

# AN EVALUATION OF THE 'ODDYSEA' TOUR

A PROJECT BY SENSORIUM THEATRE

Evaluation and report by DADAA Ltd

October 2014



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was prepared by community arts and cultural development (CACD) organisation DADAA Ltd. DADAA is a national leader in the provision of programs that promote social inclusion for people with disability and/or mental health issues. The organisation has expertise in the research and evaluation of arts and health.

This report captures the results from an evaluation of the Oddysea tour at two Education Support Schools, Malibu School and Kenwick School, and one Education Support Centre, Gwynne Park, during July and August 2014.

The evaluation consisted of two components:

- A Case Study Evaluation: by developing a framework for dimensions of engagement and completing observational analysis of Oddysea workshop sessions and performances.
- An Impact Evaluation: by using a survey that was developed and distributed electronically to participating Teachers and Educational Assistants.

Key findings included significant benefits for Teachers and Education Assistants with 87 per cent of respondents saying there were benefits to them as teachers and education assistants and 76 per cent of respondents saying that all students got something out of the program.

The most successful elements of the tour included the whole Oddysea environment, the live music and instruments, the workshops with the main characters, and the performances.

Observational analysis and feedback provides evidence that Sensorium Theatre can provide a multi-dimensional experience of engagement. Specifically:

- Staff respondents agreed that during Oddysea, students were being interactive–very interactive (100 per cent), absorbed–very absorbed (96 per cent) and learning (79 per cent).
- Students were absorbed and interactive with positive emotional reactions; to a lesser extent, they were learning with positive behavioral responses and cognitive engagement.

At Gwynne Park Education Support Centre, structure and behaviour management was noted as the biggest challenge and area for improvement with the most common suggestions being the use of smaller groups and shorter 30-minute sessions.

## ABOUT SENSORIUM THEATRE

Sensorium Theatre believes that all children can be transformed by exceptional creative experiences and that children with disability should be able to experience cultural opportunities crucial to their development.

Sensorium aims to create high-quality theatre that is accessible to young audiences with multiple disabilities by inviting them to touch, taste, smell, hear and see stories unfold around them within a sensory installation-style set.

Preparatory hands-on activities – where students become familiar with the story, characters, songs and storytelling methods that will be used in performance – are an important part of the this process. This takes place through a residency at a school.

Oddysea is the latest interactive residency and performance from Sensorium Theatre. During the residency, the performers, the environment and the characters are gradually introduced and the children are led through a sensory discovery in the storytelling process.

This process is known as ‘embedding’ and allows the performers meet the audience and learn abilities and communication style of each student, allowing them to deliver an individualised performance.

Over 2013 and 2014, Oddysea was performed for students at:

- Five Education Support Schools: Sir David Brand, Gladys Newton, Carson Street Independent, Malibu, and Kenwick Schools
- Six Education Support Centres in Kalamunda, Gwynne Park, Beldon, Joondalup, Creaney and Merriwa.



## BACKGROUND: 2013 EVALUATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ODDYSEA

In 2013, Disseminate completed a case study evaluation of the Sensorium Theatre residency at Kenwick Education Support School. The residency developed a new sensory theatre work called Oddysea for young audiences with special needs. The full evaluation report is available here:

<http://www.dadaa.org.au/download/SensoriumOddyseaEvaluationReport.pdf>

In summary the evaluation demonstrated:

- An embedded process of developing an individualised narrative and performance for the student audience and
- Further evidence of the benefits for students with complex disability who participating in sensory theatre.

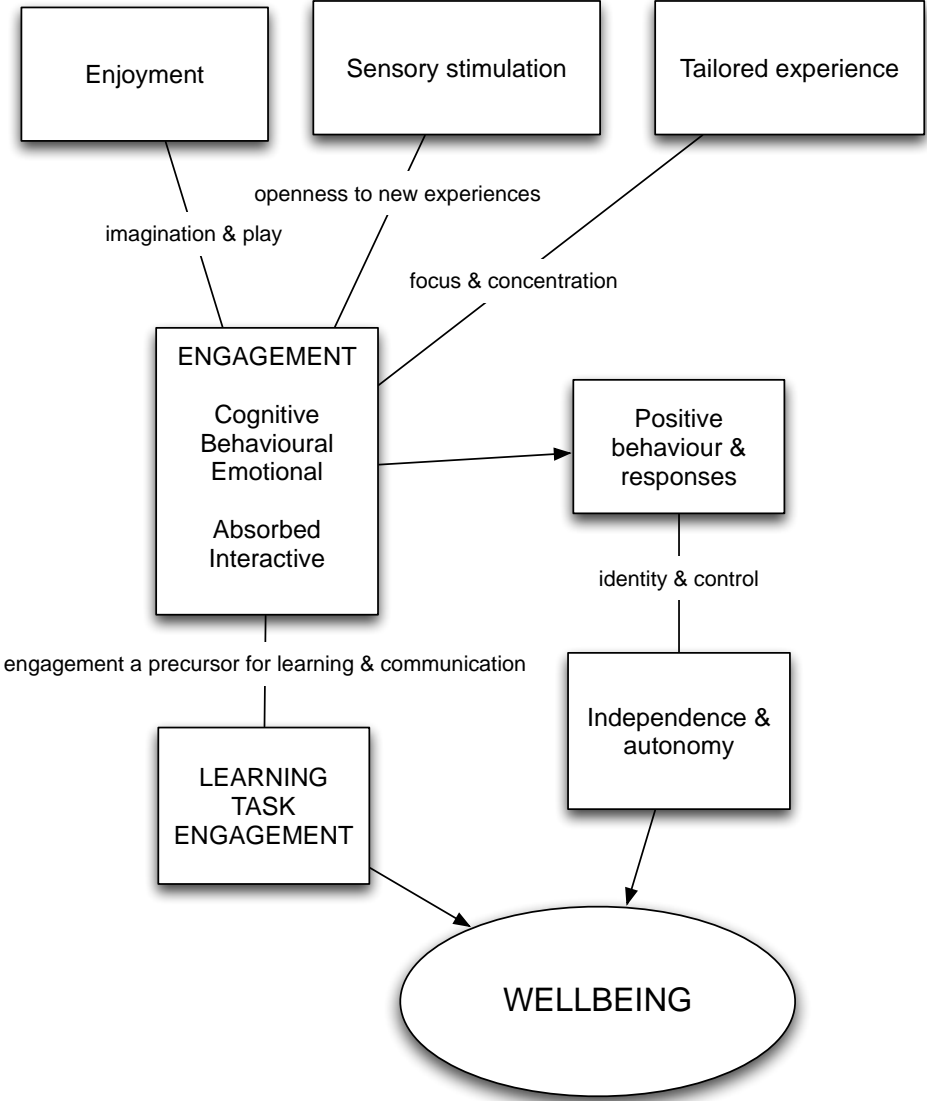
A theory of change model for Sensorium Theatre was developed by the evaluator and seen on the following page. This model builds on different types of engagement for students that are connected to learning and wellbeing and present in current arts and education literature. Namely:

- Learning task engagement, that focuses on more subtle cognitive, behavioural and affective indicators of student engagement (Chapman, E, 2003).
- Absorbed and interactive engagement (Young & Power, 2008 p. 14).
- Student wellbeing, in relation to the five ways to wellbeing, including: connecting, being active, taking notice, learning and giving (NEF, 2008).

Other potential areas that were recommended to explore further were:

- Strategies to gradually progress or “immerse” the student into the physical environment and installation
- School staff experience, including their input into tailoring the experience for the student audience.
- Changes to the school culture as a result of being involved in the residency.

**THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM FOR SENSORIUM THEATRE**



# EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

## KEY ACTIVITIES

The evaluation commenced in April 2014 by Disseminate, an evaluation and action research initiative run by community arts and cultural development organisation DADAA.

The evaluation consisted of two components:

- A Case Study Evaluation by completing observational analysis of Oddysea workshop sessions and performances, using a framework for dimensions of engagement
- An Impact Evaluation using a survey distributed to participating Teachers and Educational Assistants.

Key activities of the evaluator included:

- Developing the evaluation approach and methodology.
- Providing the information form to families of the students involved in the residency (See Appendix).
- Making observation notes both in-person and from video recordings of Oddysea sessions and the performance:
  - One workshop session and the final performances were filmed at Malibu School on 9 April 2014 and at Gwynne Park School on 14 May 2014.
  - The evaluator observed a total of four workshop sessions at Malibu on 3 and 7 April 2014 and at Gwynne Park on 7 and 12 May 2014.
- Investigating, developing and completing a framework for dimensions of engagement to assist with the observational analysis and organisation of results.
- Developing and distributing an electronic survey to Teachers and Education Assistants to measure the impacts of the Oddysea tour
- Collecting, analysing and organising data.
- Writing the report and publishing results.



