

The ‘Bank of Hope’

The impact of performing arts activities on primary school pupils’ social and emotional wellbeing

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Promoting theatre and dance for children and young people.

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Introduction

Immerse was a three-year project run by Imagine, Scotland's national organisation that promotes, develops and celebrates theatre and dance for children and young people.

From 2019 to 2022, Immerse worked with Edinburgh primary schools in areas of high deprivation to deliver a range of performing arts activities. This report evidences the benefit that Immerse had on the social and emotional wellbeing of the pupils who took part.

Project details

Immerse was a multi-year programme which embedded high-quality theatre, dance and creativity in schools who need it most. From 2019-2022, Imagine developed long-term relationships with primary schools in areas of high deprivation in Edinburgh including Brunstane, Muirhouse and Wester Hailes.

Each school year, the Immerse programme included the following activities:

- An immersive theatre adventure by [Punchdrunk Enrichment](#) where the normal school environment was transformed into a place of mystery and wonder. The three projects were [The Lost Lending Library](#), [A Small Tale](#), and [The Vanishing Land](#).
- A 10-week artist residency, where two artists worked with a year group to explore particular topics or themes, developing pupils' creativity, confidence and self-expression. Videos from the residencies are available on the Imagine website, for example films from [Year 3 at Craigmoynton](#) and [Year 3 at Canal View](#).
- A visit to an Edinburgh International Children's Festival performance, with subsidised transport available to every school.
- A four-day Summer Project, with 2-3 artists in each school leading creative explorations with children.

Additional activities also took place in Year 3. These activities included: participation in online workshops with artists' works in progress, workshops to support the development of a new digital resource for teachers; participation in a year-long residency on climate change; and performances in school of Mixed Up by Katy Wilson and Starcatchers.

Participation data

In total, Immerse reached **5,419 children** through the activity described above. Immerse reached 4,439 children through the core activity, and a further 980 children through additional activity in year 3.

In Year 1 and 2 (2019/20 and 2020/21), 6 schools in Edinburgh were involved with Immerse: Brunstane Primary, Canal View Primary, Craigmoynton Primary, Forthview Primary, St David's R.C. Primary and St Ninian's R.C. Primary.

In Year 3 (2021/22), four new schools also took part, including three schools exclusively for pupils with additional support needs: Corstorphine Primary, Oaklands School, St Crispin's School and Woodlands School.

The tables below show the number of pupils who took part in each activity.

Core activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Punchdrunk Enrichment	1,217	252	252	1,721
Artist residency (10 weeks)	269	192	192	653
Summer project		192	278	470
Ideas fund online and physical art packs ¹	171			171
Edinburgh International Children's Festival		563	861	1,424
Total	1,657	1,199	1,583	4,439

Additional activity	Year 3
Mixed Up: In school performance	770
In the Hush of the Gloaming: Year-long artist residency on climate change (St Ninian's RC Primary)	60
onTAP performances: Attendance of performances and workshops contributing to development of onTAP, an online performance resource	90
Creatures: Workshops with artists Lewis Hetherington and Sam Hardie for research & development of a new performance	60
Total	980

School demographics

Immerse targeted primary schools in areas with high levels of deprivation. Figures for each school are listed below. ¹

The core six schools who took part had an average of 61% of pupils from SIMD1 postcodes (where SIMD1 reflects the 20% most deprived postcodes in Scotland) and 34% of pupils in P5-7 receiving free school meals.

¹ An online project and physical art packs were delivered instead of the Summer Project in Year 1 (2019/20) due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figures for the core 6 Immerse schools are listed below.

