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Immersion: Inspiring Awe and Wonder



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Everyone's got one. Fleetwood Mac's 'Rumours' is mine. The album you listened to on loop. A classic. Timeless. One of a kind. Never to be forgotten. Until, of course, it is. Consigned to the history books, filed in the back catalogue, swept aside for something equally beautiful and inspiring. Unless you have small children in which case it's the soundtrack to Frozen - those were some dark years.

But what a moment, months or years later, when you happen upon one of the songs again. Nostalgia hits like the smell of your nan's kitchen when she's making 'spotted dick' (yes it's a thing - serve warm, cut into thick slices smothered with butter and sugar - only a Neanderthal would serve it with custard). And in an instant you're back, reminded of just how good that album was.

At Whitchurch Primary, we've had one of those moments recently and been reminded how good it can be to relive the classics from time to time, injecting renewed vigour and enthusiasm. This time it was the turn of immersion days. You may know them under a different guise - engagement event, entry-point, hook into learning, catalyst for learning - you may even have a clever acronym. Whatever you call them, orchestrating a moment of awe and wonder that captures children's imagination and gives them an enthusiasm for an area of learning/subject/lesson is nothing new. And let's be honest, even the best of us struggle with finding one for long division. That said, it is something that the best teachers do well, day in day out. Individual lessons aside, we chose to focus on the immersion days that happen at the start of a new topic.

We turned to our friends at Glan Usk Primary to host us for a morning (for those who prefer something more formal, for 'friends' read 'Joint Practice Development Partner School'). Immersion days are something they pride themselves on, and do very very well. They worked with our entire staff to recap the whys, whats and hows of immersion in order to bring it back into focus. Staff left enthused and full of ideas ready to try out at the start of the next topic.

The charge was clear - this coming term - throw everything at your immersion day. Be as creative and bold as you like.

Cue January and a school full of classrooms that had received the makeover treatment somewhere between DIY SOS and Grand Designs. There was a land of make believe, volcanoes you could walk into, unhatched dinosaur eggs, underwater worlds, six different restaurants/cultural experiences each catering for a different world cuisine, research laboratories, actual animal organs, fitness labs, lifesize aeroplanes, indoor trees, robotics centres and trips back in time to when war had broken out and the blackout and blitz were in full force. It was incredible. If only you could capture that buzz of excitement,

awe and wonder.

This renewed focus on immersion reminded us of its great value and vital link to subsequent high-quality pupil voice.

Here's what some of the children had to say:

"I dressed up as Sonic! I liked the sharks in the water the best because they splash and they are scary!"

- Eddie, Nursery

"I liked building Humpty Dumpty's wall. We built it because he was sad and we wanted to help him be happy again."

- Arthur, Nursery

"The dinosaur egg was about to hatch - I could see the eyes through a small crack in the egg. OH AND THE T-REX TRIED TO EAT MY TEACHER'S HEAD!"

- Isla, Reception

"I was so excited, it was amazing! There were so many ideas, I loved it! I'm looking forward to learning about how the different animal skeletons work because they all have different shaped bodies."

- Ben, Year 2

"Everyone was so shocked when we walked in. My favourite part was feeling the real organs and body parts - they were slippery and squidgy! Now I want to learn about how animal hearts work compared to humans."

- Lottie, Year 3

"It helped me because we experienced things first hand and had so much fun. It gave us lots of ideas about what kinds of things we could learn in class."

- Seren, Year 4

"It was very surprising! I didn't know what to say. Mr Thompson was dressed up as a pilot. It was amazing!"

- Una, Year 4