## CASE STUDY EVALUATION: A FRAMEWORK FOR DIMENSIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

As stated by Chapman (2003), case studies generally attempt to place observations of engagement within the context of the environment and are concerned with the processes associated with engagement levels (p. 6).

In 2008, an Edinburgh-based two-year pilot project called Starcatchers aimed to explore the creation of theatre for young children by engaging an in-house creative team of theater practitioners and artists to devise theatre-based installations consisting of drama, storytelling, dance and song.

An evaluation of the project was carried out to explore the nature of the work and propose its potential impact on young children. For the purpose of the evaluation the term 'engagement' was defined as (Young, S & Power, N, 2008, p.14):

The moments when the young person shares intimate and mutual awareness with another person (in this case the performer) or is focused with others on a shared interest (the performance).

'Disengagement' is when attention moves away from any element of the performance.

The results from observational analysis demonstrated that there are two different ways in which children engage with creative performances with their key elements described (Young, S & Power, N, 2008, p. 24):

### 1. Absorbed Engagement

- Described children as 'transfixed'
- Direction of their of gaze and orientation of their body fixed on the dramatic action
- Moving bodies rhythmically in time to the music.

### 2. Interactive Engagement

- Explored the performance space
- Increased vocal communication
- Increased movement
- Interacted with the creative artists and with the props
- 'Imitated the creative artists, watching how they used the props then trying it themselves'.

Trowler (2010) defines student engagement as:

'More than involvement or participation, it requires feelings and activity [as] acting without feeling engaged is just involvement or even compliance: feeling engaged without acting is dissociation' (p. 5).

She cites Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris (2004, p, 62–63) who identify three dimensions and criteria to student engagement:

### 1. Behavioural engagement

- Demonstrating attendance and involvement
- Absence of negative or disruptive behaviour
- Active responses.

### 2. Emotional engagement

- High levels of interest or positive attitudes
- Affective reactions such as curiosity, enjoyment or sense of belonging
- Investment in and emotional reactions.

### 3. Cognitive engagement

- Invested in learning and development
- Attending to and extending mental effort in learning tasks encountered.

‘Learning task engagement’ is observed when students are engaged in learning activities, and simultaneously seen as a sign that learning is taking place (Chapman, 2003, p. 2).

Skinner & Belmont (1993) offer this this definition in the context of learning:

Children who are engaged show sustained behavioural involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone. They show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity and interest (p. 572).

Characteristics of high levels of engagement in learning, relevant to Sensorium include (Hume, K & Dunning, P, 2006, p. 6):

- Demonstrating enthusiasm, curiosity, and interest in the learning
- Interacting with self, teacher and learning environment in an active, emotionally connected manner
- Making independent connections, sometimes continuing with “work” after the “assignment” is completed.

The dimension of engagement framework, shown in the table below was developed to structure the observational analysis and overall results.

<b>Dimensions of engagement</b>	<b>ABSORBED</b>	<b>INTERACTIVE</b>	<b>LEARNING</b>
<b>Behavioural</b>	<i>Attention Focus Absence of disruptive behaviour</i>	<i>Initiates movement to explore the environment Increased energy Sustained involvement</i>	<i>Makes effective use of environment &amp; props Turn taking</i>
<b>Emotional</b>	<i>Positive emotional tone Shows interest in environment Expressed feeling through body language</i>	<i>Uses movement to express feelings Shares emotions &amp; moods Responds to characters &amp; props</i>	<i>Uses movement to express self Acts out emotions and moods Gets emotionally involved with story and characters</i>
<b>Cognitive</b>	<i>Concentration Responds to music Discriminates between different sources of sound and silence</i>	<i>Motivation Moving with purpose Stopping and starting to music Using musical instruments to create sound</i>	<i>Expresses ideas Making choices Autonomy Imagination Experiencing the story Communication / using language</i>

## IMPACT EVALUATION: SURVEY TO TEACHERS AND EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS

An electronic survey was developed based on the previous evaluation results, discussion with the Sensorium team and field notes from the four workshop sessions observed at both Malibu and Gwynne Park Schools in April and May 2014, respectively.

The survey was distributed electronically to Teachers and Education Assistants at Malibu, Gwynne Park and Kenwick Education Support Schools, following the Oddysea final performance.



# RESULTS

## PARTICIPANTS

Ten classes from Malibu, Gwynne Park and Kenwick Education Support Schools were part of the Sensorium residency. This included:

- Up to 120 students in pre-primary, primary and high school attending a maximum of four workshop sessions (“Crab”, “Turtle, Shadows” and “Jellies”) and one performance session, of maximum one-hour duration each.
- At least 18 Teachers and 63 Education Assistants were involved with the workshop sessions and performance.

The most common type of disability of the students involved is Autism Spectrum Disorder, followed by:

- Intellectual disability, such as Down Syndrome
- Attention deficit disorder
- Physical disability, such as cerebral palsy or global developmental delay
- Vision impairment
- Epilepsy.

The range of abilities of the students varied greatly:

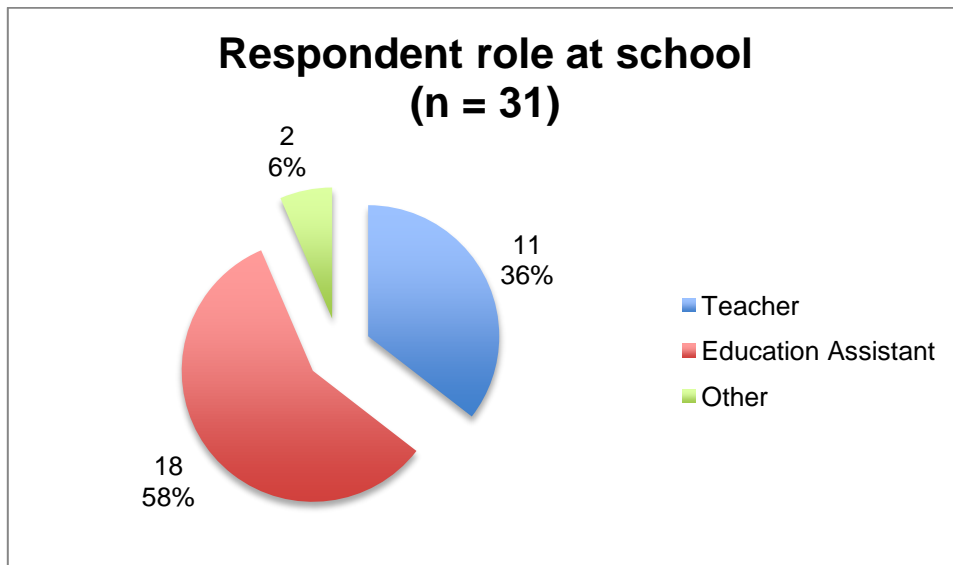
- Some students are non-verbal and use communication aids, such as picture exchange communication system (PECS).
- Other students are able to communicate and are developing their expressive language skills.
- Some students have challenging behaviours, such as difficulty focusing and maintaining attention.
- Some students have limited movement and mobility, using wheelchairs and needing a hoist to transfer.



## SURVEY RESPONSE RATE

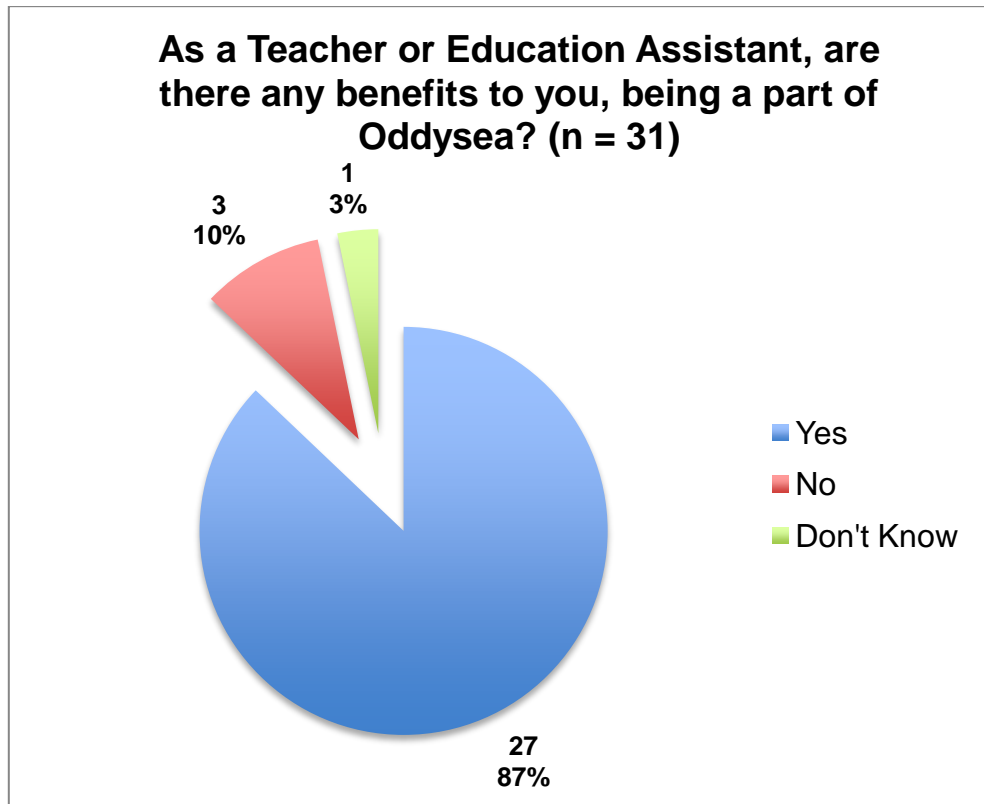
A total of 75 surveys were emailed to staff, with 31 respondents and an overall response rate of 41.3%. Most the respondents were Education Assistants (58%).

