobile phone, watch, computer, microwave, kitchen scales, a Braille and Speak machine and a Goal Ball with sound (DVD 5 – S5b below).



**DVD 5 – S5b**

TK continues: *And when the technology fails, as it sometimes does, we can always rely on our other senses. This means that we have a 'Plan B'!!*

L, in profound thought, says: *And through the eyes of our friends, we will always see.*

Photos depicting learners and tutors undertaking various activities are shown in the background, to the accompaniment of the theme tune, 'Port and tSuaimhnis'. Two of these photographs are included below (DVD 5 – S5c and S5d).



**DVD 5 – S5c.** Friendship on a group outing.



**DVD 5 – S5d.** Enjoying a bird walk in the town park.

TK reminds the audience of their experience again, as he asks: *What's it like to be blind?* The learners pick up his question and repeat it in hushed tones, until it naturally fades away, bringing the performance to a conclusion.

Following the performance, the adult education officer facilitated a discussion between the performers and the audience. Issues regarding difficulty in navigating the streets because of obstacles created by sighted people, were discussed. For example, parking on footpaths and leaving dustbins in the middle of the streets, which create difficulty for people trying to navigate with a white cane. Members of the audience reflected on the fact that they never think, as they act in these ways. One woman, who worked in the school attended by the learners spoke of the level of concentration required to navigate the environment without sight. She reflected: “We never knew it was so hard for ye. We never realised”. The learners had a much more overt aim of wanting the audience to learn from this performance, but also to learn with them, thus enabling the co-creation of knowledge.

A journalist with the local Kerryman newspaper spoke of how enjoyable as well as informative the performance was for him. McAdams (1993) highlights the point that our lives connect to those of others and our myths to other myths (p. 113). This is discussed in chapter three. This journalist, now deceased, followed up on his comments with an article in the paper the following week. He pointed out the necessity to develop greater awareness of the needs of others. He summarised the message of the learners saying that “ it was one of challenge to the rest of us: a challenge to be aware of the obstacles to normal living that we unconsciously place in the way of others”.

He also commented on the growth of self-confidence in the learners throughout the five stages of the ‘Hidden Voices from the Dark’ project, and the educational value of their work for the general public:

Most of the participants had been involved in previous such productions and it was interesting to observe how they had grown in self-confidence. As well as using dialogue, they used sound and visual aids to give their audience an insight into their lives as they go about their daily routine of dressing,

working, walking shopping or gardening. Their dialogue was as much an education for the audience as it was an entertainment.

The session concluded with suggestions for future discussions. The learners and the audience adjourned to the foyer for tea and coffee. This was a custom following each performance and allowed for greater connection between the learners and the general public.

My awareness of the depth of the relationship between the learners and the natural world grew with each phase of the project. Cajete (2000) states that: “In the perceptions of many native cultures, their landscapes are seen as metaphoric extensions of their bodies” (p. 185). Everything that is alive is imbued with spirit. This relationship can be traced through the different phases of the project, for the learners, from the development of their awareness of the space in which all life is lived, becoming like seeds in the ground and growing through and towards the light of the sun, to forming their bodies into a holy well to enable healing for each other, to finding a connection in a personal and collective way with nature, to connecting with each other and the ‘other’ in community through words spoken from their hearts, to this phase where reliance on an internal dialogue with nature guides them through their daily journeys. Cajete (2000) speaks of indigenous people experiencing “nature as part of themselves and themselves as part of nature (p. 186). L, in his story illustrates the interconnectedness between human, animal and environment, when he speaks of needing to acquaint his guide dog with the familiar sounds in the landscape that will help them both find the village Post Office – hearing the waterfall, painfully feeling the briars and bushes, hearing the sounds of children. Without sight, the learners are dependent on a relationship with the environment to navigate from one place to another. As they move through the landscape they are waiting for the sound, once they hear it, they acknowledge it: “So, when I came to Starry’s Cross, I said: Yale, that’s the waterfall boy, take care here now, we are moving out to a real road. Good boy. Good boy. Lead on”.

The learners highlight the advantages of modern adaptive technology for them, in this performance. But, they are aware that it can sometimes let them down and may cut

them off from nature and place. However, they do not allow this to happen. In highlighting the importance of these indigenous ways of knowing and using them in new ways in living and learning they open up the possibility of creating an 'indigenous postmodern' way of being in the world.

But, this was not the end of the journey for the learners. Deeper layers of 'self' were pressing for expression and these are illuminated in the next chapter.