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Practitioner Review: Effectiveness and mechanisms of change in participatory arts-based programmes for promoting youth mental health and well-being – a systematic review

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Background: Participatory arts-based (PAB) programmes refer to a diverse range of community programmes involving active engagement in the creation process that appear helpful to several aspects of children's and young people's (CYP) mental health and well-being. This mixed-methods systematic review synthesises evidence relating to the effectiveness and mechanisms of change in PAB programmes for youth. **Method:** Studies were identified following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses approach. Eleven electronic databases were searched for studies of PAB programmes conducted with CYP (aged 4–25 years), which reported mental health and well-being effectiveness outcomes and/or mechanisms of change. A mixed-methods appraisal tool assessed study quality. A narrative synthesis was conducted of effectiveness and challenges in capturing this. Findings relating to reported mechanisms of change were integrated via a metasummary. **Results:** Twenty-two studies were included. Evidence of effectiveness from quantitative studies was limited by methodological issues. The metasummary identified mechanisms of change resonant with those proposed in talking therapies. Additionally, PAB programmes appear beneficial to CYP by fostering a therapeutic space characterised by subverting restrictive social rules, communitas that is not perceived as coercive, and inviting play and embodied understanding. **Conclusions:** There is good evidence that there are therapeutic processes in PAB programmes. There is a need for more transdisciplinary work to increase understanding of context–mechanism–outcome pathways, including the role played by different art stimuli and practices. Going forward, transdisciplinary teams are needed to quantify short- and long-term mental health and well-being outcomes and to investigate optimal programme durations in relation to population and need. Such teams would also be best placed to work on resolving inter-disciplinary methodological tensions. **Keywords:** Mental health; well-being; young people; participatory arts; mechanisms of change; metasummary.

Introduction

A recent report by the UK Education Policy Institute (Crenna-Jennings & Hutchinson, 2020) suggests that many children and young people (CYP) continue to experience serious difficulties in accessing high-quality mental health services. There is a pressing need for accessible, cost-effective, and acceptable alternative provision for delivery in community settings. Participatory arts-based (PAB) programmes have been gaining recognition as a non-clinical, CYP-friendly approach that could contribute to the promotion, prevention, and early intervention agenda in UK Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS; O'Donnell, Lohan, Oliffe, Grant, & Galway, 2022).

Participatory arts-based (PAB) activities are a form of art (including music, dance, theatre, visual arts, storytelling, poetry, and film) involving active engagement (e.g. creating and performing) and collaboration with those taking part during the creative process. They are usually facilitated by artists or arts practitioners in the form of group workshops (O'Donnell et al., 2022) and delivered in community settings, such as schools, youth centres, and justice sites. PAB approaches contrast with arts therapies and interventions delivered by trained therapists in clinical settings, using clinical approaches alongside art and creativity to support emotional work (Kalmanowitz et al., 2019). They are also distinct from other community-led arts programmes, such as choral singing or life drawing, which often emphasise the use of artistic engagement as a resource for building social inclusion and supporting mental well-being, but are similarly delivered *to* receptive participants, rather than participatory involvement *in* creative processes, such as through composing, co-creation, or design.

There has been increasing recognition over the last decade of the importance of meaningful participation for promoting the well-being, social connection, and agency of CYP (Pavarini et al., 2021; van Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2015). Creating the space for youth voices to be heard and prioritised

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in decision-making related to social care and in mental health research has provided the opportunity for services, interventions, and research processes to be co-produced, helping make them more responsive to CYP's needs and expectations (Pavarini et al., 2021; van Bijleveld et al., 2015). Processes of co-creation in PAB programmes likewise make it possible to tailor engagement and therapeutic benefits for mental health to particular individuals and groups (Pavarini et al., 2021). Dialogic engagement enables artists and practitioners to draw on the experiences of the CYP involved, ensuring participation is meaningful for them (Lowe, 2012).

There are new opportunities to expand the delivery of PAB programmes in the United Kingdom, including the launch of social prescribing (https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/) and the devolved commissioning of services to meet local needs (Health and Social Care Act, 2012). Social prescribing, which includes 'Arts on Prescription' (AoP), links people receiving primary care services with sources of non-medical support in the community usually via the voluntary and third sector (Bungay & Clift, 2010). A recent systematic review (SR) evaluating UK social prescribing schemes in community settings identified several outcomes related to promoting good mental health and well-being from AoP projects including increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and positive mood, and reduced social isolation, anxiety, depression, and negative mood (Chatterjee, Camic, Lockyer, & Thomson, 2018). There are policy development calls for more research on how social prescribing can best involve CYP in PAB programmes to reduce mental health problems and increase well-being (Fancourt, Warran, & Aughterson, 2020).

The evidence landscape

Before considering the evidence landscape relating to PAB programmes, it is important to clarify what the term 'mental health' encompasses and how it relates to well-being. The notion of what it means to have 'good mental health' has come to have two distinct meanings. In the medical literature, it is usually defined as the absence of mental health problems (Granlund et al., 2021; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010), whilst the World Health Organization (WHO, 2005) explicitly aligns it to 'well-being'. The dual-continua model (Granlund et al., 2021; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010) integrates both meanings, conceptualising mental health as involving two distinct but related continua, modelled as two cross-cutting axes with one focussed on mental health problems (from less severe mental strain to more severe symptoms fulfilling criteria for mental illness) and the other on degree of well-being (from flourishing to languishing). Seeking to combine the hedonic ('feeling good') and eudaimonic ('doing well') aspects of well-being, Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002) link flourishing to high scores in emotional, psychological, and social well-being and languishing to the opposite. Different PAB programmes for CYP have employed outcome measures that test for a reduction in mental health problems and for increases in well-being, or in closely related psychological states, such as self-esteem.

The positive impact that PAB programmes can have on mental health problems in CYP such as anxiety and depression and on well-being is widely reported (All-Party Parliamenatary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Fancourt et al., 2020; Tymoszuk, Perkins, Spiro, Williamon, & Fancourt, 2020). A rapid review (RR) of performing arts programmes (including music, drama, singing, and visual arts) for young people (11–18 years) found that the most commonly reported outcomes related to well-being were increased self-confidence and self-esteem, a sense of achievement and empowerment, improved social skills, and positive behavioural changes, which could be helpful for mental health (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013). Similarly, Zarobe and Bungay's (2017) RR of PAB programmes for adolescents reported positive impacts on resilience, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Fancourt et al.'s (2020) government-commissioned report concluded that the evidence base for the use of PAB for CYP is strong enough to be used for policy development.

Clift, Phillips, and Pritchard (2021), however, give a more negative assessment, criticising the two commissioned government scoping reviews cited above (Fancourt et al., 2020; Fancourt & Finn, 2019) for overclaiming on the effectiveness of PAB programmes, highlighting a number of methodological issues in included studies and the very diverse nature of studies included, which make drawing conclusions problematic. Bungay and Vella-Burrows (2013) and Zarobe and Bungay (2017) also note a number of methodological weaknesses in studies, including attrition, use of non-standardised measures, and poor questionnaire completion.

Practice-based evidence and mechanisms of change

In addition to methodological issues, Zarobe and Bungay (2017) and others (De Witte et al., 2021; Raw & Mantecón, 2013) highlight a knowledge gap in our understanding of key mechanisms of change in PAB programmes involving collaborative engagement. Better characterisation and conceptualisation of these, including in what ways they might be shaped by contextual factors, such as population and art form, would increase understanding of how mental health benefits for CYP come about, as well as helping guide future programme design.

Increasing demands in recent years for PAB studies to better evidence outcomes using robust quantitative evaluation methodologies to inform commissioning and scale-up decisions (Clift et al., 2021; Crossick

& Kaszynska, 2016; Daykin, De Viggiani, Moriarty, & Pilkington, 2017) have perhaps overshadowed the potential of practice-based evidence to offer rich, contextualised, and robust insights in the early stages of mapping mechanism of change. Studies reporting on PAB programmes using qualitative approaches often provide detailed process-focussed analyses of interview, focus group, and observational data. Artists and arts practitioners are in a position to offer nuanced and reflexive accounts of their practice that recognise the complexities of their own and young people's involvement, the cultural context in which the arts activities take place and the artistic process (Clift et al., 2021). They can report on aspects of the arts practice that facilitate, or hinder, change and the role played by the art form itself in this. Analysis of the accounts of CYP can inform our understanding of what does, or does not, work for them and why, whilst cross-case analyses of individual experiences can tell us more about common and specific pathways of change.

Rationale for current systematic review

Whilst two previous reviews have examined the impact of PAB programmes for CYP on reducing mental health problems and increasing well-being (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013; Zarobe & Bungay, 2017), both were conducted several years ago, employed rapid review methodologies, did not undertake a detailed formal critical appraisal of included literature, and focussed only on children aged 11–18. A RR is a form of knowledge synthesis that speeds up the process of conducting a traditional systematic review (SR) by simplifying or omitting some of the steps (Garritty et al., 2021). This can introduce bias, raising concerns about the reliability and validity of the findings. There is a need for a SR that provides a detailed formal critical appraisal of the literature, includes a wider age range of CYP, and integrates qualitative evidence relating to mechanisms of change in addition to considering effectiveness outcomes. Integrating findings relating to processes of change in PAB programmes from included studies will help address gaps in knowledge and increase impact, informing the development, deployment, and ongoing research evaluation of PAB studies. This SR addresses the following questions, the first in relation to the quantitative data and the second through a metasummary of the qualitative data:

1 What is the evidence of effectiveness of PAB programmes in improving the mental health and well-being of CYP, and what barriers are encountered in capturing this?
2 What common and specific mechanisms of change in relation to CYP mental health and well-being are reported in PAB studies, and how are these shaped by aspects of context, such as population, implementation, and art forms?