	Gwynne Park	Kenwick	Malibu	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Respondents</b>	12	5	14	<b>31</b>
<b>Surveys sent</b>	25	22	28	<b>75</b>



## BENEFITS TO TEACHERS AND EDUCATION ASSISTANTS

Most of the school staff respondents agreed that there were benefits to them being involved (87%).



**Comments related to this question indicate that staff learnt new and creative strategies to enhance student's sensory experiences and interactions:**

It is a great source of inspiration and ideas.

I picked up a few sensory ideas and how to incorporate them into our science classes. Made me more aware.

How [to] react gently, playfully and sensitively to our students' needs and disabilities, which helps reinforce our own behaviour and interaction with them...

The vast experience and knowledge the artists has inspired many and has motivated them to make drastic changes to their current programs to accommodate for students with high complex needs...

Many of the textures, feels, sights and sounds were new, innovative and creative, something I think the students could benefit from in their own homes or at our school in a special sensory room, particularly for many of the textures.



**Comments to the question ‘As a Teacher or Education Assistant, why did you like being a part of Oddysea?’ demonstrate the significance of both students and staff changing their environment and routines as well as promoting new experiences and imagination:**

I liked being part of Oddysea as it was something different and very intriguing.

I was able to see [the students] in a different setting and learning environment.

It was great to see the students interacting and enjoying themselves outside a classroom setting.

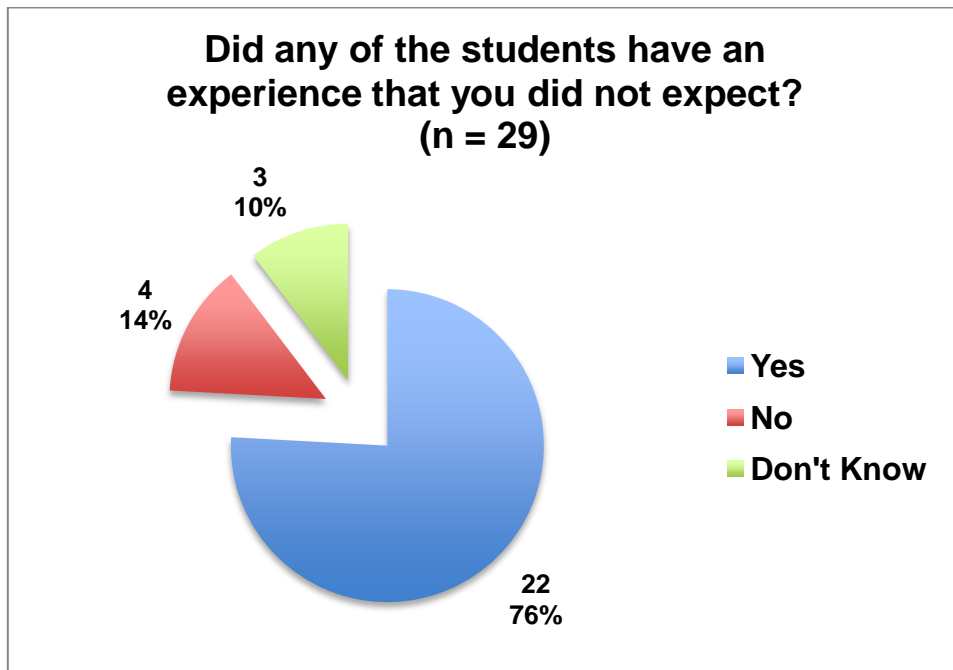
Time out of the classroom, change in routine.

I do know that it was very 'different' for some other EAs and teachers, who had not been exposed to such creative work, interactive environments and make-believe...

It was a magical place to be and to see the delight on the faces of our students, and the expressive sounds they made, it was something I have not experience during my 10 years as an EA.



Just over three-quarters of agreed that some students have an experience that they did not expect (76%).



**These additional comments demonstrate the level of surprise by school staff, in particular improved attention, engagement and positive reactions:**

Some of the very active students were very contented to listen & interact!!! Very surprising!!

We expected the students to be engaged and react to the entire experience but not to level that we all witnessed!! Some tear jerking moments were had for sure!

The students were unbelievable the way they connected with the performers and all the instruments and the sea creatures is one memory I wont forget for a long time.

Some students with usual limited attention span were absorbed for long lengths of time.

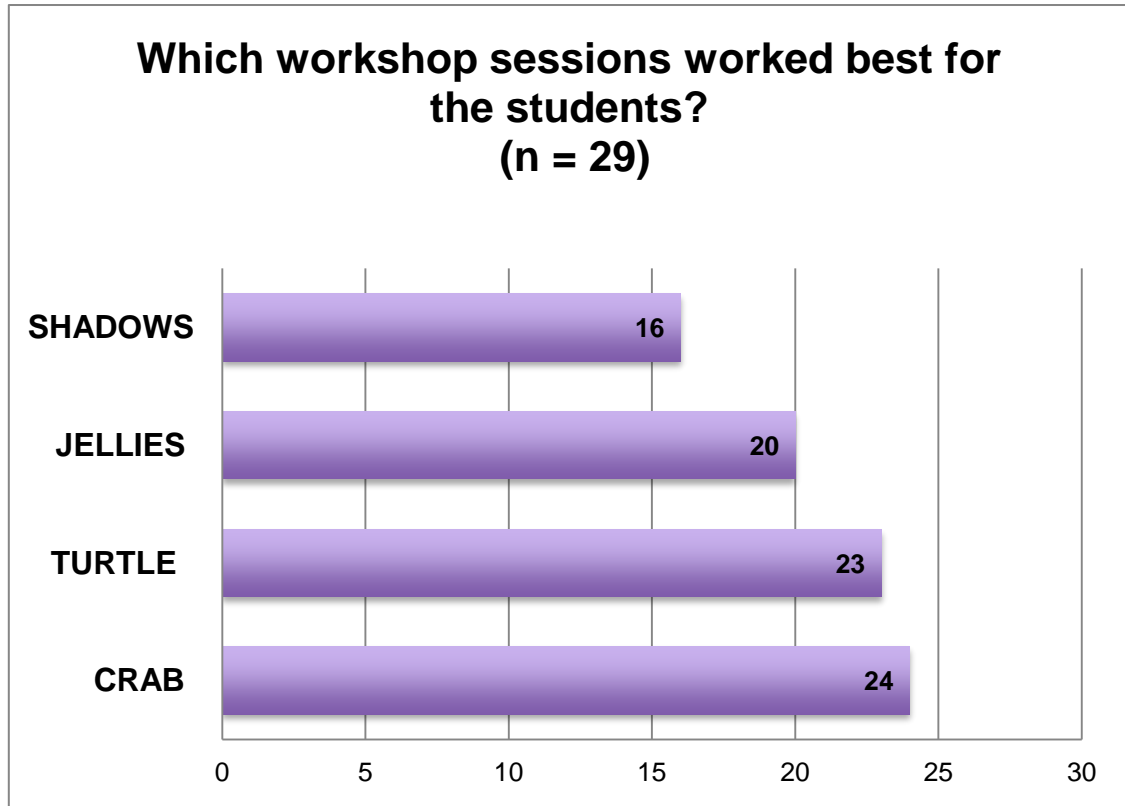
One of our students in pre primary surprised me with the level of engagement.

[The student] tolerated the second session for 40 minutes - so that's huge for [him] who likes his personal space.

One of my students came in very angry and with heightened behaviour but within 5 minutes of Oddysea he was calm and refocussed.

## SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTS OF ODDYSEA

Most of the staff respondents reported that the 'Crab' and 'Turtle' workshop sessions worked best for the students, 82.8% and 79.3%, respectively.



The Shadows' workshop was the lowest rated session (55.2% of respondents) for students.