		Free School Meals	Roll by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020									
School Name	Pupil roll	% of P5-P7 on FSM	SIMD 1	% SIMD1	SIMD 2	% SIMD2	SIMD 3	% SIMD3	SIMD 4	% SIMD4	SIMD 5	% SIMD5
Brunstane Primary	239	34%	146	61%	25	10%	16	7%	40	17%	12	5%
Canal View Primary	337	48%	276	82%	c		34	10%	c		14	4%
Craigroyston Primary	313	32%	239	76%	37	12%	32	10%	5	2%	0	0%
Forthview Primary	401	45%	201	50%	180	45%	14	3%	6	1%	0	0%
St David's RC Primary	338	17%	193	57%	95	28%	43	13%	c		c	
St Ninian's RC Primary	215	28%	105	49%	34	16%	48	22%	18	8%	10	5%
Average across core 6 schools	307	34%	193	63%	74	22%	31	11%	17	4%	7	3%

Four additional schools took part in Immerse Year 3, including three schools for pupils with additional support needs:

		Free School Meals	Roll by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020									
School Name	Pupil roll	% of P5-P7 on FSM	SIMD 1	%	SIMD 2	%	SIMD 3	%	SIMD 4	%	SIMD 5	%
Corstorphine Primary	570	n/a	7	1%	13	2%	43	8%	80	14%	427	75%
Oaklands School	42	100%	6	14%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	24%	17	40%
St Crispin's School	54	100%	23	43%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9	17%	10	19%
Woodlands School	82	29.3%	17	21%	15	18%	8	10%	9	11%	33	40%

Imaginate is committed to supporting Black pupils, pupils of colour, pupils who have experienced migration and D/deaf and/or disabled pupils. We recognise that these pupils often experience particular disadvantages in the school system and in wider society, due to systemic inequalities.

The core six Immerse schools have an average of 58% of pupils with additional support needs, 30% of pupils who have English as an additional language, and 24% of pupils from a minority ethnic background².

School Name	Pupil roll	Additional Support Needs		English as additional language		Ethnicity					
		Pupils with an ASN	Percentage	Pupils with EAL	Percentage	White British	% White British	White Other	% White Other	Minority Ethnic	% Minority Ethnic
Brunstane Primary	239	107	45%	26	11%	175	73%	23	10%	35	15%
Canal View Primary	337	198	59%	73	31%	222	66%			77	23%
Craigroyston Primary	313	161	51%	68	28%	206	66%			69	22%
Forthview Primary	401	315	79%	144	60%	207	52%			125	31%
St David's RC Primary	338	207	61%	193	81%			191	57%	108	32%
St Ninian's RC Primary	215	120	56%	72	30%	92	43%	77	36%	46	21%
Average across 6 schools	307	185	58%	96	30%	180	60%	97	34%	77	24%

In year 3 of the project, four new schools also took part in Immerse, including three schools where 100% of pupils have additional support needs. No ethnicity data was reported for Oaklands School. The average number of pupils from a minority ethnic background of the remaining 3 schools is 24%.

School Name	Pupil roll	Additional Support Needs		English as additional language		Ethnicity					
		Pupils with an ASN	Percentage	Pupils with EAL	Percentage	White British	% White British	White Other	% White Other	Minority Ethnic	% Minority Ethnic
Corstorphine Primary	570	201	35%	58	10%	392	69%			140	25%
Oaklands School	42	42	100%	7	17%						
St Crispin's School	54	54	100%	8	15%	29	54%	6	11%	19	35%
Woodlands School	82	82	100%	5	6%	68	83%	5	6%	9	11%

² Scottish Government data reports on the total number of pupils from a minority ethnic background, which includes African, Asian (Chinese, Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Other), Black, Caribbean, Mixed or multiple ethnic groups, and Other.

Impact on social and emotional wellbeing

Pupils' social and emotional wellbeing consistently emerged as a theme in feedback about Immerse, with frequent comments on how pupils improved their confidence and collaborative working as a result of being involved in the project.

Context

The positive impact that Immerse had on pupil wellbeing contributes to Scottish Government policy to support young people's wellbeing in order to help them achieve their full potential in education and beyond.²

The Scottish Government recognises that children and young people's wellbeing is crucial for developing positive life trajectories and research shows that healthy social and emotional development in young people is linked to better educational outcomes.³ Children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Scotland are more likely to have low educational outcomes and to experience poor social and emotional wellbeing.⁴ The Covid-19 pandemic had a particularly negative impact on wellbeing for low income families⁵. For all these reasons, programmes supporting children's wellbeing are needed now more than ever.

