

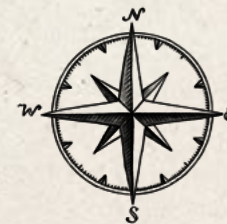


The Enjoyment and Impact of Immersive Learning





The Immersive Learning Collective



The Immersive Learning Collective brought together a group of teachers from 16 Primary Schools and a Special School from across London. The aim was to create a bespoke multi-year programme, to help teachers become experts in immersive learning, and to provide tools and training to independently plan and launch their own creative projects for children.



The Wild Visitor, photograph by Stephen Dobbie

2020-2021

The collective met online to explore immersive learning during the year, including a collection of immersive projects designed for home, hybrid and online learning.



The Wishing Cupboard, photograph by Stephen Dobbie

2021-2022

Part Two: Co-Creation

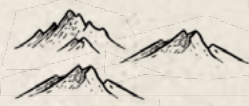
Early years teachers collaborated with Punchdrunk Enrichment creatives to create The Wishing Cupboard, a new Teacher-Led Adventure for 3-5 year olds about imagining new stories for objects.



2019-2020

Part One: Punchdrunk Enrichment Principles

16 schools explored the principles of Punchdrunk Enrichment's practice in CPD sessions and regular meetings, and were the first to experience Codename Atlantis, a teacher-led immersive experience about endangered environments, for Years 5-6.

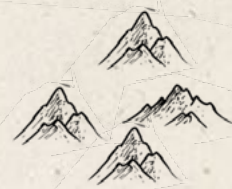


Immersive Learning Collective Celebration Day, photograph by Stephen Dobbie

2022-2023:

Part Three: Independent Design

The schools designed and launched their own immersive learning experiences for their pupils. They were supported by mentoring from Punchdrunk Enrichment creatives, conversations with their peers, and access to a programme of skills development workshops and regular meetings.





Immersive Learning Journeys



Immersive Learning Journeys was a programme for seven schools in the London borough of Greenwich which explored what happened when Punchdrunk Enrichment delivered a range of immersive learning projects over a period of three years, working closely with school staff and communities.

A Curious Quest **A whole school immersive experience**

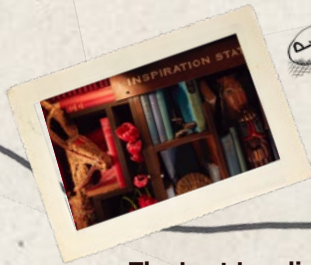
A venerable History Society lends a school an old Miniature Museum of curiosities in an effort to inspire students to interrogate their local history. But when Year 6 open a Broggan box displayed in the folklore section of the Museum, a creature called a Broggan escapes...

Students are tasked with creating treasures to lure the Broggan back to its box using their knowledge of local history and its artefacts.

A Small Tale **A Teacher-Led Adventure for years 1-4**

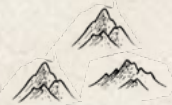
The teacher and their class read a mysterious old picture book about two mischievous and messy tiny people with a love of stories. But when they return to the book the following day the pages are all blank, except for two sets of tiny footprints... they discover that the tiny characters have escaped.

The students' mission: to create their own adventure stories for Abe and Alba to bring them safely back to their book.



The Lost Lending Library **A whole school immersive experience**

The Lost Lending Library leaps from place to place, on the hunt for more and more books for its collection. At 314 floors high and with 78 spiral side departments, it's the largest collection of books in the world. Alongside the classics by the world's more famous authors, it also houses some of the most precious books of all time: books containing stories written by apprentices of the library - which the children need to provide!



The Vanishing Land **A Teacher-Led Adventure for years 5-6**

The class begin learning about forgotten lands and disappearing environments. But the discovery of an old board game set on a lost island begins an all too real journey into a vanishing land. The game unlocks a portal to the lost island: only the students can save it before it disappears forever through their stories, knowledge of local geography and the environment.

Route 158 **A whole school Teacher-Led Adventure and immersive experience**

When a series of wayfinding stones mysteriously appear at school, pupils are unaware this is the start of an epic adventure. A travel company from another world is in peril, and urgently needs the children's help.

Running over two academic years, pupils must guide the travel company to their school, discovering a dusty old double decker bus which needs their imaginations to help refuel, and to discover and celebrate what culture means to them.