Method

Search strategy

The review protocol was registered on PROSPERO (No. CRD42022343497) and follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). A systematic search was conducted of 11 electronic databases: MEDLINE, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Arts & Humanities Citation Index, Social Science Citation Index, Art and Architecture, ERIC, British Education Index (BEI), Scopus, Child and Adolescent Studies, and RILM. An initial search strategy was developed in consultation with a subject librarian and previous related systematic reviews (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013; O'Donnell et al., 2022; Zarobe & Bungay, 2017). This search strategy, which used a combination of controlled vocabulary and free-text terms (see Appendix S1 for the search strategy as applied to the EBSCO MEDLINE database), was subsequently refined through an iterative process and adapted according to subject headings and keywords for each database. To supplement the electronic database search, we hand searched the reference lists of included studies and relevant systematic reviews for potentially eligible articles missed in the database search.

Eligibility criteria. The search was restricted to empirical articles published in English in peer-reviewed journals during the past 10 years (from 01 January 2012 to 01 November 2022) reporting on the use of PAB programmes across all art forms delivered by arts practitioners or artists to improve the mental health and/or mental well-being of CYP aged 4–25 years. Studies involving only CYP under 4 were excluded, as their ability to enter into processes of co-production is more limited and likely to be mediated by a parent or caregiver. The search was restricted to the previous 10 years due to escalation of PAB programmes in the previous decade and to keep the focus on current practice. Art forms included the following: (a) performing arts (music, dance, and theatre); (b) visual arts, design, and craft; (c) literature; and (d) online, digital, and electronic arts. Studies reporting on mental well-being or mental health outcomes that were not planned for at the outset, but which arose in the course of a PAB programme, were included. Studies including measures testing for psychological states (e.g. self-esteem and self-confidence) about which there is a lack of consensus regarding whether they are related or central to well-being (Martela & Sheldon, 2019) were also included.

Studies were restricted to participation that required 'active engagement' (e.g. creating and performing) where the practice described was collaborative. Articles reporting on arts activities involving 'passive engagement' (e.g. watching a play or where arts activities were used as a distraction) or where the focus was primarily on skill development, so involving more directed engagement towards a goal specified at the outset (e.g. the El Sistema music programme), were excluded. Studies delivered by arts therapists were excluded, as were those that primarily focussed on physical illnesses or serious mental conditions (e.g. personality, bipolar, cognitive, and/or psychotic disorders) and involved predominantly CYP with severe learning difficulties (over 50%), which would require different participatory processes.

Screening and selection of articles. All search results were exported to an EndNote library, where duplicates were identified and removed. All remaining citations were uploaded to Covidence for article screening (www.covidence.org). Four authors were involved in the screening and selection of eligible studies (EW, SG, HN, and AK). The title and abstract of each article were independently screened by two authors to identify potentially relevant studies. Discrepancies were resolved through consultation with the lead author (EW). The full-text

versions of all potentially relevant articles were then retrieved for eligibility assessment. Where it was unclear from the title and abstract screen whether an article met the inclusion criteria, the full-text article was reviewed. Two independent reviewers from the review team screened all full-text articles to evaluate whether they met the selection criteria. Any disagreements were resolved by consensus discussion with the first author. Where an agreement was not reached, a third member of the review team was consulted. Reasons for excluding studies were documented using the Covidence software.

Data extraction. Data from all included articles were extracted using a template created for this review (EW extracted data from all included articles; SG extracted data from six articles to quality assure the process). Extracted data for each included article were written up as a narrative summary of the study and sent to an additional author who was a specialist in the specific PAB activity in the study. They checked the extracted data to ensure accuracy and completeness. Disagreements were resolved via discussion. The predefined categories for extraction were as follows: (1) publication details: first author, year, and country; (2) aim(s) and/or research question(s); (3) theoretical/conceptual frameworks adopted; (4) population demographics and recruitment; (5) details of the PAB programme, including nature of arts activities, setting, duration, and timing of sessions; (6) study methodology; (7) study outcomes related to mental well-being and/or mental health; (8) acceptability indicators; and (9) reported mechanisms of change reported and contexts in which they occurred.

Results

Overview of studies

Twenty-three papers were included (n = 5 quantitative; n = 12 qualitative; and n = 6 mixed methods; see Figure 1). This represents n = 22 projects, as one RCT study chose to present the qualitative (Duberg, Möller, & Sunvisson, 2016) and quantitative (Philippson et al., 2013) data separately (see Tables 1 and 2). Most studies were conducted in Western countries, the largest number coming from the United Kingdom (United Kingdom = 11; Australia = 5; Canada = 3; Sweden = 1; Hong Kong = 1; and Japan = 1). The median number of CYP participating (excluding those in comparison and control groups who did not engage in any participatory arts-based activities) was 31 (range: 4–190). In quantitative studies, including the quantitative component of mixed-methods papers, the median number was 72 (range: 12–190), whilst in the qualitative studies, including the qualitative element of mixed-methods papers, the median number was 27 (range: 4–118). CYP's ages ranged from 5 to 26, with most being between 12 and 25 (n = 13). Of these, just over half were of secondary school age (12–18; n = 7). Only three studies recruited children under 11 (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; Stephenson & Dobson, 2020). Nearly all studies involved groups of children who were marginalised, vulnerable, or disadvantaged in some way (youth justice/antisocial behaviour, n = 4; 'disadvantaged', n = 5; low SES, n = 3; migrant/refugee, n = 2; mental health difficulties, n = 2; and autism, n = 1; LD = 1). The PAB programmes ranged in length from 2 days to over a year, with the most common duration being 10–12 weeks, meeting for 1–2 hr per week (n = 8). Several (n = 5) programmes ran for over

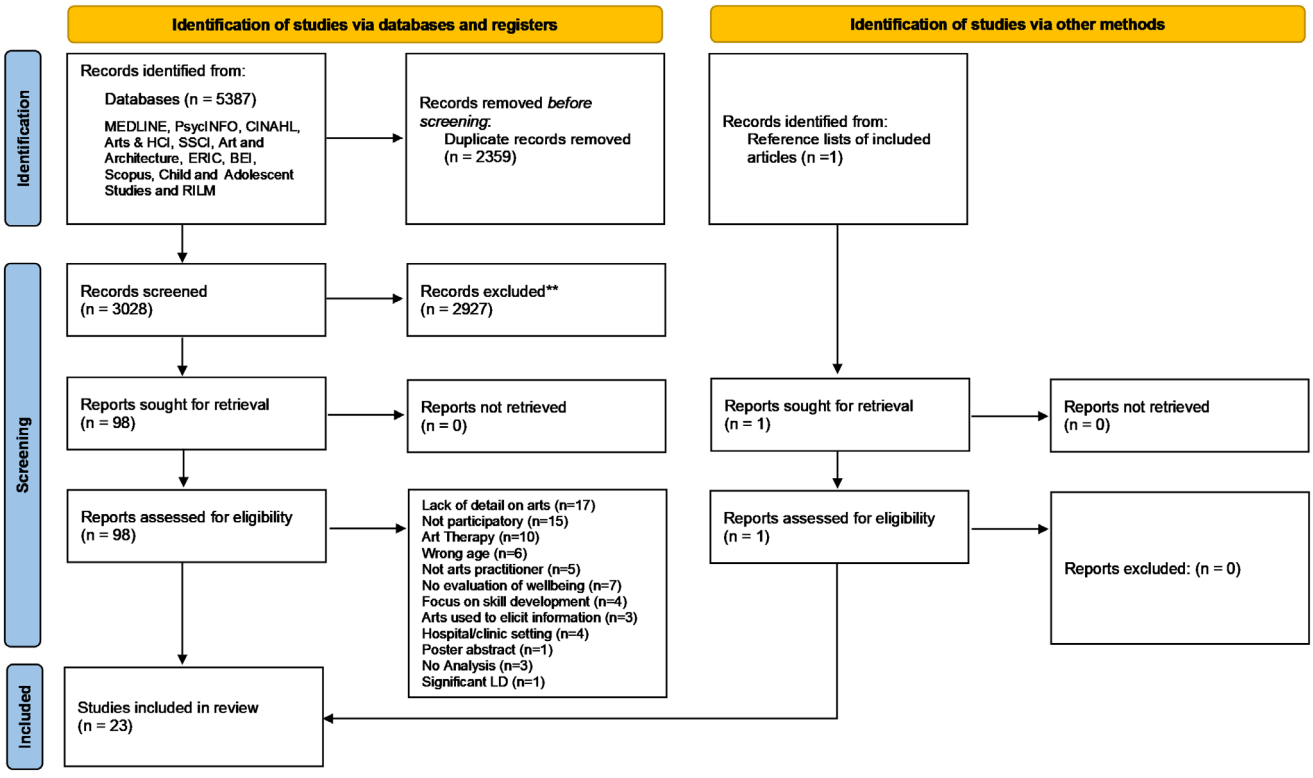

Figure 1 PRISMA flow chart

Table 1 Summary of quantitative studies and quantitative elements of mixed-methods studies