Methodology

Feedback from teachers and artists was collected after each element of the Immerse project through written surveys. At the end of each school year, interviews were also carried out in-person or over video call with an independent researcher.

There were 85 responses overall, with 67 responses from teachers and 18 from artists. The table below shows the number of school responses for each survey:

School	Artist residency			Punchdrunk Enrichment			Summer project		Total
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3	
Brunstane		1		9		1		1	11
Canal View	3		1		3			2	7
Craigroyston	1		1		2	1	2	1	8
Forthview	2	2	1				2		7
St David's	1	1		17	1		1	1	22
St Ninian's	1	1	1	11				1	14
Total	8	5	4	37	6	2	5	6	67

Feedback from teachers and artists was analysed using definitions of social and emotional wellbeing from the Early Intervention Foundation⁶, findings from the Office for National Statistics report on children's wellbeing⁷, and themes which emerged from project feedback.

Survey responses were coded to the following categories:

- Self-esteem, including the following categories:
 - Confidence (general)
 - Confidence working in a group
 - Confidence being the centre of attention
 - Confidence in abilities
- Communication skills, including the following categories:
 - Collaborative working
 - Expanding social circle
 - Community building
 - Literacy & language
- Access to joyful experiences
- Motivation (including motivation to engage with school)
- Self-regulation (including concentration and behavioural problems)
- Resilience (the ability to cope and recover from challenging circumstances)

These elements of social and emotional wellbeing align with the four pupil capacities as defined in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence⁸ and the Scottish Government 'Getting it right for every child' policy⁹. The curriculum aims to enable young people to become successful learners (e.g. pupils should have the ability to think creatively and independently), confident individuals (e.g. pupils should have high self-respect and a sense of emotional wellbeing), responsible citizens (e.g. pupils should have respect for others), and effective contributors (e.g. pupils should develop resilience and the ability to work in groups).

Self-esteem

The biggest area of impact was on pupils' self-esteem, with 83 comments linked to confidence in various areas: confidence in abilities; confidence in group work; confidence in being the centre of attention, and confidence (general).

Confidence in abilities

There were 27 mentions of positive impact on pupils' confidence in their abilities. Teachers often remarked on how the creative projects gave children the opportunity to work towards a final product which allowed them to feel proud of the work they achieved.

The positive influence on pupil's confidence in their abilities was long lasting, with a wide-ranging impact. For example, a teacher at Brunstane Primary School commented: "There was a group of reluctant writers who really enjoyed this programme and were proud of what they achieved. I often refer back to this writing to remind them of their success."

Additionally, a teacher at St David's Primary noted that one of their pupils found the artist residency "particularly empowering. His artwork has always been good, but this project let him shine [...] His approach to work across the board has improved. He now sees his artistic

approach as an asset.” This feedback shows that performing arts activities can have a wide-ranging positive impact on children in multiple areas of their education.

Similarly, a teacher at Canal View described a pupil who is “often self-conscious” and “settles for doing the very minimum” due to a “lack of confidence in his abilities”, but became very engaged in a Punchdrunk Enrichment project: “It was wonderful to see him lose his inhibitions during the excitement... he was very keen to write multiple stories and added more detail than he’d ever done previously”. This suggests that the creativity in performing arts activities can allow children to let go of their insecurities and build their confidence in their own abilities.

A comment from a teacher at Forthview Primary School provides another explanation of how Immerse helped to improve pupils’ confidence in their own abilities:

“Children loved having a real artist working with them. Taking time to be creative with no pressure [...] was great to see the positive impact this had on the children. They took more chances with their work and were confident in sharing with work they were happy with.”

Allowing children space to be creative gives them the opportunity to explore, take risks and surprise themselves with what they can achieve. In turn, this improves their confidence in their abilities.