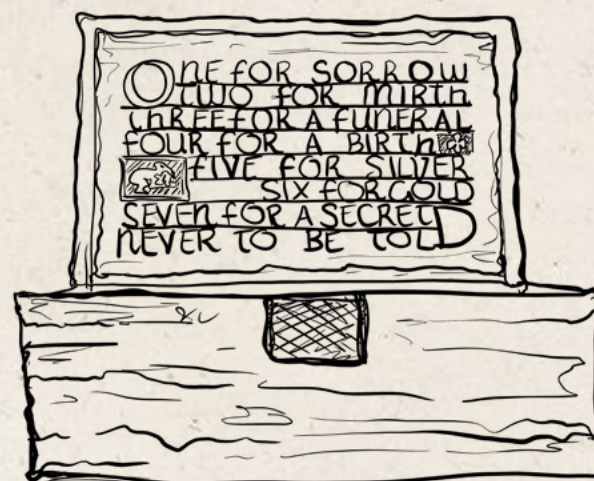
Photographs by Paul Cochrane and Nina Photography





CHAPTER ONE

Executive Summary

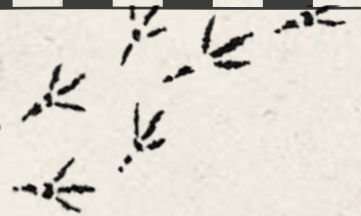


Immersive learning is a transformative, playful and experiential approach within education that has the potential to positively impact the lives of teachers, students and their wider community.

This short report summarises the promising findings of *Punchdrunk Enrichment's* 'Immersive Learning Collective' (ILC) and 'Immersive Learning Journeys' (ILJ), the way that this impact is being achieved, challenges the programmes have encountered and solutions to them, and finally recommendations for practitioners, researchers and policymakers for improving all young people's access to high-quality immersive learning experiences.



A Curious Quest, photographs by Stephen Dobbie



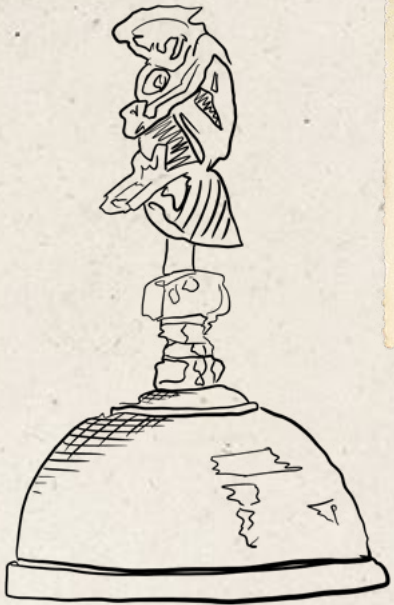
A Curious Quest, photographs by Stephen Dobbie

The impact of immersive learning

- **Creativity and imagination:** Immersive learning instils elements of playfulness, exploration and adventure within children's learning, as well as embeds creativity and risk-taking in teachers' professional development journeys.
- **Pupils' positive attitudes towards learning:** Participation in immersive learning programmes is associated with improvements in pupils' happiness, wellbeing, positive attitudes towards learning and pupils' ability to learn from mistakes.
- **Pupils' positive attitudes towards themselves and their wider community:** Pupils participating in immersive learning show marginal but promising improvements in their sense of agency, motivation, self-efficacy and positive attitudes towards their local community.

How this impact is being achieved

- **Joy:** Immersive learning is a joyful experience, making school a more enjoyable place to be and leading potentially to more positive attitudes towards learning and wider school life.
- **Better Relationships:** Immersive learning's highly social and inclusive dynamic could lead to pupils feeling more connected to their school community.



Challenges for immersive learning – and how these can be overcome

- **Research Methodology:** There were some minor limitations to the approach to surveying young people participating in ILC and ILJ that can be overcome in future research through including more qualitative data collection with these groups.
- **Year Groups:** Immersive learning was shown to be most impactful in earlier key stages, therefore indicating more of a need to carefully plan programme delivery around key stage two cohorts that have more academic demands on their curriculum.

Recommendations

- **Practitioners:** *Punchdrunk Enrichment's* successful CPD provision should be made more widely available for teacher practitioners, and school and trust leaders should consider trialling an immersive learning strategy to support pupils with key stage transitions.
- **Researchers:** More research is needed to investigate the further impact of immersive learning over time and in other areas of the UK. Connections between immersive programmes and Initial Teacher Education Providers should also be made to develop training for prospective teachers.
- **Policymakers:** Evidence on immersive learning should be gathered as part of the government's 2024-25 curriculum review, with further engagement from parliamentary groups and allied creative advocacy organisations.