Author and country	Study design	Population and referral route	Intervention details	Control group (s)	Outcome measure (s)	Data time point (s)	Key outcomes	Quality (MMAT)
Archambault et al. (2020) Canada	Mixed methods Pre-/post- and 3-month follow-up	• Participants: N = 12 YP, aged 14–25 (mean age 18; F10: M2) • n = 7 YP living with family; n = 8 in secondary education • Target Ps (n = 8): 6/8 in receipt of psychiatric services • Referral: n = 8 'target Ps', referred from hospitals/community health centres; n = 4 other Ps recruited by word of mouth	• Art form: Visual arts • Duration: 12 weeks; ×1 per week for 2 h • Setting: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) • Facilitator: Arts educator • Delivery: Individual and group • Arts activities: YP collaborate on artworks inspired by museum visit. Introduced to various artistic techniques, for example painting, printmaking, photography, and collage	• None	• Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scales; French version • French validated version of the WHO-5 Well-being Index • Young Adults Social Self-Evaluation • Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale	• T1: Baseline • T2: Post-intervention • T3: Follow-up 3 months later	• Sig ↓ in negative affect pre-/post-workshops (held in weeks 2, 6, 9, and 12) • Sig ↑ subjective mental well-being scores (WHO-5) T1–T2, not found at T3 • Sig ↑ Social acceptance T1–T2. Not found at T3	Moderate
Caló et al. (2020) United Kingdom	Mixed methods Pre/post	• Participants: N = 27 disadvantaged YP, aged 12–17 • Referral: Not reported	• Art form: Music • Duration: 16 sessions • Setting: School, charity, and community centres • Facilitator: Music practitioners • Delivery: 1–1 and group work • Arts activities: Participatory music-making, incl. use of technology, music recording, song writing, and learning to play an instrument. Focus on expressing emotions and exploring problems	• None	• Good Childhood Index (Rees, Goswami, & Bradshaw 2010) • Questionnaire included Life Satisfaction Measures of Personal Well-being used by ONS National Wellbeing Programme	• T1: Baseline • T2: Post-intervention	• No significant effects identified	Moderate

(continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Author and country	Study design	Population and referral route	Intervention details	Control group (s)	Outcome measure (s)	Data time point (s)	Key outcomes	Quality (MMAT)
Efstathopoulou and Bungay (2021) United Kingdom	Longitudinal cohort design	• Participants: 91 YP, aged 13–16. Year groups 9–11 (26 M; 60F; 1 trans-gender; 4 no info) • 10 schools in socially deprived areas; selected by funder • Referral: School staff selected pupils they thought would benefit. Some selected vulnerable pupils they thought would enjoy arts activities	• Art Form: Visual arts • Duration: 10 weekly; 2-hr workshops • Setting: School • Facilitator(s): Artists with school staff • Delivery: Individual and collaborative group work • Arts activities: New visual artistic activity and topic introduced weekly, including wire sculpting, clay, painting, and collage. Focus on creative process not art produced	• None	• Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) • True Resilience Scale	• T1: Baseline • T2: Post-intervention • T3: 3 months later	• Sig ↑(4.2 points) in WEWMS (moderate effect size 0.3); not found at T3 • Sig ↑ (small effect size 0.23) in True Resilience Scale; Insufficient data to establish if sustained at T3 • Some YP could not understand questionnaires	Moderate
Philipsson, Duberg, Möller, & Hagberg (2013) Sweden	Prospective RCT	• Participants: *N* = 112 girls with internalising difficulties, aged 13–18 (mean age 16). *N* = 59 girls in dance intervention group: • Referral: Recruitment carried out with school health services; school nurses invited eligible girls to informational meeting	• Art form: Dance • Duration: 8 months, ×2 weekly for 75-min sessions • Setting: Gym near school • Facilitator: Dance practitioner • Delivery: @20 girls/group • Arts activities: Focus on enjoyment of movement. Improvisation and spontaneous movements included, to encourage creativity. YP input into music and dance styles	• Control group: Standard prevention and care	• Quality of life (QoL) measure – Health Utility Index Mark 3 (HU3)	• T1: Baseline • T2: 4-month follow-up • T3: 8-month follow-up • T4: 12-month follow-up • T5: 20-month follow-up	Sig ↑ in QoL measured by the HUI13 at 4, 8, 12, and 20 months compared to controls	Moderate

(continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Author and country	Study design	Population and referral route	Intervention details	Control group (s)	Outcome measure (s)	Data time point (s)	Key outcomes	Quality (MMAT)
Levstek and Banerjee (2021) United Kingdom	Mixed methods	• Participants: *N* = 99 YP (F39; M59; Non-binary 1). Mean age 15.59 • Also, *n* = 21 staff members, 14 parents • Referral: Not reported	• Art Form: Music • Duration: 14 months; ×1 per week • Setting: Drop-in centre; special school • Facilitator(s): Music 'tutors' • Delivery: Small group • Arts activities: Music activities ranged from performing alongside music known to YP, creating new music, music production tutoring, and 'inclusive ensembles' (2 projects)	• None	• Retrospective survey recording changes in YP with regard to intrapersonal and interpersonal areas of development (Likert scale). • Staff asked to compare what YP were like in 1st session retrospectively compared to last session	• Post-intervention	• Sig ↑growth in intrapersonal and interpersonal domains	Moderate
Martin and Wood (2017) Western Australia	Quasi-experimental study Pre/post	• Participants: *N* = 84 students displaying antisocial behaviour, enrolled from grades 8–10. Of these, *n* = 41 completed questionnaires (24F, 17 M; mean age 13.8). • 3 low SES schools • Recruitment: Via school psychologist, student, student services, coordinators, and/or grade coordinators • Approx 50% consented	• Art Form: Music (drumming) • Duration: 10–weeks • Setting: School • Facilitator(s): Accredited DRUMBEAT facilitator • Delivery: Group • Arts activities: Hand drumming; YP form a 'drum circle', making music together as a group Culminates in a group performance to an audience	• None	• Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) • Kessler 5 (K5) Psychological Stress • Abbreviated PTSD Checklist – (A PCL-C) • Adapted Self-Reported Delinquency • Scale (ASRDS)	• T1: Baseline • T2: Post-intervention	• Sig ↑ (4 points) in WEMWBS in boys not girls • Sig ↓ PCL-C scores (PTSD symptoms) in boys but not girls • Sig ↓ ASRDC (antisocial behaviours) in boys but not girls	Weak

(continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Author and country	Study design	Population and referral route	Intervention details	Control group (s)	Outcome measure (s)	Data time point (s)	Key outcomes	Quality (MMAT)
Miao and Stewart (2022) Canada	Mixed methods	• Participants: *N* = 13 YP (5F; 8 M) • All had interest in music; *n* = 3 had songwriting experience (2 with music and lyric composition and 1 with writing rap lyrics). • 2 groups (group 1: *n* = 7; 3F; 4 M and group 2: *n* = 6; 2F; 4 M) • Recruitment: Via social media and posters at a youth centre	• Art form: Music • Duration: 5 days; group 1: 4 × 3 hr sessions and 1 × 1 hr; group 2: 4 × 2 hr and 1 × 1 hr • Setting: Not given • Facilitator: Musician • Delivery: individ. or in pairs • Arts activities: Introduced to structural elements of songs, basic lyrical and melodic concepts, and musical notation. Developed compositions and helped to explore life experiences to develop musical/lyrical ideas	• None	• Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES) • Sherer's General Self-Efficacy Scale	• T1: Baseline • T2: Post-intervention	• No sig difference in pre- and post-RSES scores • No sig difference in mean pre- and post-workshop self-efficacy scores	Weak
Tanaka et al. (2020) Japan	Preliminary study; quasi-experimental	• Participants: *N* = 23; *n* = 10 TD children (aged 8–9) and *n* = 13 autistic children (aged 8–13)	• Art Form: Visual arts • Duration: 11 months; ×5 sessions; 2 hr (2018; 1.5 hr 2019) • Setting: Not reported • Facilitator(s): Visual artist • Delivery: Group • Arts activities: YP used *Smoovie* application on iPad to make own movies with short stop-motion animation. Theme of project was fully participant led. Arts and crafts materials that stimulated different senses were provided	• None	• Levels and % concentration of salivary oxytocin (OT) • Concentration % of CORT in saliva (as biomarker of levels of stress)	• T1: Baseline saliva samples collected within 10 min pre-workshops • T2: Post-intervention saliva samples collected immediately post-workshops	• Sig ↓in salivary OT level post-sessions in TD not in ASD • Sig ↑mean % of salivary OT post-session in ASD compared to TD • Sig ↑ % salivary OT post-workshop for ASD • No difference in salivary cortisol concentrations post-workshop in TD and ASD	Moderate

(continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Author and country	Study design	Population and referral route	Intervention details	Control group (s)	Outcome measure (s)	Data time point (s)	Key outcomes	Quality (MMAT)
Rousseau et al. (2014) Canada	Cluster RCT	• Participants: *N* = 555 immigrant and refugee youth • Theatre group (intervention): *n* = 186, mean age 14.03 (F64; M89 • Control group: *n* = 207, mean age 13.99 (F64; M71) • Tutorship group: *n* = 162, mean age 13.57 (F74; M102)	• Art Form: Theatre • Duration: 12 weeks; ×1 per week; 90-min workshops • Setting: Schools • Facilitator(s): Theatre-trained facilitators with psychology experience • Arts activities: Warm-up games and exercises to build trust, followed by improvisation (verbally, musically, and through gestures) using theatrical methods (e.g. fluid sculptures) informed by students' personal stories related to weekly theme	• No intervention • Tutoring	• Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ); assessing Impairment from emotional and behavioural symptoms	• T1: Baseline • T2: Post-intervention	• No greater reduction in self-reported impairment and symptoms in intervention group compared to controls	Moderate
Wood et al. (2013) Western Australia	Mixed methods	• Participants: *N* = 190, 9–27 per school • Setting: 19 schools (primary *n* = 10, secondary *n* = 5, Intensive English Centres *n* = 4; providing intensive English to YP with English as 2nd language	• Art Form: Music (drumming) • Duration: 10 weeks • Setting: Schools • Facilitator(s): Artists with school staff • Arts activities: Hand drumming; YP form a 'drum circle' exploring connections between making music together as a group and development of healthy relationships	• None	• Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSES) Wording of scale altered T2 to make more understandable for YP • Feedback questionnaire completed at the 5-week mid-point post-programme	• T1: Baseline • T2: Post-intervention	• Sig ↑ in self-esteem RSES (10% increase). • ↓Decrease in reported behaviour incidents for 29% of YP (school data) and 5% decrease in absenteeism	Weak