Confidence in group work

There were 14 comments relating to confidence in group work, for example a teacher from St David’s Primary said that a Punchdrunk Enrichment project “helped some of my shy children to express themselves and share their ideas.” Similarly, one of the artists who led a residency noticed a growth in children’s “confidence in expressing their ideas and contributing to class discussions and explorations.”

A teacher at Forthview Primary School noted that creative methods played a key part in increasing children’s confidence in group work: “the idea of using masks really allowed all learners, including those who are shy and more reserved, to want to take part. It allowed them to take on a different personality in a safe environment.”

Teachers repeatedly praised how inclusive the artist residencies were. For example, a teacher at St Ninian’s reported that “the class as a whole felt included and listened to and that their opinion was valued.” This allowed children to improve their confidence working as part of a group: “the confidence in some children to speak out, share ideas and take part in showing their small scenario grew enormously.”

Some comments overlap with other areas of social wellbeing, but this section focuses on comments which directly mention confidence when socialising. Comments relating to social skills without any reference to confidence were coded as one of the communication skills, such as pupils’ ability to work collaboratively (see page 11 for further analysis of communication skills).

Confidence being the centre of attention

There were 14 mentions of improved confidence around being the centre of attention. Comments on the theme of taking a lead role or having an audience were coded as confidence being the centre of attention. This differs from the comments around confidence in group work, which referred to smaller social interactions. However, sometimes one could lead to the other, such as for a pupil at Canal View:

“One of the children who always struggles with any kind of focus on her sometimes with people even looking at her across the room, went from strength to strength. At the beginning I was unsure she would participate at all due to being so nervous. But the build up from performing with various groups showing at once or with partners I think was effective. Then in the last few weeks she was even volunteering to be an example for the class which she never would have originally done.”

Additionally, this teacher commented that “it has impacted in class as well as [this pupil] offers answers more now”, which again shows the broad and lasting impact the Immerse project had on school engagement.

Other teachers reported an increase in confidence as a result of being part of a performance. For example, a teacher at Craigryston Primary noted that there was “a boy in the class who usually feels too self-conscious/embarrassed to take part in any kind of public sharing. I was blown away to see this child lead one of the more poignant dance/movement scenes in our final show.” The teacher also reported that after the residency, one of the children said, “I used to get stage fright and not want to be up the front, but I really enjoyed this experience and I feel more confident”.

Similarly, an artist who led a residency commented that “one child, who early in the project would insist he was 'too embarrassed' and didn't want to be in a show, danced in front of the whole school with a big grin on his face and wrote “thank you for making me feel confident” in my goodbye card from the class.”

Confidence (general)

There were an additional 28 comments which referred to confidence more generally. This included shorter comments which didn't contain enough detail to be further categorised, for example a teacher at Canal View Primary said the sessions “built the confidence of all who were involved” and “watching their confidence soar was an absolute joy to witness.”

This category also included comments which shows that Immerse helped pupils to value their own inherent worth and feel confident to be themselves. For example, a pupil at St David's RC Primary School said that the artist residency helped them to “see the big picture - we are bigger than we think.” This pupil's teacher noted that the residency “improved self-esteem for my class – [it] really helped them see how special they are - even from another universe they shine.”

Communication skills

Another significant benefit to children's social and emotional wellbeing was an improvement in their communication skills. There were 60 comments related to communication skills, which were coded to the following categories: collaborative working, expanding social circle, community building and literacy/language skills.

Collaborative working

One of the biggest areas of impact was on collaborative working, which is a crucial skill for children's learning. The Education Endowment Foundation found that collaborative learning approaches have a positive impact on children and can raise attainment¹⁰.

There were 23 comments related to collaborative working in the Immerse feedback, which shows that performance related activities are a powerful tool for supporting collaborative learning in young people.

A teacher at Craigroyston commented that "children came together and worked as a team" during their artist residency, which allowed pupils to develop their "collaborative skills". This was supported by quotes from the children themselves, such as: "I've learned that it's not just about me getting my part in the show right, but I need to help others as we are all working together as a team."