A Curious Quest, photograph by Stephen Dobbie

CHAPTER TWO

Background



Countless leaders from the world of research, policy, and industry have stated that a broad and balanced education system is central to creating a healthy, prosperous and progressive modern society.

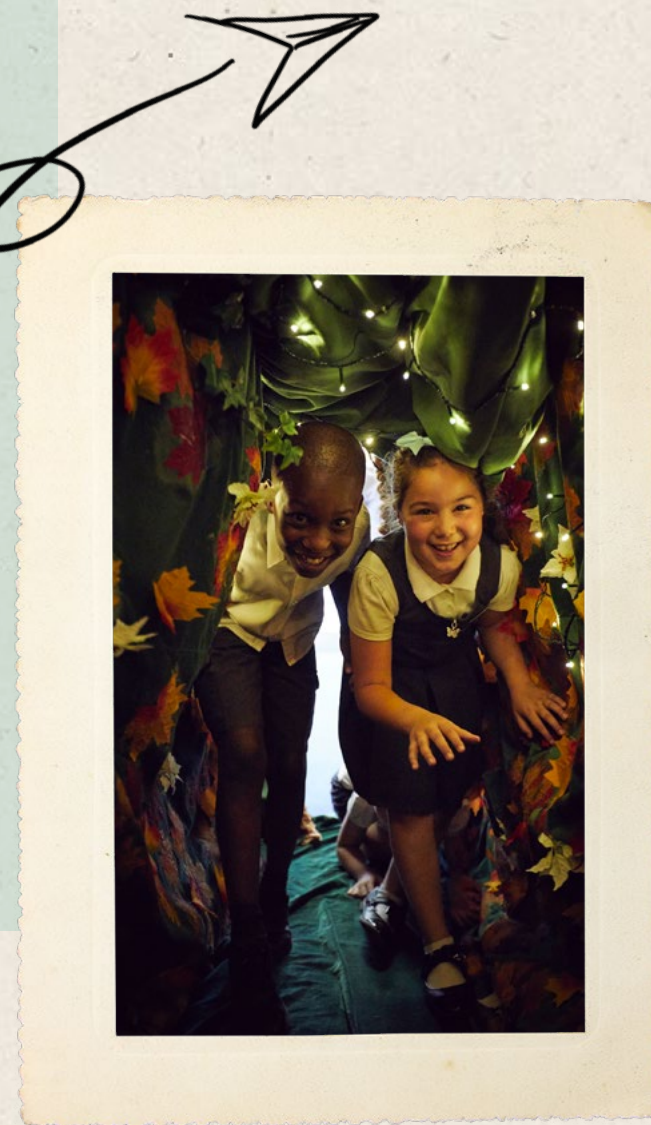
However, the rhetoric has not matched the reality for teachers and pupils in schools. Public funding cuts, high-stakes testing and a narrowing of the curriculum in England have seen a sidelining of creative arts learning for many schools – not least in the most deprived and underserved areas within this country¹. Amidst these challenging circumstances, cultural and arts organisations continue to build strong relationships and collaborate with school communities to restore creativity and imagination in children’s learning experiences. *Punchdrunk Enrichment* is one of these organisations.

2.1 Introducing *Punchdrunk Enrichment*

Punchdrunk Enrichment exists to bring joy and wonder to the communities they serve by producing unique, imaginative and immersive theatrical experiences. By reinventing the principles of *Punchdrunk* theatre company for an educational setting, *Punchdrunk Enrichment* has pioneered an approach towards immersive learning. Immersive learning is defined as involving a process of navigating playful pathways of enquiry which centres participants as agents of change within a fictional frame, and supports them to engage in imaginative and physical transformations of spaces and practices.



The Lost Lending Library, photograph by Mihaela Bodlovic



The Lost Lending Library, photograph by Paul Cochrane

1. Cultural Learning Alliance. (2024) Cultural Learning Alliance – Report Card 2024. CLA. <https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CLA-2024-Annual-Report-Card.pdf>

Case Study: An Immersive Learning Journeys project

Route 158 was a whole school immersive adventure taking place at ILJ Primary Schools across two years. Children discovered that Ermis Travel, a double-decker bus from a travel agency voyaging from a world called Weevillania, had appeared in their playground. Ermis Travel needed the children's imaginations to refuel the bus with 'immafuel' - fuel generated from imagination. The project used a long form immersive narrative spanning multiple weeks to engage the children with piles of wayfinding stones from Weevillania appearing in school, and audio messages from the crew of Ermis Travel, before the arrival of the bus. The learning outcome in the first year was for children to devise new and creative inventions and imaginative ideas. In the second year, the bus returned for a twin town ceremony between the school and its Weevillanian counterpart - the children devised their own responses to what culture meant to them, across literature, cuisine, art, musical anthems, and social values, and performed these to an audience of their families alongside the Ermis Travel crew in a playground parade.