Table 2 Summary of qualitative studies and qualitative elements of mixed-methods studies

Author and country	Population	Description of participatory arts-based methods	Design: method of data collection	Acceptability indicators	Quality (MMAT)
Archambault et al. (2020) Canada	• Population: *N* = 12 YP (aged 14–25; mean age 18; F10: M2) • *n* = 7 YP living with family; *n* = 8 in secondary education • Target Ps (*n* = 8): 6/8 in receipt of psychiatric services • Referral: *N* = 8 'target Ps', referred from hospitals/community health centres; *n* = 4 other Ps recruited by word of mouth	• Art form: Visual arts • Duration: 12 weeks; once per week for 2 hr • Setting: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) • Facilitator: Arts educator • Delivery: Individual and group work • Arts activities: YP collaborate on artworks inspired by museum visit. Introduced to various artistic techniques, for example painting, printmaking, photography, and collage	• Mixed methods • Data Collection: Individual semi-structured interviews (*N* = 24) conducted post-programme, with YP, clinicians, and close relatives • Data Analysis: Thematic analysis (TA)	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑sociability; ↑social confidence; ↑social skills; distraction from worries • Affective attitude: ↑positive affect • Burden: One YP felt angry to be in programme, and parent reports they felt 'judged' in workshops	Moderate
Atkinson and Robson (2012) United Kingdom	• Population: First primary school (low SES) – *n* = 11 groups of 4–6 children, aged 5–11; second primary school (low SES) – *n* = 13 groups of 6–10 children, aged 5–11 • Recruitment: Selected as rated project as successful in enhancing participants' personal well-being and where same arts practitioner had been involved throughout	• Art form: Visual arts • Duration: Group met regularly over at least a term for a am/pm session ×1 per week • Facilitator: Arts practitioners • Arts activities: One school used drawing and modelling; other school used writing. Practitioners ran and facilitated range of different activities	• Qualitative • Data collection: Practitioners acted as participant–researchers • Open format form prompting recording of session activities/intentions and dynamics • Data Analysis: Thematic analysis (TA)	• Perceived effectiveness: Self-expression, increased self-confidence, improved literacy skills • Affective attitude: Enjoyment, fun • Self-efficacy: Sense of increased personal agency • Burden: Some YP excluded due to behaviour, other competing activities (e.g. schoolwork prioritised by teachers disrupting sessions for some YP). Not having same physical space for the arts activities was disruptive	Strong
Baker et al. (2018) Australia	• Population: *N* = 85 YP (*n* = 28 male), aged 12–19, mean age 13.94, *SD* 2.17 • Background: Many of the YP faced barriers to participating in mainstream educational settings • Recruitment: YP selected as identified by youth workers/school staff as not fitting in at school or were home schooled	• Art form: Music (songwriting) • Duration: 2 days • Setting: Community hall • Facilitator: Artists • Delivery: Large group • Details of arts activities: Songwriting activities comprised preparatory games and tasks, creating the lyrics, rehearsing, recording, and performing the song and accompanying dance, and planning/recording a video for the song	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Video footage, ethnographic observations • Data Analysis: Video footage, ethnographic field notes, and artefacts thematically analysed and themes produced relating to contextual factors and well-being outcomes	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑connectedness; ↑self-confidence; sense of accomplishment • Affective attitude: YP had fun • Burden: Less engaged when artist rejects YP's ideas and uses their own instead	Moderate

(continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Author and country	Population	Description of participatory arts-based methods	Design: method of data collection	Acceptability indicators	Quality (MMAT)
Brown and Jeanneret (2015) Australia	• Population: *N* = 31 YP completed programme, aged 15–22/*n* = 35 enrolled • Background: Life challenges include the following: homelessness, m/hr conditions, and living in residential care • Recruitment: Via youth worker. Identified YP who were disengaged and interested in art	• Art form: Mixed visual arts • Duration: 8 weeks, twice a week for 5-hr sessions • Setting: Dedicated youth studio • Facilitator: Artist • Delivery: Small groups of up to 8 • Details of arts activities: YP explore diverse forms of visual art, design, film/video, animation, and photography. Exhibition held at end	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Interviews with: artist; youth worker; artist and youth worker together; YP and parent/guardians • Researcher observations of representative sample of workshops • Data Analysis: Process of 'progressive focussing' (Stake, 2000) framed by hermeneutic model of inquiry	• Perceived effectiveness: Reciprocity; ↑social connectedness (peers and wider community); ↑agency; lead own learning and explore own ideas; achievement; ↑mastery; recognition of own skills and abilities • Self-efficacy: ↑self-belief; realisation of artistic potential • Burden: fragility of YP's lives, difficulty of travelling to venue • Alleviators of burden: flexible, tailored approach; informal, relaxed, non-hierarchical, positive atmosphere unlike school); whole organisation approach (aided by youth worker)	Weak
Caló et al. (2020) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 27 YP aged 12–17; *n* = 23 took part in interviews • Background: Disadvantaged • Recruitment: No information provided	• Art form: Music • Duration: 16 sessions • Setting: 1 school, 2 community centres, and 1 charity • Facilitator: Music practitioners • Delivery: One-to-one and group work • Details of arts activities: Participatory music-making; use of music technology, music recording, songwriting, learning to play instruments. Focus on expressing emotions/exploring problems	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Interviews: YP (*n* = 23); COOL music leaders; stakeholders (educators, teacher, and social/support worker who worked with YP (*n* = 8) • Data Analysis: Thematic analysis (TA)	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑Social connectedness; ↑belonging and self-acceptance; ↑friendship; ↑agency and independence; sense of achievement; positive contribution and recognition • Burden: Filling in questionnaires difficult • Alleviators of burden: No pressure to discuss problems • Self-efficacy: Able to make own choices, autonomy	Moderate
Clennon and Boehm (2014) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 78 YP First group – *n* = 55 YP, M13 years (5% of group aged 16–18). Second group – *n* = 23 YP, M12 years (30% aged 16–18). • Background: Disadvantaged • Recruitment: YP attending youth club and drop-in group could attend creative sessions	• Art form: Music • Duration: More than a year; ×1/week • Setting: Youth club and drop-in group • Facilitator: Workshop leaders with musical background/training • Delivery: Group activities. Older YP mentored younger ones • Details of arts activities: YP encouraged to develop own distinctive and creative engagement with local heritage, mediated through musical, media, and music-technological activities. Series of weekly creative sessions music and music technology provided a safe and creative outlet for emotions generated from discussions on sensitive issues	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Combined elements of ethnography and participatory practice • Data Analysis: Embedded participant–observer research, focussing on generating authentic narratives from all stakeholders	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑self-esteem; ↑self-confidence; ↑engagement with other people; ↑emotional self-regulation; able to safely explore emotions	Moderate

(continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Author and country	Population	Description of participatory arts-based methods	Design: method of data collection	Acceptability indicators	Quality (MMAT)
Daykin et al. (2017) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 118 YP (81 M; 37F) aged 13–21 (mean age 16.64 years) • Background: YP based in justice settings • Recruitment: Project advertised to YP via flyers/posters	• Art form: Music • Duration: 6 weeks, ×1 per week, 90 min to 3-hr sessions • Setting: 15 projects; 8 different youth justice sites, ×2 each of children's homes (SCHs), juvenile secure units, young offender institutions (YOIs), and community-based youth offending teams (YOTs). • Facilitator: Professional musicians • Delivery: Small groups • Details of arts activities: Active learning techniques used to introduce YP to instruments (string, percussion, keyboard, and electronics). Musicians built on YP's musical preferences/past experiences. Produced CD with recorded tracks at end	• Mixed methods: Quantitative data not reported as questionnaires not completed correctly • Data Collection: Participant observation, interviews, and focus groups • Data Analysis: Inductive thematic analysis	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑comfort around others; ↑confidence; ↑hope about future; accomplishment; ↑ knowledge and skills • Affective Attitude: Positive and enthusiastic about music programme. Liked informality, banter, jokes, and opportunity to 'let go' in a relatively 'safe' environment • Burden: YP who did not engage/turn up found to have felt 'fed up', 'hungry', 'tired', 'uncomfortable', or 'ill'. YP sometimes 'in a bad mood', 'anxious', 'too angry', or 'too upset' to participate, usually due to issue outside music programme. Younger, more emotionally labile, YP found programme more difficult. Some YP criticised range and type of instruments used or insufficient resources. Some YP did not identify with musicians, for example describing them as nerds or 'a bit queer'.	Strong
Duberg et al. (2016) Sweden	• Population: *N* = 112 girls with internalising difficulties, aged 13–18 (mean age 16) • *n* = 59 girls in dance intervention group • Recruitment: Carried out with school health services; school nurses invited eligible girls to informational meeting	• Art form: Dance • Duration: 8 months, ×2 weekly for 75-min sessions • Setting: Centrally located gym • Facilitator: Dance practitioner • Delivery: Around 20 girls per group • Arts activities: Focus on enjoyment of movement. Improvisation and spontaneous movements included to encourage creativity. YP input into music and dance styles	• Qualitative: Completed as part of RCT. Quantitative data reported separately. See Philoppson et al. (2017) in Table 1 • Data Collection: *N* = 24 semi-structured, face-to-face, interviews 1 -week post-programme • Data Analysis: Inductive content analysis	• Perceived effectiveness: relaxing, relief from stress, ↑agency, ↑friendships, ↑emotional expression, ↑(embodied) self-trust, sense of freedom, ↑self-worth, ↑self-acceptance, ↑ embodied self-confidence, ↑empowerment • Affective attitude: Enjoyed dance sessions; joy whilst dancing • Self-efficacy: No pressure to be 'good' • Burden: Engaging in dance programme after school could be tiring	Strong

(continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Author and country	Population	Description of participatory arts-based methods	Design: method of data collection	Acceptability indicators	Quality (MMAT)
Ennis and Tonkin (2018) Australia	• Population: Those who had taken part in youth arts projects for at least 2 years between 12 and 26 years of age • *N* = 17 people interviewed out of *n* = 23 who expressed an interest in being interviewed, all older than 18 years • Recruitment: Adult Networks used to contact those participating in youth arts at different time periods (1980s to present).	• Art form: Mixed arts, mainly theatre • Duration: At least 2 years • Setting: Reporting on past participation in a youth arts programme • Facilitator: Not reported • Delivery: Not reported • Details of arts activities: Focus on creating, participating, and/or engaging in drama and circus; including skills training workshops, story development, and script writing, rehearsals, performances, direction, light, and sound set up and operation	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Unstructured face-to-face interviews; *n* = 5 via Skype/telephone • Data Analysis: Narrative method. Categorical content approach taken to data analysis	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑self-confidence; ↑social confidence; ↑ social connectedness; ↑creative thinking; ↑ empathy ↑positive body awareness; ↑self-knowledge; ↑emotional health, ↑physical fitness; ↑capability; ↓ anxiety • Affective attitude: 'fun'; excitement of performances; felt 'satisfied and alive'. • Burden: Worried 'not good enough'; rapidly changing bodies caused confusion/embarrassment; difficulties in wearing unflattering costumes • Self-efficacy: Able to make own choices artistically, balancing risk and safety; able to make contributions they valued	Moderate
Hanrahan and Banerjee (2017) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 4 YP aged 15–21 (Mean age = 18.25, *SD* = 2.75; (3F; 1 M) • British with mixed ethnic profile: *n* = 2 mixed race; *n* = 2 black • 3/4 attending or had attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) • Background: Permanent/multiple temporary school exclusions due to behavioural incidents. Challenging home life • Recruitment: Researcher approached YP to invite them to participate	• Art form: Theatre • Duration: Total time 1 year+: Initial 6-month period, ×1 per week or bi-weekly, followed by rehearsals and productions • Setting: Project run by a theatre company • Facilitator: Theatre practitioners • Delivery: Small group • Details of arts activities: Drama workshops focussed on improvisation using wide range of scenarios and roles, and improvisations based on the YP's life stories and experiences	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews conducted at 3 time points (T1, YP just starting programme; T2 7–10 months post-T1 after first performance; and T3, 11–12 months post-T2, following production). • Data Analysis: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑self-confidence; ↑ self-esteem, ↑connection to peers and theatre workers as part of an equal team • Affective attitude: YP reported feeling positive about participation and motivated; enjoying process of acting, and process of being engaged in a constructive activity • Self-efficacy: YP reported ↑sense of being able to change themselves and their life trajectory in positive ways	Moderate
Lai et al. (2021) Hong Kong	• Population: *N* = 24 YP, aged 15–18 from 'low-quality' schools in Hong Kong • *n* = 2 YP transitioning from school to work and declined to be interviewed, so *n* = 22 Ps interviewed • Recruitment: No details provided of how YP recruited to dance programme	• Art form: Dance • Duration: 1 year; ×1 per week • Setting: Not reported • Facilitator: Dance instructor with youth experience • Delivery: Large group • Details of arts activities: MINDJAM is a performing arts programme consisting of a set of sequenced activities with seven public performances. During rehearsals, YP collaborate together with support of facilitator to produce an 8-min street culture performance	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Interviews • Data Analysis: Thematic analysis (TA)	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑connectedness to peers and widening of social network • Affective attitude: ↑feelings of happiness and joy whilst participating • Self-efficacy: ↑sense of mastery of the skills associated with street dance • Burden – One YP expressed a fear of failing to meet group's common goal	Moderate

(continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Author and country	Population	Description of participatory arts-based methods	Design: method of data collection	Acceptability indicators	Quality (MMAT)
Levstek and Banerjee (2021) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 99 YP (F39; M59; non-binary *n* = 1). Mean age = 15.59 • Also, *n* = 21 staff members, 14 parents • Recruitment: Not reported	• Art Form: Music • Duration: 14 months; ×1 per week • Setting: Drop-in centre; special school • Facilitator(s): • Delivery: Small group • Arts activities: Music activities ranged from performing alongside music known to YP, creating new music, music production tutoring, and 'inclusive ensembles' (2 projects)	• Mixed Methods • Data Collection: Staff asked to compare what YP were like in 1st session retrospectively compared to last session • Data Analysis: Thematic analysis	• Perceived efficacy: ↑confidence; ↑emotional competence; ↑self-awareness; ↑confidence in abilities	Moderate
Macpherson et al. (2016) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 10 YP (4 M; 3F), aged 16–25 • Sustained attendance achieved by 9/10 • Background: *n* = 6/10 YP faced m/hr challenges involving depression and anxiety; *n* = 4 experienced moderate learning difficulty (*n* = 1 autistic; *n* = 3 with MLD, one of whom also had ADD). • Recruitment: YP recruited through charity and community partners	• Art form: Visual arts • Duration: 10 weeks; ×1/week for 4 hr • Setting: Arts-based methods developed and delivered in conjunction with community and charity partners. Physical setting not noted • Facilitator: Arts practitioner • Delivery: Small group • Details of arts activities: YP introduced to a range of visual arts skills (including mono-printing, painting, plaster casting, and stencilling) and basic ideas behind Resilience Framework. Collaborated together on producing artworks and shared their learning	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Participant observation and reflective diary by researcher at workshops; *n* = 1 focus group (mid-way point); *n* = 9 semi-structured interviews post-programme with YP who attended regularly • Data Analysis: Coding structured according to core concepts found in Resilience Framework	• Perceived efficacy: ↑resilience; ↑social connectedness; ↑sense of belonging; reciprocity; routes to connection – shared experiences of art; ↑emotional self-regulation; personal growth – sense of achievement; ↑competence; acquisition of new skills and knowledge leading to ↑confidence in abilities • Self-efficacy: Perception that 'no good' at art • Affective attitude: Enjoyment from engaging in shared arts' activities • Burden: Making unfavourable self-other comparisons to other YP's artwork resulting in feeling less capable • Alleviators of burden: Collaborative outputs	Moderate
Miao and Stewart (2022) Canada	• Population: *N* = 13 YP (5F; 8 M) • 2 groups (group 1, *n* = 7; 3F; 4 M and group 2, *n* = 6; 2F; 4 M). • All had interest in music; *n* = 3 had songwriting experience (2 with music and lyric composition and 1 with writing rap lyrics). • Recruitment: Via social media and posters at a youth centre	• Art form: Music • Duration: 5 days; group 1: 4 × 3 hr sessions, and 1 × 1 hr; group 2: 4 × 2 hr and 1 × 1 hr • Setting: Not given • Facilitator: Musician (local choir director, composer, and singer) • Delivery: YP worked individually or in pairs • Arts activities: Introduced to structural elements of songs, basic lyrical and melodic concepts, and musical notation. Developed compositions and helped to explore life experiences to develop musical/lyrical ideas	• Mixed Methods • Data Collection: Focus groups • Data Analysis: Phenomenological analysis (no specific analytic procedure reported) undertaken of focus group data	Perceived effectiveness: ↑self-expression, ↓self-harm and ↓anxiety (better able to cope), ↑Social connectedness, reciprocity, validation. Affective attitude: Enjoyment; sense of pride from completing composition. Self-efficacy: Lack of perceived artistic skills Burden: Difficult to make song due to inexperience, lack of time, lack of inspiration, how felt on a particular day impacted engagement and how felt about songwriting process.	Weak

(continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Author and country	Population	Description of participatory arts-based methods	Design: method of data collection	Acceptability indicators	Quality (MMAT)
Parker et al. (2018) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 32 pupils (28 M; 4F) aged 13–16 • Participants attended large comprehensive school • Recruitment: Pupils typically referred by teachers due to: disruptive, bullying, or aggressive behaviour towards peers	• Art form: Music • Duration: 10 weeks, ×1/week, 2 hr • Setting: School • Facilitator: • Delivery: Groups of around 15 pupils • Details of arts activities: Consisted of the following: (a) lyric writing (in style of YP's preferred genre – usually rap), (b) composing beats (mostly using Logic Pro software on Mac computers (pupils who could play musical instruments did so in sessions), and (c) recording and/or performing music YP had composed. Coupled with mentoring	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews with YP • Data Analysis: Grounded theory approach (Charmaz).	Perceived self-efficacy: ↑self-confidence (especially around other people), improvements in communication skills, being hope about future, ↑positive view of the self, sense of achievement. Affective response: Sessions fun and relaxing, sessions helped YP feel calm/less angry, sense of pride due to what they achieved.	Moderate
Ritchie and Gaulter (2020) United Kingdom	• Population: *N* = 13 pupils, aged 11–15, from a range of countries • School situated in socially deprived area • Pupils had varying levels of English language, some having little or no English • Background: Pupils had migrated to United Kingdom within previous 3 years • Recruitment: All pupils migrating to United Kingdom within last 3 years identified	• Art form: Dance • Duration: six 60-min dance classes exploring hip-hop styles • Setting: School • Facilitator: Researcher–practitioner from Royal Academy of Dance • Delivery: Small group tasks • Details of arts activities: Hip-hop selected by pupils. Dance sessions used cued response teaching style before becoming more pupil-led as pupils gained experience. Small group tasks encouraged collaboration between YP	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Semi-structured focus groups with YP, no more than *n* = 6 per group. Photo-elicitation methods used • Interviews with staff overseeing research and staff members with responsibility for students with EAL • Data Analysis: Axial and open coding used	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑self-confidence; ↑resilience ('you have to try'); ↑social connectedness • Affective attitude: Enjoyed sessions and had fun	Moderate
Stephenson and Dobson (2020) United Kingdom	• Population: Classes of 7- to 11-year-old children (years 3, 4, 5, and 6) • Background: Children attended primary school with above average SES • Recruitment: No selection as sessions were undertaken in class time	• Art form: Creative writing and drama • Duration: 2 terms, ×3 sessions • Setting: Primary school • Facilitator: Arts practitioners with help from teachers • Delivery: Group (classes) • Details of arts activities: Theatre company initially facilitated sessions, planning for improvised moments within the drama where children had choices about how to interpret and lead the narrative collectively and make decisions within the narrative, which could influence characters within it. During project phases 2 and 3, teachers led more of sessions	• Qualitative • Data Collection: Interviews (teachers and children); reflective conversations (children and teachers); observations of lessons (by authors); reflective journals (teachers, children, and researchers). • Data Analysis: Key themes from interviews were mapped (Miles Huberman) in relation to Sen's model of flourishing	• Perceived effectiveness: ↑self-confidence; 'built courage'. ↑resilience (learn OK to make a mistake); ↑empathy; ↑critical reflection; ↑compassion • Affective attitude: Strong subjective well-being reported across all year groups; words such as 'enjoyed, happy, and interesting' frequently used in relation to sessions • Self-efficacy: being someone else, doing/saying what you want to do/say/feel) built confidence in what wanted to do	Moderate