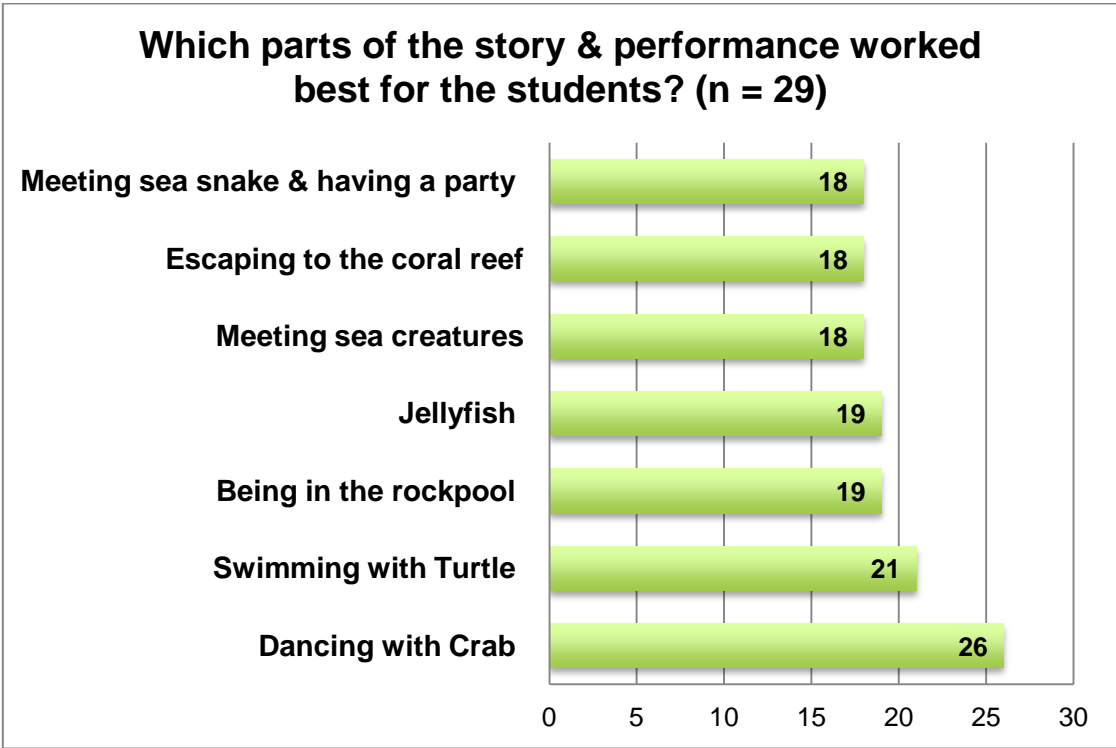
**Based on the following comments, this session could be more inclusive, in particular for students with vision impairment:**

For our vision-impaired students the shadow session was probably not that stimulating.

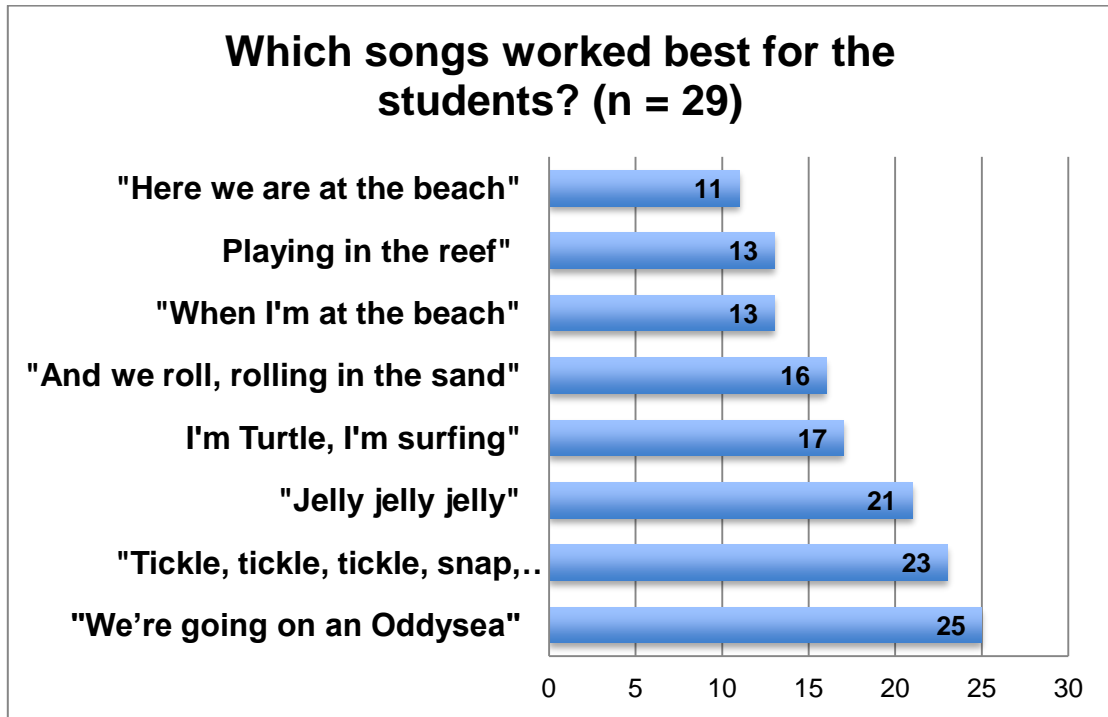
The Shadows is the only one that sparked great conversation with regards to our vision impairment students who sadly missed out on a majority of it. Discussion was had as to how this could be modified to make such accommodations and some were made for the performance, which had a great impact!

The shadows were great but I think some of the holding and focusing on the shadow images may have been a bit too abstract for some of our kids.

Almost ninety per-cent of staff respondents (89.7%) reported that 'Dancing with Crab' was the part of the story and performance that worked best for students.



Respondents rated the song 'We're going on an Oddysea' as the "best" song for students (86.2%), followed by "Tickle, tickle, tickle, snap, snap, snap" (79.3%).



**General comments about the Oddysea song were very positive:**

Oddysea song of course got repeated each time and what a catchy song for the kids to be familiar with at each session.

I thought the songs were great, some very melodic, some repetitive, some with soothing instruments, some with louder tones. All being various, yet easy for us to learn and sing, it was very clever.

These songs were easy for kids to remember and had catchy short phrases for the kids to learn.

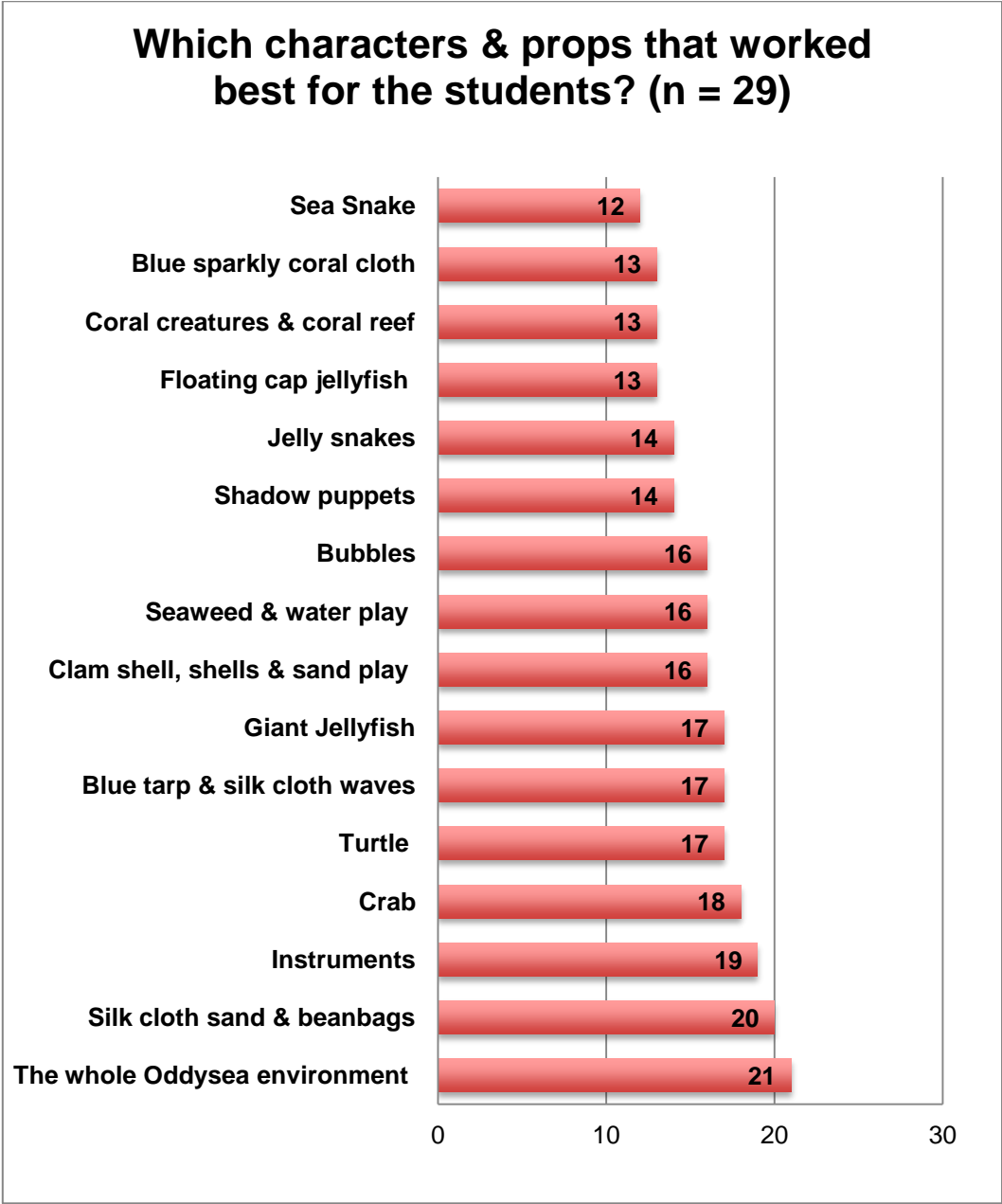
The tunes and actions seemed to appeal to them.