Route 158, photograph by Nina Photography

Case Study: An Immersive Learning Collective Project

Eglinton School created The Printing Press, their independent design project, with their Punchdrunk Enrichment creative mentors as part of their participation in the Immersive Learning Collective.

Teachers were inspired to create a whole school immersive experience with learning objectives linked to art history and the creation of modern and abstract artwork.

In The Printing Press, children discovered that colour had disappeared from Weeviltown, a fictional town brought to life in Punchdrunk Enrichment's projects, and that Marcel, a local print worker and artist, was determined to bring the colour back to his home.

Paper aeroplanes began to arrive in different areas of the school, complete with a variety of messages. Slowly and surely they started to appear all over the site in the playground, flying into classrooms, in huge piles in the corridors. Some of the paper planes were made from posters, newsletters and other outputs of The Printing Press. In letters from Marcel arriving through the planes, the children were tasked with helping Marcel return the colour dust to Weeviltown.

Each year group was assigned an artist to draw inspiration from. Children created pieces of artwork based on the works of abstract artists and colour swatches to accompany their work.

Once the children had completed their artworks, their work and colour swatches were sent to Marcel so he was able to reverse print the colour dust and restore the colour to Weeviltown.

"I would encourage every school to have a go at doing something like this. The outcome and the experiences that children have has been second to none, and I think definitely something people should try, definitely something we will continue."

Sade Ferguson, Year 5 Teacher
Eglinton Primary School



Punchdrunk Enrichment's approach towards immersive learning has taken two primary forms in recent years:

- **The Immersive Learning Collective (ILC) 2019-23:** a professional development programme which provided opportunities for teachers to develop immersive learning techniques to use with pupils in their schools;
- **Immersive Learning Journeys (ILJ) 2021-24:** a programme embedded in seven primary schools in Greenwich, delivering a bespoke suite of existing and new projects responsive to school needs, from *Punchdrunk Enrichment* directly to pupils.

Both of these programmes have recently been delivered across London, with the ILC consisting of teachers from 18 mainstream primary schools and one Special Educational Needs (SEN) setting,

and the ILJ working across seven primary schools in the borough of Greenwich. All participating schools serve socioeconomically and ethnically mixed communities.

2.2 The report

This report by The Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY) brings together findings from recent evaluation of the ILC conducted by Dr Angela Colvert (University of Roehampton, University of Sheffield) and Dr Lisa Stephenson (Leeds Beckett University), and the ILJ evaluation conducted by [i2 Media Research](#) - a consumer insight and user experience research strategy consultancy based at Goldsmiths University of London. The report aims to tell a story about the impact and delivery of *Punchdrunk Enrichment's* work in schools, as well as what needs to be in place at a policy and practice level to support more teachers in using immersive learning effectively in the classroom.



CHAPTER THREE

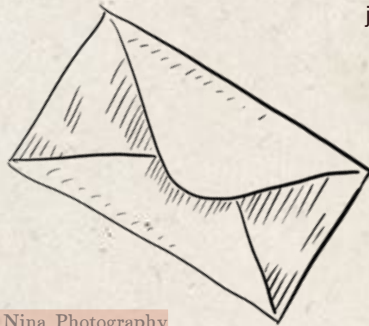
The Impact of Immersive Learning



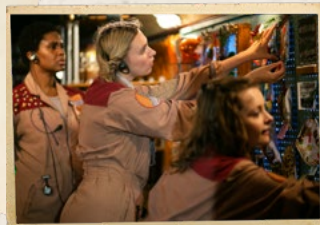


Our research indicates that the impact of the ILC and ILJ is visible in three primary ways:

- Creativity and imagination
- Pupils' positive attitudes towards learning
- Pupils' positive attitudes towards themselves and their wider community



Route 158, photographs by Nina Photography



3.1 Creativity and imagination

According to reports from participating teachers and pupils, both the ILC and the ILJ installed elements of playfulness, exploration and adventure within the children's learning. The programmes also embedded creativity and risk-taking in teachers' professional development journeys with support from artist facilitators.