a year, whilst $n = 2$ studies lasted 2 days to one week. The arts-based activities included music ($n = 9$), visual arts ($n = 6$), theatre ($n = 4$, one of combined creative writing and theatre), and dance ($n = 3$). PAB programmes were conducted in various community settings, including schools ($n = 10$), community and youth centres ($n = 2$), an art studio ($n = 1$), justice sites ($n = 1$), an arts museum ($n = 1$), and a gym ($n = 1$). In a few cases ($n = 4$), the setting was not specified, and some took place across multiple community sites ($n = 2$). Table 2 presents additional information about acceptability indicators for PAB programmes. Acceptability relates to the extent to which people delivering/receiving an intervention consider it to be appropriate, based on anticipated or experienced cognitive and emotional responses (Sekhon, Cartwright, & Francis 2017).

Critical appraisal

Methodological quality appraisal was conducted independently by two reviewers for each paper using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool 2018 (MMAT) (Hong, Gonzalez-Reyes, & Pluye 2018). There were high levels of agreement (>80%) with a third reviewer helping to resolve discrepancies. Methodological quality was categorised as follows: weak – meeting two criteria or less; moderate – meeting three or four criteria; or strong – meeting all five criteria (see Tables 1 and 2).

Quantitative studies. Critical appraisal of the quantitative papers, and quantitative elements of mixed-methods papers, highlighted the difficulty of meeting prescribed methodological thresholds when studies are delivered in community settings. Problems identified included the following: small sample sizes; lack of control groups (all studies apart from Philipsson et al., 2013; Rousseau et al., 2014); difficulty disentangling the effects of PAB activities from other elements of the intervention; incomplete outcome data; difficulty completing outcome measures; positive selection bias; positive response bias; and social desirability effects. The lack of control groups and difficulty distinguishing different elements of programmes (Martin & Wood, 2017; Wood, Ivery, Donovan, & Lambin, 2013) made it difficult to ascertain to what degree any reported effects were likely due to the PAB activities or to other generic factors. Taken together, selection and response biases and social desirability effects all raise the risk of over-estimating any identified effects. Whilst the RCT studies (Philipsson et al., 2013; Rousseau et al., 2014) included control groups, participating adolescents were aware of the nature of the study, potentially impacting how they completed self-report measures post-intervention.

Qualitative studies. Highly rated qualitative studies ($n = 3$) clearly specified the theoretical perspectives shaping data collection and analysis. There was a clear link between data sources, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. They described methods of data collection and analysis clearly. Sufficient concrete examples of the original data were presented to both illustrate the analytic procedure(s) used and provide evidence that the findings were well-grounded in them. The data were appropriately (neither under- nor over-) analysed, with nuances and complexities clearly portrayed and diversity considered and explained. Lower rated (weak and moderate) qualitative studies ($n = 10$), and qualitative components of mixed-methods studies ($n = 4$), included one or more methodological flaws. The most common issues included insufficient detail about the PAB activities and steps taken to analyse the data. Confirmability and credibility were undermined by a lack of balance between the analytic commentary and original data. Either too little data were included to fully support the analytic claims made, or conversely, not enough analytic commentary was given to provide an adequate interpretation of the data. Both limited the number of findings that could be extracted from the study for the metasummary presented below. There was also a lack of attention to diversity in the data, with subtleties and complexities not addressed, and the data insufficiently contextualised and situated.

Narrative synthesis

Effectiveness of PAB programmes

The 10 studies reporting quantitative data collectively used 15 different measures to evaluate outcomes relating to CYP's mental health and well-being (see Table 1). Most studies employed uncontrolled pre-/post-test designs. Two RCT designs were included (Philopsson et al., 2013; Rousseau et al., 2014), both of which had some methodological flaws. In the case of Rousseau et al. (2014), behaviour in the sessions was not well-managed, meaning programme implementation was compromised. Overall, due to a number of methodological issues, results from the quantitative studies should be interpreted with caution.

Mental well-being and quality of life. Four studies employed measures of mental well-being to evaluate the outcome of the PAB programmes (Archambault et al., 2020; Caló, Steiner, Millar, & Teasdale, 2020; Efstathopoulou & Bungay, 2021; Martin & Wood, 2017). Of these, three (Archambault et al., 2020; Efstathopoulou & Bungay, 2021; Martin & Wood, 2017) reported significant improvements in CYP's mental well-being following completion of visual arts ($n = 1$) and music programmes ($n = 2$). The two studies (Efstathopoulou & Bungay, 2021; Martin & Wood, 2017) using the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) both

found an increase of 4 points, which is above the level for clinical significance (3 points). However, Efstathopoulou and Bungay (2021) found that this improvement was not sustained at the three-month follow-up. Likewise, Archambault et al. (2020), who used the WHO-5 to evaluate young people's mental well-being, found that post-programme gains were not maintained at the 3-month follow-up. In contrast to other studies, Caló et al. (2020) found no significant increase in mental well-being, using the Life Satisfaction Measures of Personal Well-being (ONS National Wellbeing Programme) following young people's participation in a series of participatory music workshops. A prospective RCT study (Philipsson et al., 2013) found a significant increase in quality of life (QoL) score (as measured by the Health Utility Index Mark 3 (HU3) in the treatment group at 4, 8, 12, and 20 months, suggesting it was being maintained over time. However, there are some methodological weaknesses in the study, including that the validity and reliability of the Swedish version of the QoL measure used have not been tested and there were also differences in baseline between the treatment and control groups.

Self-esteem. Two studies (Miao & Stewart, 2022; Wood et al., 2013) evaluated young people's self-esteem using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). One lasting 10 weeks identified a significant effect post-intervention (Wood et al., 2013) and the other (Miao & Stewart, 2022), very short intervention (1 week), did not. However, the wording of the items in the RSES used in the study by Wood et al. (2013) was altered after the pre-test to make it more understandable, invalidating the pre- to post-comparison.

Barriers to evaluating effectiveness. Several studies reported problems with CYP's completion of the standardised measures (Daykin et al., 2017; Efstathopoulou & Bungay, 2021; Wood et al., 2013). In addition to the wording of items being changed to improve understanding mid-way through the study described above (Wood et al., 2013), Efstathopoulou and Bungay (2021) report that CYP had difficulty understanding some of the questions in the WEMWBS, for example asking the meaning of 'optimistic'. Daykin et al. (2017), who initially planned a mixed-methods study, abandoned the quantitative data on the basis that the participating young people in the justice settings were observed to engage 'in banter, conferring and joking' (p944) with each other, during completion. This suggests that there are issues with the measures themselves that need to be addressed.

Mechanisms

A qualitative metasummary was undertaken to integrate findings relating to mechanisms of change reported in the qualitative studies with a view to addressing our second research question. Qualitative metasummary integrates the manifest content of qualitative study findings organised into topics or themes, via statements of the findings, as opposed to producing interpretative syntheses represented by integrating concepts, models, or metaphors (Sandelowski, Barroso, & Voils, 2007; Thorne, Jensen, Kearney, Noblit, & Sandelowski, 2004). The metasummary process involves the following: (a) extracting relevant statements of findings from included studies and then (b) consolidating these statements into a smaller set of abstracted findings.

Extraction. A working definition of findings of relevance was established to guide data extraction: this was, 'any second-order findings relating to the mechanisms or processes of change impacting on well-being or mental health outcomes of CYP reported in the included qualitative papers. This includes specified pathways by which change is said to come about, any contextual factors affecting these, and any information specific to the well-being or mental health outcomes themselves'. Second-order findings refer to analytic claims made by the author that are based on the original data. To be extracted, second-order findings had to be supported by first-order evidence, for example participant quotations, detailed case studies, or summary tables of specific topics showing frequency of mention by participants. Statements of findings from each paper were extracted independently by the first and second authors, leaving behind other elements of each paper such as original data (e.g. participant quotations), data and findings not consistent with the above working definition, findings from other studies and/or theories referred to by researchers, accounts of the analytic procedures used, and researchers' discussions about the theoretical or applied significance of their findings. Disagreements between researchers about the data to be extracted were discussed and resolved. In this way, 413 findings were extracted and edited into complete sentences understandable to a naive reader, whilst keeping close to the original words used by the authors of included papers and preserving any relevant contextual information (e.g. type of arts intervention, duration of programme, and key details about the CYP).