Similarly, a teacher at St Ninian's said that "the project allowed more group bonding and team effort. I believe it also made the class more accepting of each other [...] As a class they have learned to depend on each other more."

It is possible that Immerse had this impact by bringing new perspectives into the classroom, with artists who work in a different way to the pupils' teachers. For example, an artist who led a residency said that "despite the teacher's suggestions of leaving people out who were finding it difficult, they all took part and all performed in the final sharing [...] they learned to work with each other through lots and lots of collaborative tasks, which is something they previously had struggled with."

Expanding social circle

Another theme which emerged in teacher feedback was pupils expanding their social circle, with five comments on this theme.

A teacher at St David's said that a Punchdrunk Enrichment project "allowed the Primary 1s to engage with other children in the school." These creative projects are a brilliant opportunity to bring the whole school together.

Similarly, a teacher at St Ninian's commented that the most useful element of the artist residency was that it allowed "more socialising to occur with students that wouldn't normally socialise... it gave them a chance to work with children in the class they wouldn't normally be close to in free and dramatic ways."

These outcomes support findings in the Spark Change report by New Victory Theatre, which found/indicated that performing arts programming can provide a “buffer” to the declines in collaboration skills that are common among primary school aged children.¹¹

By expanding their social circles, pupils develop their social skills and experience a broader range of personalities and viewpoints. This can help them to respect others, supporting the Curriculum for Excellence aim to develop learners who are responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Community building

There were five comments linked to community building. For example, a teacher at Forthview Primary said that “the flexibility, enthusiasm and have a go attitude from all involved really built a sense of our own wee community.”

Making a film also gave the pupils at Canal View Primary an opportunity to directly engage with their local community. According to their teacher, “the film being set in their local community.... helped them feel value and pride in their community”.

An artist reported that taking part in Immerse helped a pupil feel “like a part of the class, something he was really struggling with at the start of the year.” This sense of belonging was important for this pupil’s wellbeing: initially he “faced multiple challenges and often really struggled in group sessions”, but “came away from the project telling us all how proud he was of what he'd done after he managed to perform with his whole class.”

In an in-person interview, a head teacher reflected on how taking part in Immerse allowed the whole school to connect:

“The whole school was able to embark on a journey together, pitched at a level they could thrive in. Each pupil was able to experience a unique learning environment within this whole school approach, creating opportunities for discussions and debate. As a school, we were able to share with the whole community the opportunity we had, involving them in the daily lives of the school.”

Literacy & language

Another large area of impact was on pupils’ literacy and language skills, with 27 comments. For example, teachers mentioned how artist residencies had improved “speaking and listening skills” and “verbal and non-verbal communication”.

Some of the artist residencies involved writing, which had a positive impact on pupils. The teacher at Brunstane Primary noted “there was a group of reluctant writers who really enjoyed this programme and were proud of what they achieved. I often refer back to this writing to remind them of their success” and a pupil at St David’s Primary said that their artist residency “improved my writing...I never wrote so much!”

In addition to the artist residencies, teachers found that Punchdrunk Enrichment projects were especially beneficial for children’s abilities in writing and telling stories, an important

facet of language and literacy. Punchdrunk Enrichment projects provided an immersive theatre experience and associated writing tasks. For example, the Lost Lending Library involves a fantastical library that appears in the school and children are asked to write stories for the library.

A teacher at St David's said "This project was the step towards independent writing we didn't know we needed. The children recognise themselves as writers [...] It gave them a refreshed interest in books and story writing" and a teacher at St Ninian's remarked "the short stories they wrote were some of the best writing I had seen."

Teachers also noticed an improvement in literacy and language skills in children who were struggling in this area. For example, a teacher at Canal View Primary noticed a particularly positive impact on a specific pupil:

"One pupil in particular, has slightly delayed speech and is often self-conscious when sharing ideas as it is not always clear or easy to understand what he is saying. It was wonderful to see him lose his inhibitions during the excitement of the unfolding adventures of Abe and Alba. This pupil often settles for doing the very minimum during writing tasks [...] During the project, he was very keen to write multiple stories and added more detail than he'd ever done previously. It really was wonderful to see."