"It was a complete unknown. I had no idea what I was letting myself in for, what we were getting involved in. But really got caught up on a way of excitement about making learning exciting, inspiring"

Senior Leader, ILC School



Participating teachers also reported how creating opportunities for young people to exercise their creativity and imagination through the specific approach of immersive learning had a positive impact on all children, especially for children with SEND, low attainment and behavioural challenges.

"It's really important that we have a creative curriculum that can inspire and engage all of our different cultures, but all of our children too that present particular behavioural difficulties. Also, those children that are in a different emotional state to others because they've had difficulties and hardships that some of us can't even imagine. So the creative curriculum is really important for our children and for our teachers as well because if they're not excited, the children aren't excited"

Senior Leader, ILC School



3.2 Pupils' positive attitudes towards learning

Using surveys of young people before and after they participated in the ILJ programme as well as interviews with teachers, both evaluations show that immersive programmes are associated with increases in pupils' happiness, wellbeing, positive attitudes towards learning and their ability to learn from mistakes. Learning from mistakes and viewing ability at tasks as something that can be gradually improved - part of the 'Positivity' measure in the ILJ - is associated with Growth Mindset and better academic achievement in the general education research literature².



Route 158, photograph by Nina Photography

Interviews with parents also highlighted the happiness and wellbeing improvements that young people experienced as part of the programme;

"He tried to explain everything inside the bus to me. He used many English words, so I didn't understand everything, but he said it was a good feeling. It was so nice and different"

Pupil parent with English as an additional language, ILJ, speaking about Route 158 (left)

Practitioners also reported that the techniques and approach they developed through the ILC programme allowed them to build engagement and enthusiasm for learning in their pupils, typically through their individual and collaborative design of teacher-led adventures for the classroom.

"The legacy [...] was the impact of what these projects can do - I think everybody has seen the engagement by children, the work produced being of a better quality, and children being more engaged. So, I think that in itself will be a legacy."

Teacher, ILC School



3.3 Pupils' positive attitudes towards themselves and their wider community

Surveys taken before and after participation in the programmes highlighted that pupils improved marginally in their sense of agency, motivation levels and sense of self-efficacy as part of the ILJ evaluation's 'Purpose' dimension. This included reduced external motivation and arguably a more intrinsic self-directed learning development, as pupils agreed less that they worked hard at school 'to please their teacher' after the experience. Reports from teachers also showed that pupils began to talk and think about their own identity and place within their community in a more sophisticated, creative way after participating in the programme.

"My class learned about culture on a deeper level, including their own. This made them feel proud and they wanted to share their identity with others in class. They were really engaged by all the activities and the build-up of learning, because there was a purpose to what they were doing. We were able to do lots of creative activities which were hands on, which really benefited lower attainers and those with behavioural needs to succeed"

Year 2 teacher, ILJ School, speaking about Route 158

Relatedly, reports from teachers also highlighted pupils' raised awareness and understanding of cultural diversity through immersive learning, with a notably positive impact on the communication skills and focus of SEND learners and those presenting challenging behaviour. Additionally, immersive learning's crucial principle of situating practice within their immediate environment meant that the programmes utilised opportunities to extend learning to their local communities - engaging parents and guardians, community organisations, museums and donors along their journeys.

"You hear from parents about dinnertime conversations and how the projects are so important to the lessons children bring home. It shows the motivation that their children have to talk together and work together... It also allows parents to imagine with their children, it helps with conversation starters"

Headteacher, ILJ School





CHAPTER FOUR

How This Impact
Is Being Achieved

While it is important to understand the impact these programmes have achieved, it is equally important to understand how they might be achieving this impact. At present, there appear to be two primary means by which Punchdrunk Enrichment's immersive learning programmes improve outcomes for pupils.

4.1 Joy

In both programmes, the fundamental elements of joy, magic and wonder were embedded into both pupil experiences and teachers' professional development through its signature pedagogy – with teacher practitioners reporting more confidence in risk-taking and experimentation to bring children's passion back into learning. The evidence shows that this approach to immersive learning produces joy in teachers and pupils. By making school a more joyful place to be, it is plausible that both programmes give pupils more positive associations with school and learning. In line with other research evidence showing that a sense of happiness and wellbeing in school is associated with improved learning behaviours and outcomes, joy could be a key mechanism by which immersive learning can impact pupils³.