These were soothing songs.

The students still sing them.



Staff respondents indicated that ‘the whole Oddysea environment’ worked best for the students (72.4%), followed by the ‘silk sand cloth and beanbag’ textures (70%) and using instruments (65.5%).



**Positive comments about the quality of the set and props include:**

We had a rewarding and insightful look into a 'world' of make-believe and entrancing visuals. The whole sensory experience...brought so much of the story to 'life'.

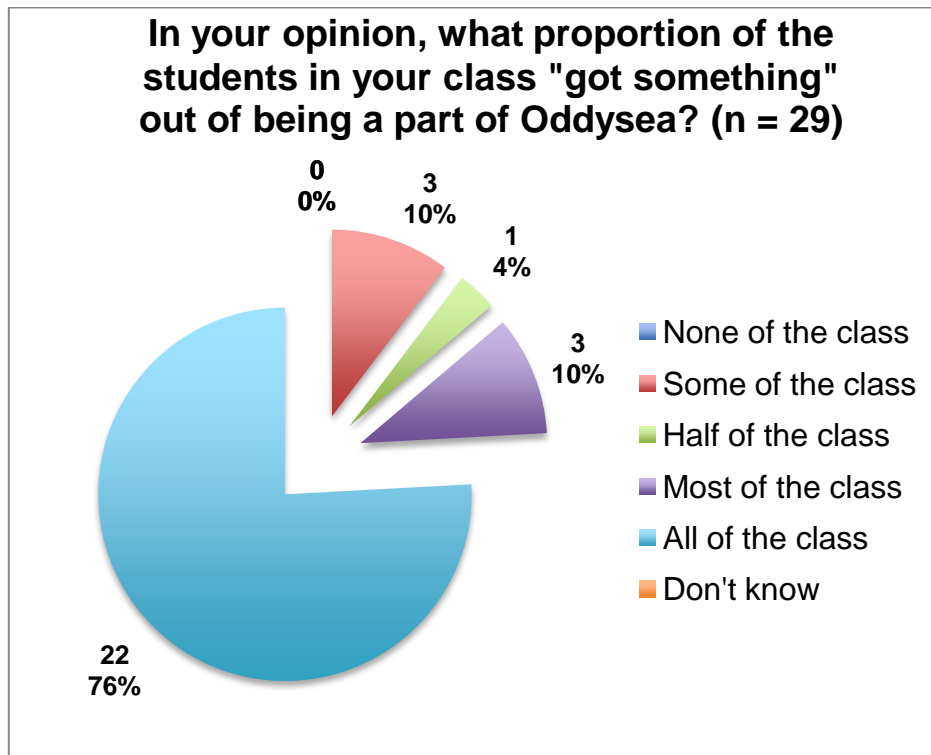
The colours of the set were amazing.

Credit must go to the work involved to make props, e.g. crab, turtle, the coral reef bed.

As far as props and total sensory experiences, I thought the Jellies, and particularly the end session with the giant jellyfish were absolutely amazing visually.



Just over three-quarters of staff respondents felt that all of the students “got something” out of being involved in Oddysea.



**Staff comments indicated that tailoring the experience to each individual student and being inclusive was “that something” that the students got out of being involved in Oddysea:**

Opportunities for all students at all levels.

I have a range of abilities in the class. It was fantastic to see that they could all relax and join in with the performers at their own level.

The opportunity to explore different texture, smell, sound, taste and even students with severe level of disability, was engaged and involved.

I thought the actors...make a great effort in respecting their...thus knowing what worked best for them.

Oddysea...props were available to ensure ALL students got the best seat in the house!

I think it was cleverly designed, and appropriately designed for our students, again, who were mostly multi-severe disabled. I was appreciative that the actors had obviously gone to great lengths to know what would positively affect our students.

I love this production. It showed me that every child has the right to learn and to experience what Oddysea is all about.

There was one student that made me realise that you can achieve anything if you are allowed to explore and take that journey to where that student wanted to go.

## DIMENSIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

### ABSORBED ENGAGEMENT

The dimension of engagement framework was used to structure the observational analysis in terms of how students experienced absorbed engagement during the Oddysea sessions and the performances.

<p><b>Dimensions of engagement</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ABSORBED ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Transfixed Direction of gaze and orientation of body fixed on the dramatic action Move bodies to the music.</p>
<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating attendance and involvement</li> <li>• Active responses.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Attention Focus Absence of disruptive behaviour</i></p>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High levels of interest or positive attitudes</li> <li>• Affective reactions such as curiosity or enjoyment.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Positive emotional tone Shows interest in environment Expressed feeling through body language</i></p>
<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invested in learning and development.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Concentration Responds to music Discriminates between different sources of sound and silence</i></p>

The observations recorded are provided as examples of individual and/or groups of student responses during the sessions and/or the final performance.

## Examples of Absorbed Engagement

### Behavioural

- Keeping hand on wave drum
- Staying still
- Taking hands from over ears
- Keeping feet in slimy seaweed
- Watching / following turtle moving
- Wearing turtle hat / keeping it on
- Lifting and turning head to focus on light/shadows
- Sitting & staying seated on soft coral cushion
- Allowing themselves to be covered in coral

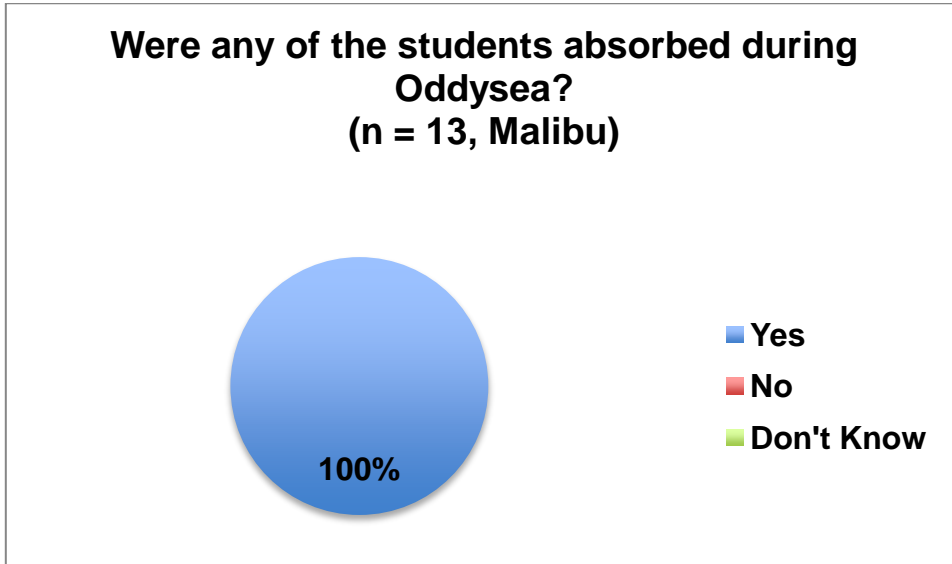
### Emotional

- Bouncing up & down to Oddysea song
- Swaying / rocking to 'underwater music'
- Laughing/squealing when Crab getting closer as he snaps or tickles
- Wrapping self / running hands through/ holding onto silky sand or water
- Feeling texture of waves / blue tarp
- Smiling after touching Turtle
- Enjoying texture / snuggling /rubbing feet on the texture of the coral