Over 80% of teachers surveyed felt that a Punchdrunk Enrichment project had improved pupils' motivation for writing and that these improvements had continued beyond the project.

This impact was especially beneficial for pupils who were struggling in this area and/or had English as an additional language. For example, a pupil at St David's "improved in developing ideas, writing at length and challenging herself to go further as it appears some of the barriers to accessing writing have been lifted following this experience."

Another teacher at St David's noted that "it was incredible to see the children [with English as an additional language] use more English to try and explain to me what they had experienced."

This feedback suggests that the creativity and excitement involved in the project helped to remove barriers to developing their communication skills. This was especially impactful for children who were previously struggling with literacy and language, such as children who use English as an additional language.

[Access to joyful experiences](#)

Some of the most passionate feedback about Immerse were the positive comments about ways the project brought joyful experiences to the pupils, with 40 comments overall.

For example, a teacher at Craigroyston Primary said that "many of the children have spoken about [the artist residency] as their 'favourite moment of P1' when doing their end of year keepsake!" Additionally, an artist also commented on how the young people were "very fulfilled and chuffed after the performance."

The Punchdrunk Enrichment immersive experiences in particular left an impression on teachers, with many enthusiastic comments that the project was “awe inspiring”, “absolutely magical” and “full of wonder”. Pupils were described as being “completely fascinated”, “overwhelmed with excitement”, and “obsessed and totally in love with the whole project” by teachers from various schools. Brunstane Primary School in particular commented that “They’ll remember it for the rest of their lives!”

Teachers remarked how uplifting they found the project during the Covid-19 pandemic, which highlights how important it is to provide children with access to joyful experiences to help them overcome challenging circumstances. For example:

“It was just this magical thing that made such a difference to all of us. And I think especially just now [with Covid-19] it is difficult to hang on to hope. But when you start your year with something as magical as that, it gives you a wee **‘bank of hope’** that you can tap into. I think it’s a really meaningful way to bring hope and joy into people’s lives who don’t necessarily have that much hope and joy.”

This feedback shows that Immerse had a highly positive influence on the school environment and brought hope and joy to young people, which is crucial for their wellbeing.¹²

Motivation

There were 27 comments related to motivation, which was classified as children’s motivation to take part and/or engage with school activities. This is crucial for developing successful learners as defined by the Curriculum for Excellence pupil attributes, which aims to develop pupils who have “enthusiasm and motivation for learning” and “determination to reach high standards of achievement”.

Immerse had a positive influence on pupil motivation in a variety of ways. For example, an artist who led a residency reported that there were “some children who were unable to participate in the beginning”, but by the end of the project these pupils were “were fully engaged and flourishing.” The artists “managed to engage all the children, even those who were struggling to take part in the classroom.”

Another artist reported being told by teachers that they were successful in motivating pupils who normally do not engage with school to get involved in class, with a teacher commenting that “this is the longest [this pupil] has stayed engaged and present in a lesson”.

Similarly, a teacher at Forthview Primary suggested that Immerse was particularly effective in encouraging motivation to engage with school during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many children were struggling with motivation due to increased stress:

“The kids have enjoyed every part of it too and it shows in the fact that we always had roughly 22 or more kids join us online when in lockdown. Then when in class it was clear just how much they did enjoy our Imagine time. It created discussions, creative thinking and lots of fun!”

Teachers also reported that Punchdrunk Enrichment projects were effective in motivating pupils. For example, a teacher at St David's said:

"The children immediately became engaged in the experience. They found it to be unique and completely different to their daily and weekly routine. [...] This is something that I found to be miraculous and am extremely grateful for as I have been searching for ways to engage and inspire my Primary 7 class."