"I felt really happy to see the whole school come together"

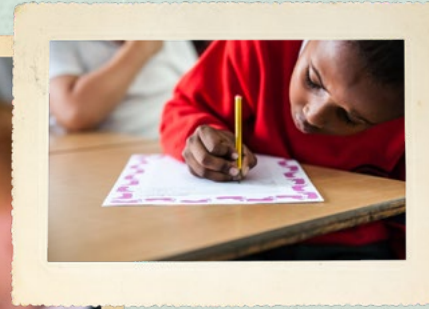
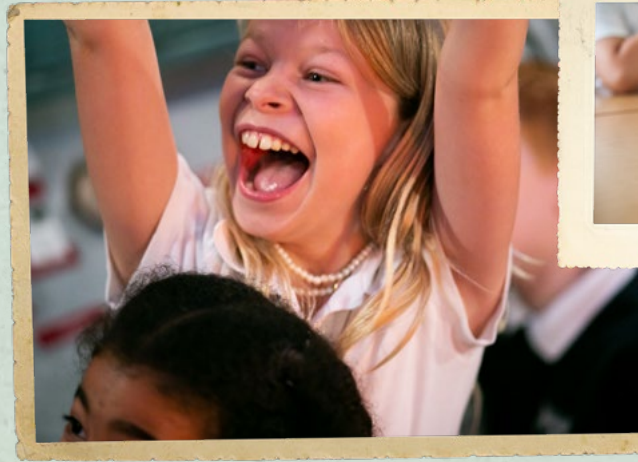
Year 5 pupil, ILJ School, speaking about Route 158

A Small Tale, photographs by Stephen Dobbie



3. Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre. (2012). *The Impact of Pupil Behaviour and Wellbeing on Educational Outcomes* (DfE Publication ref: DFE-RR253). DfE. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a747ef340f0b604dd7ae609/DFE-RR253.pdf>





A Small Tale, photographs by Stephen Dobbie

4.2 Better relationships

At the heart of immersive learning is a strong focus on engaging in imaginative and creative acts as a group. This leads to participating pupils interacting more with each other and their teachers, but also in new and unique ways. This suggests that immersive learning supports pupils to have a stronger understanding and greater social connection to their teachers and peers, creating a positive sense of belonging in their school environment.

Reports from teachers and *Punchdrunk Enrichment* facilitators also highlighted how the programmes led to more trusting relationships between teachers, school curriculum leads and senior leadership teams due to the risk-taking involved in supporting and delivering immersive learning adventures. This also suggests that immersive learning leads to more effective teaching and learning due to better relationships built across management structures.

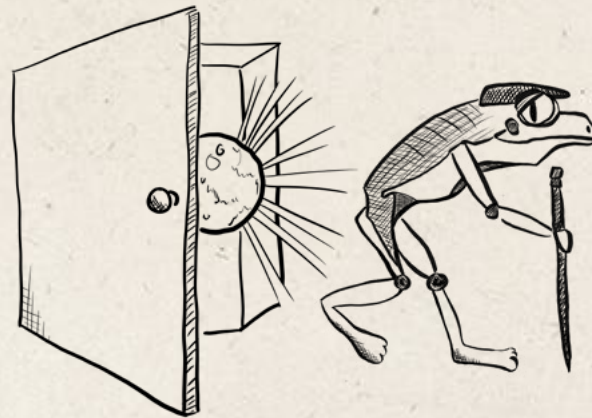
"I think it's about trust, it's about relationships, it's about collegiality. So, it's very much about teachers working together and again, sharing knowledge expertise [...] and going back to that permission to be adventurous and [...] take risks"