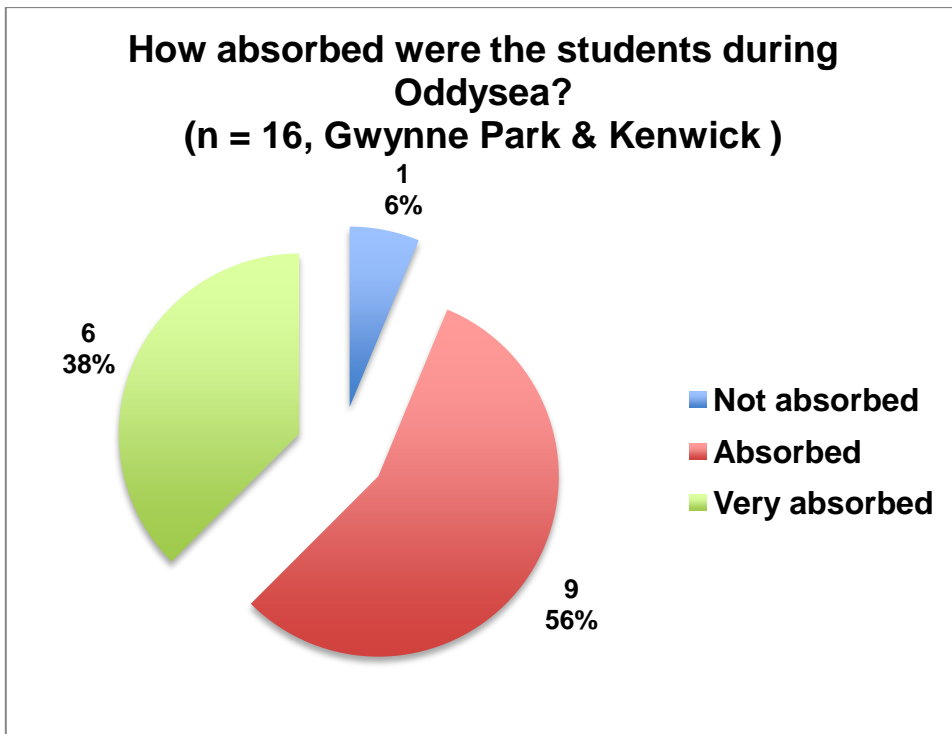
### Cognitive

- Listening /staying quiet/still wave sounds and underwater music
- Holding onto LED pebble light and watching colours change
- Silence /very quiet/whispers during scuba diver playing clarinet

At Malibu School, all thirteen staff respondents agreed that the students were 'absorbed during Oddysea'.



This question was adapted in the subsequent survey to Gwynne Park and Kenwick Schools with a three-point scale. Most of the staff respondents reported that students were 'absorbed' (56%) during Oddysea.



**Comments throughout the survey provide descriptive evidence and examples and about the level of absorbed engagement for students experiencing Oddysea:**

EACH AND EVERY STUDENT WAS ABSORBED INTO THE ODDYSEA EXPERIENCE!! Not one student displayed behaviours commonly needing to be managed during such incursions and experiences! PROOF!

I believe the students in the wheelchairs were so amazed with it all. Their faces said the lot. Smiling, laughing and just the way they communicated with their eyes.

Some that often do not interact at all were truly mesmerised. Fantastic.

Yes, I did wonder how they would go during the sessions at times, with it being maybe 'sensory overload', yet they remained within the realm of it all, did not try and 'run away' and were turning their heads and taking in much more than I expected.

All our students were engulfed in the Oddysea experience.

Amazing to see children who do not usually focus and engage, fully engaged and focused on what is in front of them.

The attention the kids gave throughout the whole presentation on each day was unbelievable.

All children were engaged and showed interest.

Watching the captivated faces of the students.

One student literally squealed with delight and was so obviously happy. Usually this student is very subdued and often shows sign of distress. This was the most magical part in my opinion. Seeing a student react like this is priceless.

I do remember thinking how much eye gazing and looking-around a couple of our students were doing. Also, that one of our 'runners' did not want to leave, and I remember thinking that any other class session would not hold his attention for so long!

One of our student s that is usually on the go lay and watched the shadow puppets for an extended amount of time. He was smiling and was really enjoying the experience

One of our students who is new to school this year and is still getting used to us...usually does not like to come out of his chair and cries when we do get him out and who we thought would probably get upset and not enjoy it was very quiet and calm and did not get upset at all.

Even the vision-impaired kids were mesmerised.

## INTERACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The dimension of engagement framework was used to structure the observational analysis in terms of how students experienced interactive engagement during the Oddysea sessions and the performances.

<p><b>Dimensions of engagement</b></p>	<p><b>INTERACTIVE ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p>Exploring the performance space          Increased vocal communication          Increased movement          Interact with the performers &amp; props          Imitating the performers</p>
<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrating attendance and involvement</li> <li>• Active responses.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Initiates movement to explore the environment</i>  <i>Increased energy</i>  <i>Sustained involvement</i></p>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affective reactions such as curiosity or sense of belonging.</li> <li>• Investment in and emotional reactions.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Uses movement to express feelings</i>  <i>Shares emotions &amp; moods</i>  <i>Responds to characters &amp; props</i></p>
<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attending to and extending mental effort in learning tasks encountered.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Motivation</i>  <i>Moving with purpose</i>  <i>Stopping and starting to music</i>  <i>Using musical instruments to create sound</i></p>

The observations recorded are provided as examples of individual and/or groups of student responses during the sessions and/or the final performance.

## Examples of Interactive Engagement

### Behavioural

- Rolling in the “sand”
- Holding up feet ready to be tickled by crab
- Moving towards / following /chasing the shadow puppets
- Sifting sand
- Sorting shells

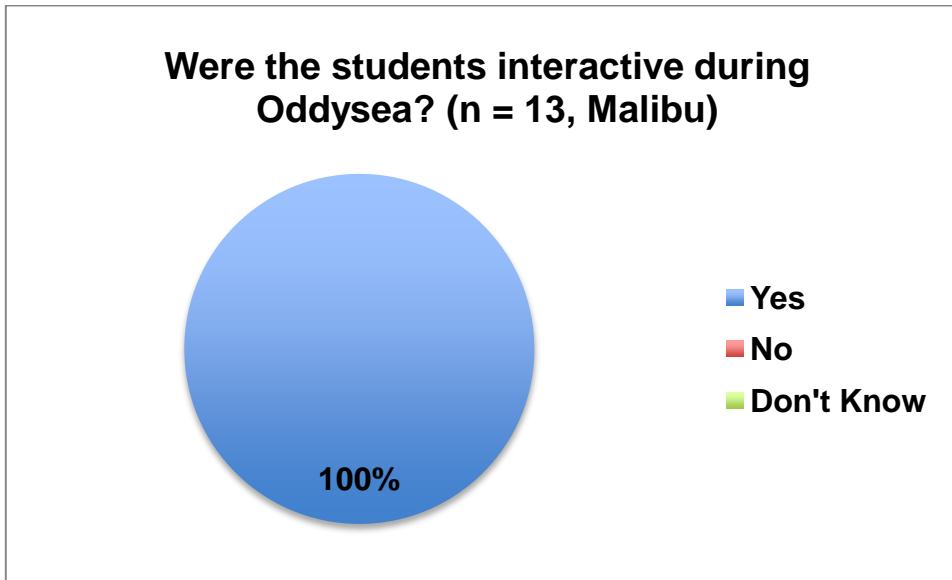
### Emotional

- Holding Crab’s claw
- Climbing into coral shell
- Pointing at giant sea snake
- Smelling a sea sponge
- Wearing sea urchin / coral hats
- Hugging coral creatures
- Waving goodbye to turtle
- Reaching out for sparkly schools of fish / feather duster fish
- Recognising crab when he first appears
- Dancing at the underwater disco