Abstraction. These 413 statements of findings were further consolidated by clustering them according to whether reported mechanisms of change or related contexts were similar or different. The consolidation of statements was conducted by the first two authors (EW and SG) until a smaller set of 42 statements was generated that captured the content of all 413 statements of findings. These 42 statements were further organised into two main sections and eight sub-sections (see Table 3). The proportion of papers

Table 3 Metasummary statements generated by findings from three or more papers and which papers contributed to each statement

Statements of findings (n = 33; classified into two main categories and eight sub-categories)	Proportion of papers present	Archambault et al. (2020)	Atkinson and Robson (2012)	Baker et al. (2018)	Brown and Jeanneret (2015)	Caló et al. (2020)	Clennon and Boehm (2014)	Daykin et al. (2016)	Duberg et al. (2016)	Ennis and Tonkin (2018)	Hanrahan and Banerjee (2017)	Lai et al. (2021)	Levstek and Banerjee (2021)	MacPherson et al. (2016)	Miou & Stewart (2022)	Parker et al. (2018)	Stephenson and Dobson (2020)	Ritchie and Gaulter (2020)
Relationship building																		
Creating a space separate from everyday life																		
Practitioners sought to build an accepting and supportive environment in which young people felt free to explore, discover and create without fear of judgement	.59			•	•	•		•	•	•			•	•		•	•	
Practitioners sought to create a protected space separate from the stresses, rules, sociocultural norms, and structures young people associate with everyday life	.47	•	•			•			•		•			•		•		•
Concept of freedom is central to function of the 'safe space': for example embodied freedom, freedom from school curriculum, freedom from critical judgements, and free to be self	.47		•		•				•		•		•	•			•	•
'Safe' space is boundaried. There are rules for 'safe' play to prevent harm	.24		•					•		•	•							
Aspects of context help maintain 'safe' space and ability to move into and out of it, including having the same room for the PAB programme, starting/warm-up rituals, and codes of practice	.18		•		•			•										
Building relationships between practitioners and young people																		
Practitioners sought to establish successful relationships with young people based on mutual trust and support, which helped facilitate engagement in the PAB programme	.47		•			•	•	•		•	•					•		•
Trust is a fundamental contextual characteristic when vulnerable and marginalised young people are involved in an intervention/programme	.24	•	•			•	•	•			•							
Practitioners aimed to build relationships based on equality and joint ownership of intervention process	.41					•	•	•		•	•		•				•	
Practitioners sought different points of connection with young people, endeavouring to build rapport by bringing themselves to the same level	.35		•			•	•	•		•						•		
Practitioners adapted to needs and interests of young people, adopting a tailored and flexible approach	.59		•		•	•	•	•	•	•			•	•		•		

(continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Statements of findings (n = 33; classified into two main categories and eight sub-categories)	Proportion of papers present	Archambault et al. (2020)	Atkinson and Robson (2012)	Baker et al. (2018)	Brown and Jeanneret (2015)	Caló et al. (2020)	Clennon and Boehm (2014)	Daykin et al. (2016)	Duberg et al. (2016)	Ennis and Tonkin (2018)	Hanrahan and Banerjee (2017)	Lai et al. (2021)	Levstek and Banerjee (2021)	MacPherson et al. (2016)	Miou & Stewart (2022)	Parker et al. (2018)	Stephenson and Dobson (2020)	Ritchie and Gaulter (2020)
Attention to confidence building within a tailored and flexible approach gives young people the freedom and agency to express their own ideas and lead activities	.18		•		•								•					
Young people were conceptualised, enabled and validated as artists	.41		•		•	•		•			•		•	•				
The trust relationship developed between PAB intervention and participants contributed to young people feeling 'safe' and protected	.41					•	•	•		•	•					•		•
The trust relationship developed between PAB intervention and participants contributed to young people feeling 'safe' leading to better connectedness and engagement with the arts programme/ intervention	.18					•					•					•		
A one-to-one approach is particularly beneficial for young people who are less confident and harder to engage in the PAB programme	.24				•	•		•								•		
Social affordances of art stimuli and practices																		
Engagement in shared participatory arts activities enabled young people to connect comfortably with each other	.29		•		•			•		•				•				
Young people related to peers by acknowledging and praising each other's art output	.24		•		•			•							•			
Shared interest in arts activities brought young people and practitioners together forging a sense of common purpose and reducing social barriers	.18						•					•	•					
Specific attributes of art stimuli and structures relating to them afford a sense of social connection	.47						•	•	•	•	•	•					•	•
Young people enjoyed the participatory arts activities and had fun	.71		•	•			•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	
Sense of enjoyment in activity led to deeper engagement that was linked to social connections. In turn, social connections fostered enjoyment of sessions	.18								•			•						•
Fostering relationships and team spirit between young people																		
Engagement in participatory arts workshops/ sessions facilitated the making of social connections between young people	.76		•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•			•

(continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Statements of findings (n = 33; classified into two main categories and eight sub-categories)	Proportion of papers present	Archambault et al. (2020)	Atkinson and Robson (2012)	Baker et al. (2018)	Brown and Jeanneret (2015)	Caló et al. (2020)	Clennon and Boehm (2014)	Daykin et al. (2016)	Duberg et al. (2016)	Ennis and Tonkin (2018)	Hanrahan and Banerjee (2017)	Lai et al. (2021)	Levstek and Banerjee (2021)	MacPherson et al. (2016)	Miou & Stewart (2022)	Parker et al. (2018)	Stephenson and Dobson (2020)	Ritchie and Gaulter (2020)
Sense of social connection between young people facilitated by feeling they are in a 'safe' and protected space	.29		•		•	•			•									•
Social connections made during participatory arts sessions led to new friendships that extended beyond the sessions	.18								•			•						•
Social connectedness encouraged deeper engagement in PAB programme	.24					•			•					•				•
Creating a more positive self-narrative																		
Validation from performance and exhibition of art outputs																		
Positive validation from other people in response to performances and exhibitions of artwork engenders a sense of pride and/or accomplishment	.41		•		•	•		•		•					•	•		
The sense of pride/accomplishment derived from taking part in performances and exhibitions of artwork results is linked to increased self-confidence	.24		•			•		•								•		
Exploration of alternative perspectives																		
Practitioners encouraged young people to explore alternative perspectives, including different aspects of self, self at different points in time and in different situations	.29		•						•	•	•						•	
Exploration of alternative perspectives is linked to increased sense of agency in young people	.24		•							•	•						•	
Sense of communitas																		
The sustained experience of being part of a team or group fostered a sense of belonging and acceptance	.29		•						•		•			•				•
A sense of belonging and acceptance is linked to increased self-confidence and/or self-esteem and/or sociability	.29		•				•				•	•	•					•
Expression and exploration of difficult emotions																		
Participatory arts interventions/programmes give space for the 'safe' and cathartic expression of emotion, particularly negative emotion	.41		•				•		•		•			•	•	•		
Negative emotions can be channelled into art materials/dance movements, resulting in positive outputs	.41		•				•		•		•		•	•	•			

contributing material relating to each abstracted finding statement is recorded in the table. Only findings included in three or more papers of the total of 17 included papers are presented in Table 3 (n = 33). These figures are provided as an indicator of having sufficient data to interpret rather than as a measure of salience or representativeness. Qualitative metasummary reflects a quantitative logic whereby higher frequency findings are taken to be evidence of the replication that is both foundational to validity in quantitative research and to the claim of having discovered a pattern or theme (Sandelowski, 2001) or 'preponderance of evidence' (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 1362) in qualitative research.

Figure 2 presents a logic model representing the structure of the identified mechanisms of change and is also a proposal for how these work synergistically. It suggests that practitioners' creation of a protected 'play' space based on mutual trust and respect, through various forms of relationship building, offers CYP a mechanism for freeing them (in a temporary and boundaried way) from everyday social rules and pressures. This opens up possibilities for creating a more positive self-narrative based on the discovery of new strengths, identities, and skills through deeper engagement in facilitative PAB activities and practices. This, in turn, gives rise to a number of outcomes linked to well-being through the development of an increased sense of accomplishment, agency, and community. Each mechanism is explained in more detail below, along with aspects of context reported to inform them, such as the art form, physical setting, implementation, and population.

Cluster 1: Relationship building, creating a space separate from everyday life

Analysis of the final second-order finding statements suggests that most PAB programmes began with a