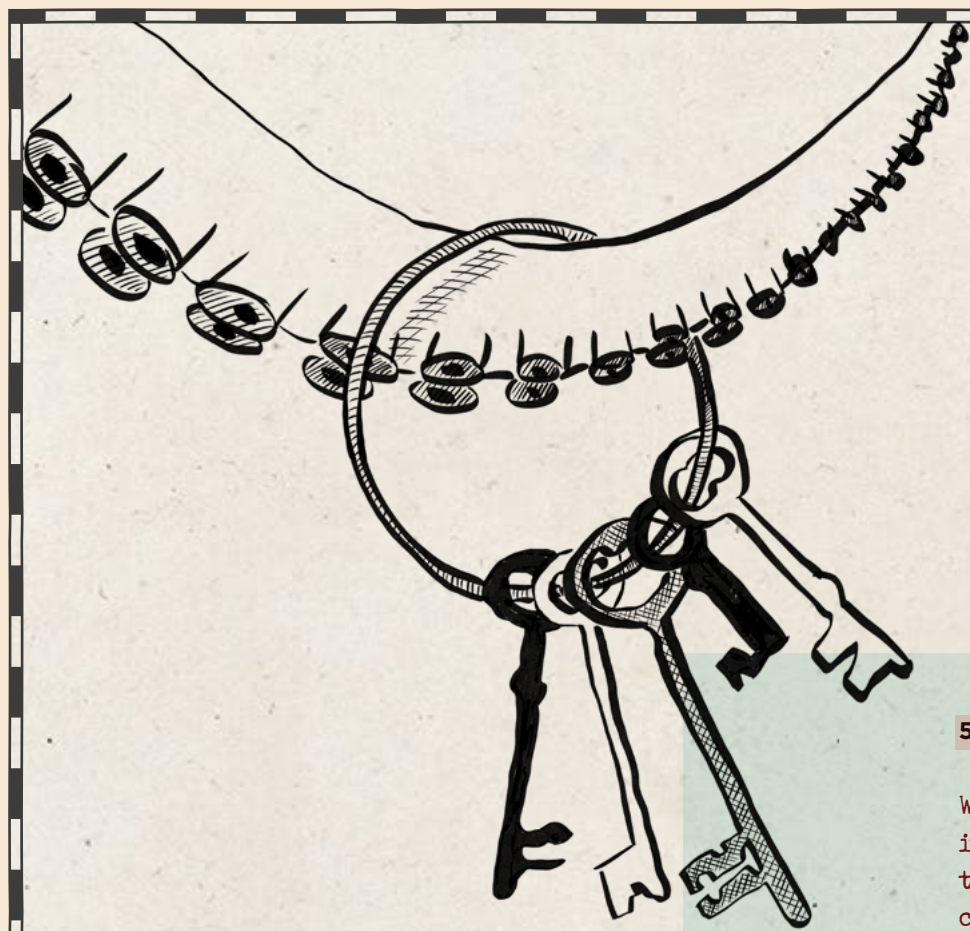
Senior Leader, ILC School



CHAPTER FIVE

Challenges for Immersive Learning & How This Can Be Overcome





5.1 Research methodology

While the before-and-after surveys in the ILJ evaluation showed that immersive learning is associated with many improvements for pupils, these surveys also showed decreases in pupils' ability to imagine, display creativity and to plan for the future.

As these survey findings are at odds with all the reports from practitioners, parents and other interviewees in the evaluations, there is a possibility that these surveys might reflect a shortcoming in the methodology. Therefore, future research into immersive learning should consider refining surveys and data collection, alongside drawing on more qualitative research.

Future research should also consider using a larger sample of pupils across different communities and regions than those in the present evaluation. This would allow future research to gain a more authoritative insight into the impact and effectiveness of immersive learning.

The Wishing Cupboard, photograph by Stephen Dobbie





5.2 Year groups

Evidence from the evaluations also shows the amount of impact associated with the immersive learning programmes varied depending on the year groups of participating pupils. Younger phases and key stages were shown to have benefited the most from the programmes (particularly year 3), with older year groups displaying more reduced impact.

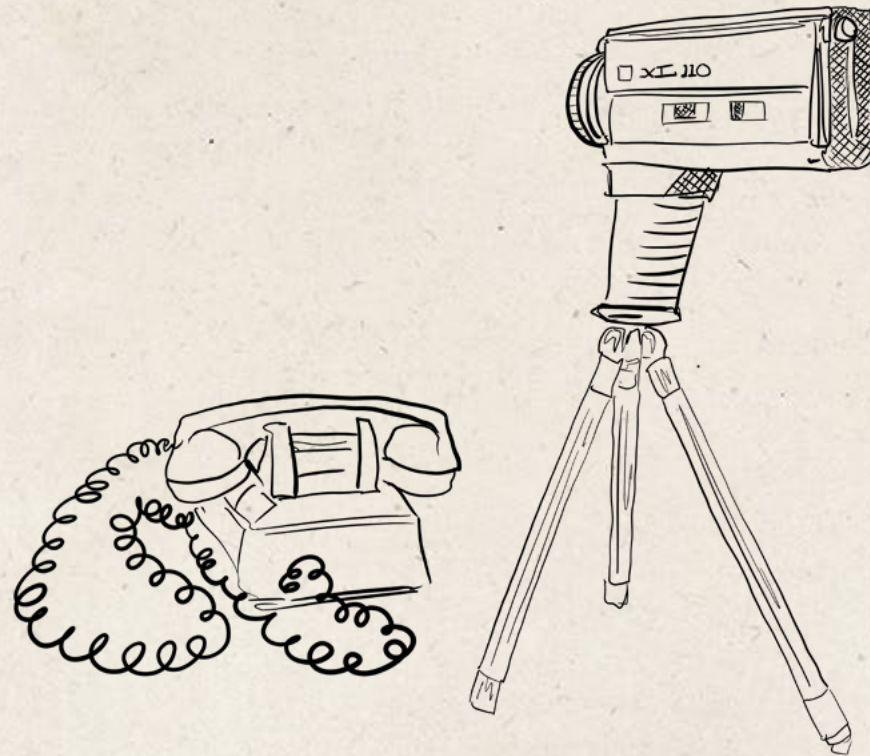
This could plausibly be due to the more academic nature of the curriculum among older year groups, alongside the added pressures of SATs for Year 6 pupils reducing how much older pupils can engage with immersive learning. As a result, schools that wish to use immersive learning should plan their delivery around periods of particular pressure on pupils, such as standardised examinations.