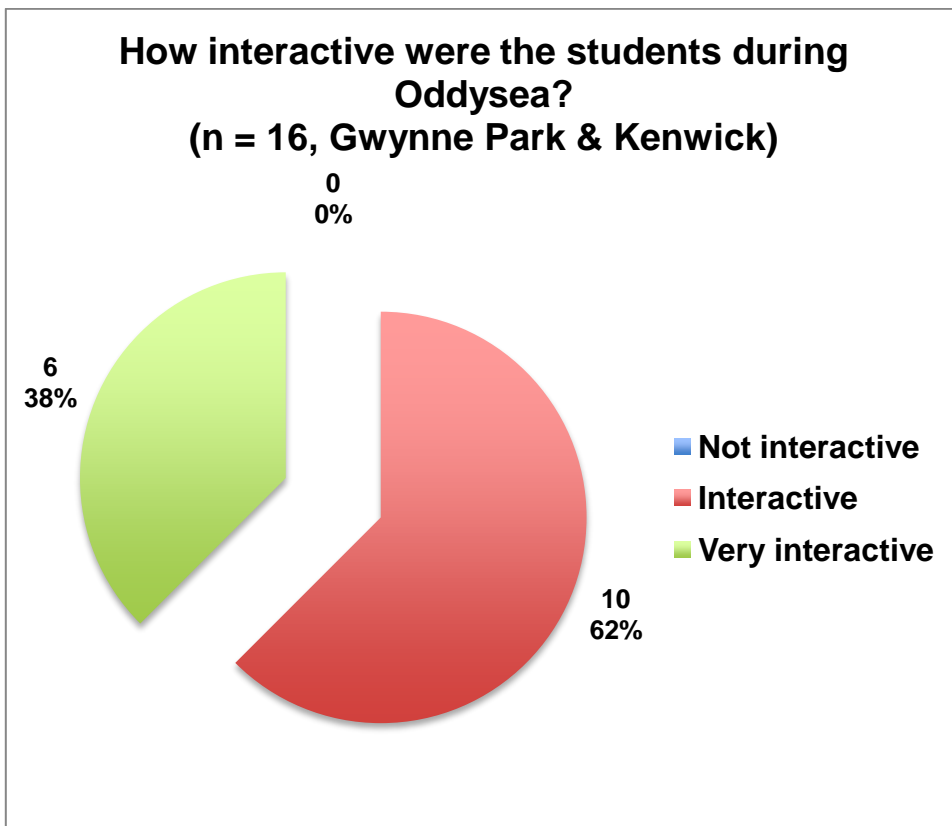
### Cognitive

- Tapping hapi drum
- Shaking tambourine / turtle eggs/ shell rattles
- Taking turns with wave drum
- Looking in clam shells for shells, sponges
- Responding when name called during Oddysea song
- Clapping with song /at the end of the song
- Marching & doing hand actions to Oddysea song
- Saying “eggs” when turtle eggs uncovered

At Malibu School, all thirteen staff respondents agreed that the students were 'interactive during Oddysea' (100%).



This question was adapted in the subsequent survey to Gwynne Park and Kenwick Schools with a three-point scale. While none of the staff noted students as not being interactive, most of the staff respondents reported that students were 'interactive' (62%) or 'very interactive' (38%).





**Comments throughout the survey provide descriptive evidence and examples and about the level of interactive engagement for students experiencing Oddysea:**

They was never not interactive but once again, if something got the students attention they could be interactive to very interactive in seconds.

The calming effect...was a way of interacting with the performance.

Most of the students were non-verbal, so they are mostly expressive by their way of body language, touch and movement, as well as eye gazing and squealing.

A lot of the kids were feeling seaweed...the shells and even the jellyfish.

They all loved the props and listened to the music intently. Crab made students smile.

A couple of students who I have not seen interact so much and were so happy. Magical.

Using props to hide in, engaging and sharing with others.

They were very interactive with the shadow puppets and some of the sea creatures.

The interaction with the Oddysea staff was welcomed and just magic.

Dancing was interactive, going deep into the ocean was great movement and visually amazing, feeling for shells in the sand box and rock pools were fun.

Just seeing the final show and how the students got involved in the storytelling process.

[The student] found some energy!

I think the smiles on [the student's] face throughout each session and her alert and attentive manor was awesome. She was reaching for objects, instruments, and people!! It was spectacular to see her so actively engaged which is not a common occurrence at school!

A student from another class came over and sat on me. I have never seen him so relaxed and engaged for such an extended period of time. He was in this state for the entire performance, and engaging and experimenting with the touching opportunities.

Seeing the total attention, interaction and positive experiences the students demonstrated during the final performance. It was amazing to see the student's reactions.

I loved the reaction from one totally blind student who I felt would not benefit as much, yet once he became confident and knew the environment he was happy to be involved and enjoyed the 'new' experiences. He talked about it afterwards and kept asking about it.

## LEARNING TASK ENGAGEMENT

The dimension of engagement framework was used to structure the observational analysis in terms of how students experienced learning during the Oddysea sessions and the performances.

<p><b>Dimensions of engagement</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LEARNING TASK ENGAGEMENT</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sustained involvement Engaged in learning activities Interacting with environment in an active, emotionally connected manner.</p>
<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of negative or disruptive behaviour</li> <li>• Active responses.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Makes effective use of environment</i> <i>Turn taking</i></p>
<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment in and emotional reactions.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Uses movement to express self</i> <i>Acts out emotions and moods</i> <i>Gets emotionally involved with story and characters</i></p>
<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invested in learning and development.</li> <li>• Attending to and extending mental effort in learning tasks encountered.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Expresses ideas Making choices</i> <i>Autonomy</i> <i>Imagination</i> <i>Experiencing the story</i> <i>Communication / using language</i></p>

The observations recorded are provided as examples of individual and/or groups of student responses during the sessions and/or the final performance.

## Examples of Learning Task Engagement

### Behavioural

- Looking at self in mirror in turtle hat
- Taking message from the bottle
- Waiting their turn for the wave drum, sharing wave drum
- Making a baby crab
- Making turtle hats
- Looking behind screen to see how shadow puppets work

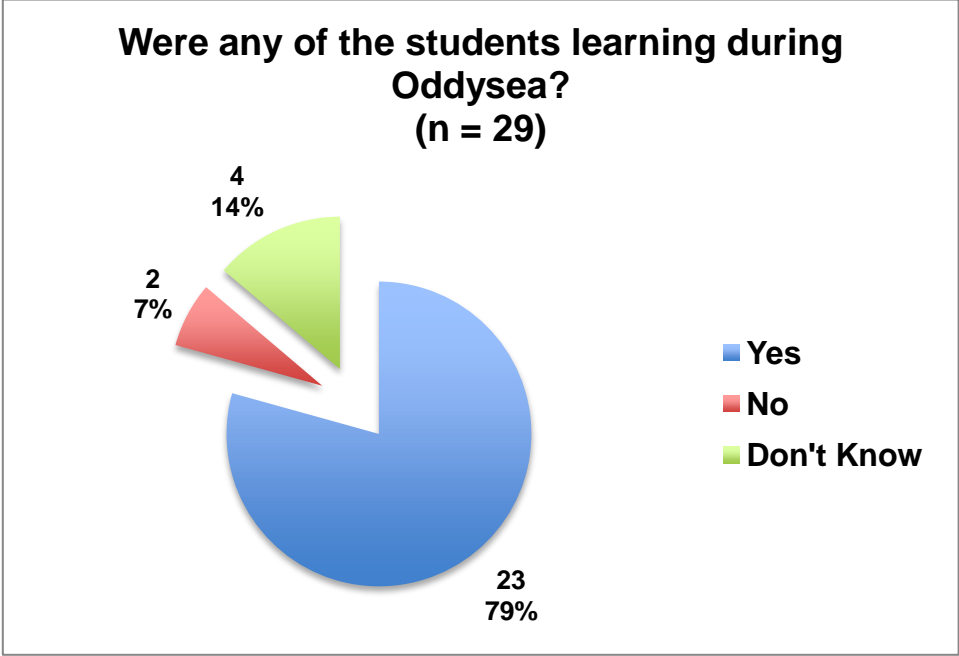
### Emotional

- High five with turtle, Hugging turtle & swimming with her.
- Running away from Crab
- Vocalisations &/or laughing when giant jelly fish appears
- Fist pumping / jumping up & down with excitement when Crab appears
- Sharing and interacting with shadow puppets
- Giving clown fish a kiss
- Laughing & clapping when everyone rescued by crab
- Crying out “Help” to crab when captured by giant jellyfish

### Cognitive

- Asking questions about the props: What’s in the shell?”
- Vocalising / singing the songs
- Learning how to making shadow puppets
- Putting coloured cellophane over torch to change colour
- Using new language, Repeating names of different sea creature shadow puppet: seahorse, octopus, starfish
- Using their imagination by doing a shadow puppet play, Doing a play/ telling own story about shadow puppets; saying “I’m a dolphin”, or I’m a seahorse” while making shadow puppets

Most of the staff respondents agreed that the some students were learning during Oddysea' (79%).



**Comments throughout the survey provide descriptive evidence about the level of learning for students experiencing Oddysea, and how it is difficult to assess, for some students. Students using their imagination, having new sensory experiences, learning new songs and following the story are the main types of learning reported:**

It's hard to tell how much our students actually 'learn'; however, with the sensory being the focus, rather than the actual story, I am sure they did learn. The little songs, and especially the repetition helped us see signs of recognition and familiarity.

The students are at a very low level so it is difficult to gauge their learning experience from the performance. However, the smiles and body language they showed I am sure they had some level of learning.

Yes, by recognising and being comfortable with the characters as the days progressed.

One student who is non-verbal was so engaged throughout and took this out of the experience by singing and doing the actions to the songs just at the mention of the word crab or Oddysea.

They learned songs, rhythm, about characters...prediction and listening, observing and physical and sensory learning.