A probationer teacher at Craigoyston Primary said that the project "highlighted to me the importance of getting a good hook to get the pupils interested in the learning". Due to being in a "high area of deprivation" (sic), pupils in this teacher's school face "a lot of barriers to learning" and the teacher found that Immerse "is exactly what these pupils need to get engaged and immerse themselves in their learning."

These outcomes support research by the Houston Education Research Consortium, which found that educational arts experiences improved school engagement and pupil aspiration.¹³

Self-regulation

Immerse also had an impact on pupil's ability to regulate their concentration and behaviour. There were 9 comments related to self-regulation.

For example, a teacher at Canal View Primary commented that "even for those that struggled with concentrating, each week made improvements." Furthermore, a teacher at Forthview Primary "saw a huge development over the weeks with regards to the children being able to discuss ideas, organise themselves and create without arguments or silliness." This comment illustrates how pupils' ability to self-regulate can also impact their ability to work collaboratively.

Similarly, an artist led a residency with a group of children who "found it hard to work as a group, they often fought". But as the residency went along, "these characters in particular began to find ways to continue to be themselves but rather than tugging the entire room in a tangential direction or lashing out by taking a 'you don't understand me' stance, they married their own large personalities with a particular task or a moment of play." This comment shows how creativity and performance can help pupils to regulate themselves.

Resilience

There were 4 comments related to resilience and coping with difficult scenarios. Creative interventions and performance activities sometimes pushed pupils out of their comfort zone, but by maintaining a safe and encouraging environment, artists supported pupils so they were able to move forward despite the anxiety.

For example, a teacher at Canal View Primary described how one particular pupil was able to adapt and respond to her anxiety in a healthy way:

"HT initially was very anxious ... She was quite tearful at first. She seemed to be anxious about the focus being on her... She seemed to be gaining confidence each week... In the final week, it was extremely pleasing to watch her [...] perform with her peers to the rest of the

class. [When] she made a few accidental errors during the performance, [...] she confidently continued, adapting her dance to cover the mistakes. She was just in the moment, feeling the music and trying out new ideas whilst the class watched. This new-found ability to be flexible, adaptive and confident was wonderful to see.”

Similarly, during an in-person interview, one of the teachers described how the Punchdrunk Enrichment project helped pupils to develop their resilience: “For some of them, it really pushed them to their limits [...] it was such an important lesson for them that, although things can be really hard, you shouldn’t give up. Things in life are difficult, but you keep going and make it work.”

Conclusion/summary

Immerse had a wide-ranging and long-lasting positive impact on pupils’ social and emotional wellbeing. This is welcome given the context of increasing emotional and psychological health problems for young people in Scotland¹⁴, particularly for children living in poverty, who are four times more likely to develop mental health problems by the age of 11¹⁵. All children have the right to opportunities which support their social and emotional wellbeing, in order for them to reach their full potential. Programmes such as Immerse support Scottish Government goals to ensure children achieve good health and wellbeing.¹⁶

The findings from our evaluation of Immerse across three years echo findings from other studies which show that the arts have a unique potential to engage children experiencing disadvantage, particularly children who struggle with traditional learning methods and/or who are usually reserved¹⁷. Theatre and dance in particular can create an inclusive, non-competitive atmosphere in which children feel free to express themselves, experiment and make mistakes without judgement. At the same time these art forms develop valuable life skills like teamwork, self-regulation and resilience.

This quote from a head teacher shows just how important the Immerse project was to their pupils:

“What was really powerful to me personally was that, we live in an area of really high deprivation... you think you know what poverty looks like, but it really is dire for some of these children. And so, for these children to come in and have a first-hand experience of ‘magic’ was just mind-blowing. They are living tough realities... and at this moment, it was just a magical experience.”

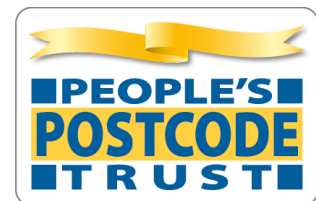
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