The Wishing Cupboard, photographs by Stephen Dobbie

CHAPTER SIX

Recommendations



We believe from the evidence that Punchdrunk Enrichment's programmes show exciting promise for immersive learning as an approach for improving pupils' imagination, creativity, positive attitudes towards learning and sense of belonging at school. As these are outcomes that we believe are desired by the whole education sector, we set out the steps we believe that practitioners, researchers and policymakers should take in order to improve all pupils' access to high-quality learning experiences.

Practitioners

- *Punchdrunk Enrichment* should continue supporting teacher practitioners and making their successful programme of immersive CPD more widely available, maintaining the strong elements of autonomy, agency and trust in teaching professionals.

- School and trust leaders with curriculum oversight should consider introducing and trialling aspects of immersive learning into their teaching, learning and planning - drawing on appropriate guidance and expertise so they can deliver to a high standard.
- Curriculum leads in schools should look at immersive learning to bridge the gap in transition between key stages one and two, leveraging its social/emotional benefits to support children through an often challenging time of change.



The Wishing Cupboard, photograph by Stephen Dobbie



Researchers

- Organisations delivering immersive learning should contract researchers to explore its impact in further detail, such as the impact of repeated immersive experiences within schools and its longitudinal effect on a range of young people's outcomes, including mental health and academic achievement.
- Future research into immersive learning should also draw on populations beyond those of current evaluations - for example in areas outside of London.
- Researchers, lecturers and course convenors involved in Primary Initial Teacher Training should consider partnering with *Punchdrunk Enrichment* and other providers of immersive CPD to build trainee teachers' capability to deliver immersive learning.

Policymakers and Parliamentarians

- The government's current Curriculum and Assessment Review should seek to gather evidence on the experiences and impact of immersive learning on pupil outcomes.
- Relevant All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), such as The Art, Craft and Design in Education APPG, should conduct further evidence collection on immersive learning, publishing their findings and advocating for its role in schools.
- Advocates of immersive learning should build a cross-sector network of organisations to engage in joint action in pursuit of widening access to immersive learning. Joint activity may include funding new research and writing submissions to government calls for evidence.
- Arts Council England and other funders should create a funding stream for more widespread trialling and delivery of IL programmes across the country.



The Wishing Cupboard, photographs by Stephen Dobbie



This report is written by the Centre for Education and Youth (CfEY), a research organisation with a vision of society that ensures all children and young people receive the support they need to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. As a team of former teachers and youth workers, our work bridges research, policy and practice across the education and youth sectors. We work collaboratively with an extensive network of organisations as partners to deliver a range of research projects, guidance and tools to help them support young people - with a specific focus on supporting young people from underserved and marginalised backgrounds. Our work creates connections, insights and actions that improve young people's childhoods and life chances.

Appendix

To find out more about how to bring *Punchdrunk Enrichment's* immersive learning projects to your school or education setting, visit punchdrunkenrichment.org.uk/projects/schools

To read the research reports referenced in this report, visit punchdrunkenrichment.org.uk/academic-resources

What's Next?

Try out Punchdrunk Enrichment's latest teacher-led project for schools, *The Creature Chronicles*

Read Punchdrunk Enrichment's *Immersive Learning Manifesto*



A Small Tale. Photograph by Stephen Dobbie