I believe that all the students were learning all the time through touching or hearing...it showed that we can learn in all different ways.

Different sounds at the sea, making craft and feeling different textures.

Imagination [and] making a shadow puppet play.

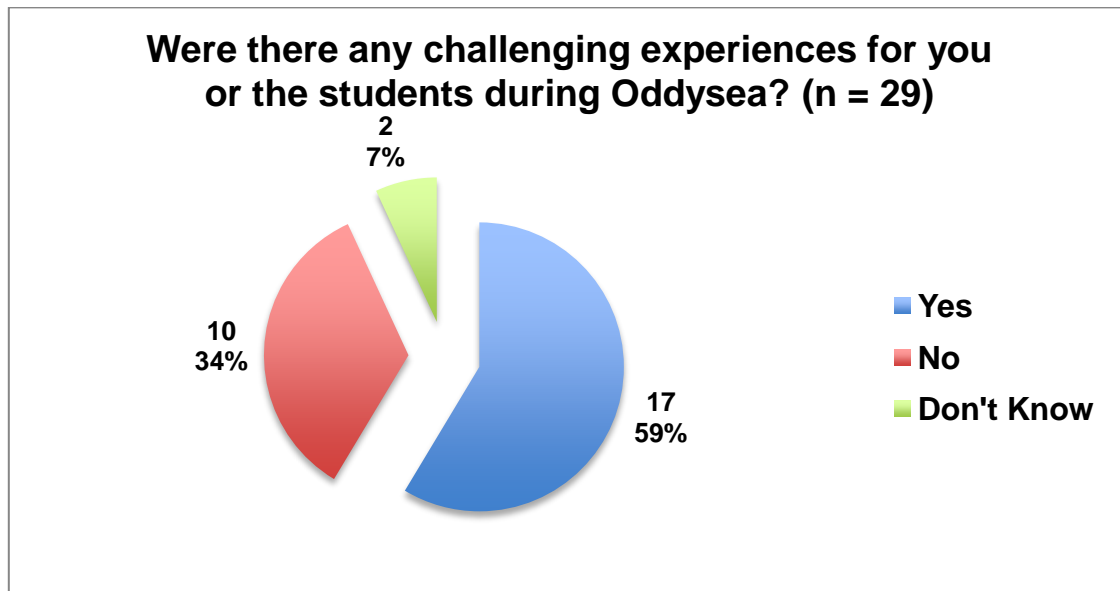
Fine motor skills, imagination and shadows/light effects.

Words to songs, following instructions, listening skills, using their imagination.

The program was great for awakening student's imagination, exposing them to many sensory experiences.

## CHALLENGES

Despite the positive effects for students and staff reported during Oddysea, almost sixty per-cent of staff respondents agreed that there were challenging experiences for staff and/or students (59%).



**Comments related to this question indicate that, at times and with some students, there is a need for more structure and positive behaviour strategies. This was particularly the case at Gwynne Park Education Support Centre:**

Student just wanted to play the whole time instead of sitting and listening when needed.

Kids ran a little wild and throwing themselves around a lot as the groups were quite large was hard to stop the very active ones with no spatial awareness from jumping on top of [other students].

Children being hyper and not sitting long enough to take in what was being said to them. Jumping all over the place throwing cushions. Hard to keep them under control I know they were allowed to do as they wished however some middle ground needs establishing so they get more out of the experience.

The children became aggressive towards each other fighting over things and snatching and not given enough boundaries.

Too much stimulation, difficulty coping with little structure.

A really good visual and tactile experience, maybe a little too much for some kids.

It became a sensory overload for some students.

The crab and turtle were more structured and students seemed to enjoy making these props.

## AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

### **Comments in response to the question: 'How could the Oddysea experience be improved for you and/or the students?' provided further evidence:**

All elements worked but the whole thing needs polishing so that the children are engaged most of the time. There were several times when the free play went to long and the kids became restless and began to play up a little. The concept is great.

I think last year's workshops where the children were taken from the tent and the craft done removed from distraction worked better.

Maybe set up a small area outside the main tent for students that get overwhelmed by the experience. This will allow them to enjoy the Oddysea at their own pace.

There needs to be a lot more structure and less freedom, the children we have need to have strict boundaries and not let run amok. I understand the concept but these children do not cope too well without boundaries and strict guidelines.

More teacher guidance was needed to control behaviour of children.

Perhaps better communications with support staff and teachers outlining their involvement in the residency [about] behaviour management.

### **Suggestions were made to have smaller groups and shorter 30-minute sessions:**

Groups too big.

Probably would like smaller groups of 6 students with half hour sessions for some students.

Smaller groups.

Shorter sessions 30 min and smaller groups

Limit number of student per performance, so each student has enough personal space to enjoy and experience the Oddysea.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Benefits for Teachers and Education Assistants

- 87 per cent of respondents said there were benefits to them as teachers and education assistants.
- 76 per cent of respondents said that students got something out of the program.

### Successful Elements

- The Crab workshop session worked best.
- The Dancing with Crab part of the performance worked best.
- The whole Oddysea environment, with regard to characters and props, worked best.
- The 'We're going on an Oddysea' song worked best.

### Levels of Engagement

- Most of the staff respondents agreed that during Oddysea students were being interactive to very interactive (100 per cent), absorbed to very absorbed (96 per cent) and learning (79 per cent).
- Students were absorbed and interactive with positive emotional reactions; to a lesser extent, they were learning with positive behavioral responses and cognitive engagement.

### Challenges and Areas for Improvement

- Structure and behaviour management was noted as the biggest challenge and area for improvement with the most prevalent suggestion being the use of smaller groups and shorter 30-minute sessions.



## CONCLUSION

The Oddysea tour can be seen as a largely successful initiative that engaged the students from the three schools to which the program toured.

The evaluation demonstrates how Sensorium Theatre can provide an enhanced experience of engagement that is both multi-dimensional and tangible.

Reported benefits from Teachers and Education Assistants are in line with other evidence about how quality participatory arts engagement can affect overall school culture and classroom practices. In the paper 'Partnerships between schools and the professional arts sector' (Donelan, K et al., 2009), the potential impacts of creative arts on schools are noted as (p.1):

- Broadening the school's approach to teaching and learning e.g. a focus on exploration rather than instruction
- Forming cross-curricular links
- Enabling the school to focus on creativity
- Improving provision for the arts.

This is exemplified by this quote from a teacher involved in the Impossible Zoo project, where Polyglot Puppet Theatre worked with students, turning the school into a make-believe zoo ([Runswick-Cole, K & Goodley, D, 2009](#)):

Through professional development and exposure to professional artists the teaching staff were able to gain insight into different ways of using puppetry, visual and performing art in the classroom. The culture of art and performing will continue in the school because staff and students can now see what is possible and the project has left students and staff with additional skills that they can build upon (p. 14).

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## APPENDIX

### Information Form for Families

#### ODDYSEA

Sensorium Theatre will be bringing their new sensory theatre show, Oddysea and accompanying workshops to your school over two weeks. It will be an adventure! Over the two weeks, we will do four different workshops with students, leading towards an interactive performance. The workshops will allow the artists to get to know the individual needs of your child so that they can tailor the performance to maximise their enjoyment of the show.

Our aim is to deliver a sensory theatre show that children with a disability can connect with, learn from and most of all enjoy! You are very welcome to attend the show if you would like to be involved too.

#### ABOUT SENSORIUM THEATRE

Sensorium Theatre is a small group of multi-skilled theatre artists establishing Australia's first sensory theatre company.

They specialise in making work designed for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities. They believe all children can be transformed and touched by exceptional theatre experiences and that these experiences generate and stimulate their own imaginations, enabling greater creative responses in their lives. Sensorium Theatre's vision is to create a unique and totally immersive world of intimate performance and highly interactive storytelling, providing a magical theatre of the senses for children with special needs in a way that truly engages and inspires them.

Their method is to create high quality theatre that is accessible to young pmlid audiences by inviting them to touch, taste, smell, hear and see stories unfold around them within a sensory installation-style set.

You can see more information about the company and shows here:

<http://performinglineswa.org.au/artists/project/sensorium/>

#### FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION

We are evaluating this project to get more information about what kind of impact sensory theatre has on students. Natalie Georgeff from DADAA (Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts) will be evaluating Oddysea. As part of the evaluation, we will be filming the workshops to observe how students interact and respond to sensory theatre. This footage will be used for evaluation purposes only. If you are happy for your child to be involved, there is a permission form attached. If you have any questions or concerns about the evaluation please get in touch with Natalie: Natalie@dadaa.org.au (m) 0417 412 867

#### ARTISTS THAT WILL BE WORKING IN YOUR SCHOOL

Francis Italiano – Director/artist

Michelle Hovane – Director/artist

Rachel Riggs – Artist

Amity Culver – Artist

Jamie David – Musician