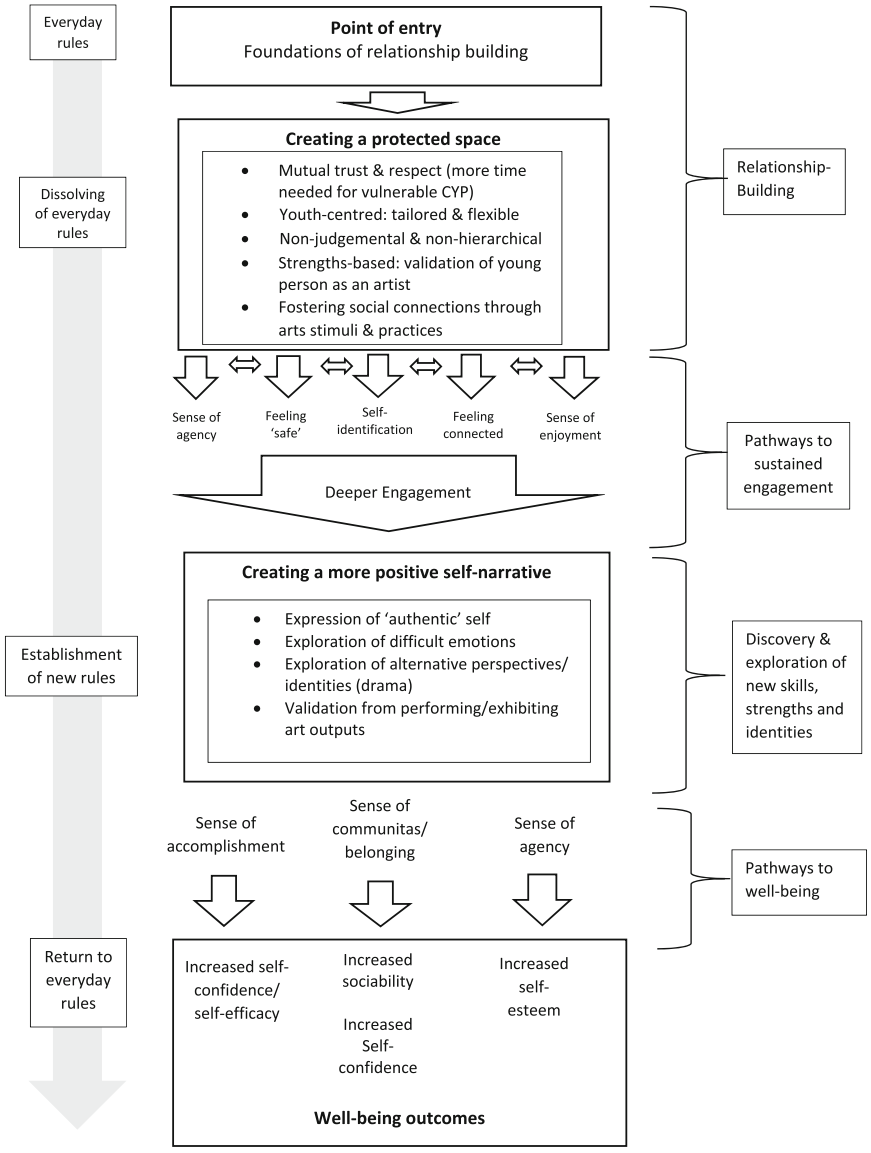

Figure 2 Logic model mapping mechanisms of change

period of relationship building, which is the first of two main organising clusters (see Table 3 and Figure 2). In some studies, this started with partnership organisations providing information about the history and interests of likely participants, and through recruiting and supporting CYP into the programme. Once the PAB sessions started, practitioners often worked to create a 'safe' social space, separate from the pressures and rules of everyday life, in which CYP felt free to be different and 'other' to their socially constructed normative roles.

Creating a protected space. The finding statements suggest that arts practitioners commonly sought to establish a space bracketed off from the external stresses, perceived sociocultural norms, rules, and social hierarchies that CYP are subject to in their everyday lives (Archambault et al., 2020; Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Caló et al., 2020; Duberg et al., 2016; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; MacPherson, Hart, & Heaver, 2016; Parker, Marturano, O'Connor, & Meek, 2018; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). This is foundational for all other mechanisms. The protected space was variously described as a 'safe' space (Archambault et al., 2020; Baker, Jeanneret, & Clarkson, 2018; Caló et al., 2020; MacPherson et al., 2016; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020), a 'liminal' space (Atkinson & Robson, 2012), an 'oasis' (Duberg et al., 2016), or as 'space-giving for the self' (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017). Practitioners aimed to create a nurturing, supportive, play-based environment in which CYP felt free to explore, discover, create, and make mistakes without fear of judgement (Baker et al., 2018; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Caló et al., 2020; Daykin et al., 2017; Duberg et al., 2016; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; MacPherson et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2018; Stephenson & Dobson, 2020). The play-based or ludic qualities of this space resonate with Turner's concept of liminality (1967, 1987).

The concept of 'freedom' appeared central to included authors' understanding of the functions of this protected 'space'. This extended beyond its role in providing a temporary 'breathing space' or 'secure oasis' to more psychological and embodied freedoms. Duberg et al. (2016) described the undemanding and supportive nature of her dance programme as offering relief from critical self-judgements, as well as an escape from competitive diachronic structures of progression. Stephenson and Dobson (2020) suggested that their creative writing workshops release children's minds from the captive 'constraints of a neoliberal curriculum' enabling the agentic potential of 'imaginative freedom' to be harnessed. In dance programmes, freedom was conceptualised as embodied in the sense of enabling physiological relaxation and feeling physically comfortable in your own skin, as well as freedom from the 'controlled and sedentary movement' associated with everyday life (Duberg et al., 2016; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). Several papers reported that CYP were given the freedom to express and explore their 'real' and authentic selves (Duberg et al., 2016; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; MacPherson et al., 2016). Finally, attention to confidence building was said by some authors to confer the freedom, or agency, to young people to lead their own learning (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015).

A key issue foregrounded in the papers is that, whilst this protected space provides freedom (temporarily) from everyday social norms, structures, and relationships that often disempower young people and restrict preferred expression, it is boundaried both physically and psychologically. It is evident in the included articles that there are rules for safe 'play' so that risk taking can happen with limited possibility of causing harm (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017). Confidentiality is a contributory factor to the concept of a 'safe' space (Caló et al., 2020; Duberg et al., 2016; MacPherson et al., 2016; see also Pavarini et al., 2021). A number of situational factors are identified as facilitating the establishment of this boundaried space, as well as movement into and out of it. These include the use of a dedicated room or place for PAB sessions (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015), mixing with different peers, and the use of starting/warm-up rituals at the beginning and end of sessions, as well as codes of practice (Atkinson & Robson, 2012). Conversely, the absence of these can threaten the integrity of the space, including not having a dedicated place, being moved at the last minute, sharing the space with someone else, mixing with the same peers as in school, and use of art materials to tease or bully other young people (Daykin et al., 2017). Several authors referred to having to manage power structures to ensure CYP continued to be comfortable enough to take social and emotional 'risks' (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Daykin et al., 2017). This is supported in the literature by Mullen and Deane (2018), who having worked extensively with CYP in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) posit that boundary setting by practitioners is essential to making change happen.

Several contextual elements are identified as working actively together to facilitate the establishment of a protected space and dissolving of existing rules and expectations, in addition to those outlined above. These are the following: the forging of an egalitarian, synergistic relationship built on mutual trust and respect between practitioners and young people (Caló et al., 2020; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Parker et al., 2018; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020); the use of a tailored and flexible approach adaptive to individual needs and interests (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Caló et al.,

2020; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Duberg et al., 2016; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; MacPherson et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2018); and validation of youth as artists (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Caló et al., 2020; Daykin et al., 2017; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; MacPherson et al., 2016).

Building trust between practitioners and young people. Most authors highlighted the importance of establishing mutual trust and respect between arts practitioners and CYP to facilitate engagement in the PAB programme (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Caló et al., 2020; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Parker et al., 2018; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). Several described this as a fundamental contextual characteristic when vulnerable and marginalised young people are involved (Caló et al., 2020; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017), who are suspicious of adults and authority (Clennon & Boehm, 2014), or who have had many experiences of being 'let down' in the past (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017). Clennon and Boehm (2014) note that an extended period of relationship building is needed to counteract this. The relationship of mutual trust and respect is conceived of as an egalitarian one, with hierarchies between the CYP and practitioners being intentionally flattened to ensure a sense of collaboration and co-production (Caló et al., 2020; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; Stephenson & Dobson, 2020). This ensures that CYP do not see themselves as being 'done to' as they often do in traditional interventions.

Finding statements indicate that building a relationship of trust between youth and arts practitioners is facilitated by practitioners making various points of social connection between them (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Caló et al., 2020; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Parker et al., 2018). Daykin et al. (2017), Caló et al. (2020), and Parker et al. (2018) all highlighted self-identification, via shared lived experiences (Caló et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2018) and gender or sexual identity (Daykin et al., 2017), as helping establish trust and as a pathway to deeper engagement in the PAB programme. Self-identification can be facilitated where the social identities and background of young people and practitioners are similar (Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Parker et al., 2018). Conversely, where these differ markedly this presented barriers to establishing mutual rapport and trust (Daykin et al., 2017). The creation of mutual trust and respect between arts practitioners and youth beneficiaries of PAB programmes was linked to CYP feeling 'safe' and protected (Caló et al., 2020; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Parker et al., 2018; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). Caló et al. (2020), Hanrahan and Banerjee (2017), and Parker et al. (2018) all reported that this, in turn, resulted in better connectedness with the programme, constituting another pathway to engagement.

Tailored and flexible approach. The tailored and flexible approach noted above requires arts practitioners to meet CYP where they are. This entailed establishing their needs, capacities, and interests and designing arts activities around these. Explicit attention to confidence building within such an approach was said to give CYP the freedom and agency to express and share their own ideas, as well as to initiate, request, and lead activities (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021), subverting the rules and expectations typically associated with the classroom (Atkinson & Robson, 2012). Several authors (Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Caló et al., 2020; Daykin et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2018) highlighted that a one-to-one approach can be especially beneficial with less confident and harder-to-engage CYP.

Finding statements suggested the sense of freedom, or agency, encouraged by arts practitioners and experienced by CYP in the PAB programmes interlinked with their feelings of being protected or 'held' within its boundaries, enabling CYP to feel secure enough to push boundaries and take up the challenge of learning new ways of thinking, feeling, and doing (Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). This, in turn, seemed to make possible the discovery of new strengths and capabilities, as well as exploration of alternative perspectives and identities (Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020; Stephenson & Dobson, 2020).

Fostering connection and team spirit between young people. Most papers suggested that the informal, relaxed, and non-hierarchical atmosphere created by the arts practitioners helped CYP connect to each other, fostering a sense of group cohesion (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Baker et al., 2018; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Caló et al., 2020; Daykin et al., 2017; Duberg et al., 2016; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Lai, Chui, Deng, & Jordan, 2021; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; MacPherson et al., 2016; Miao & Stewart, 2022; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). According to some authors, these developing social connections offered a pathway to deeper engagement in PAB programmes. Caló et al. (2020) reported that they reinforced a sense of trust and feeling of safety which encouraged engagement. MacPherson et al. (2016) noted that some young people reported feeling a sense of responsibility to peers, which motivated them to return. Ritchie and Gaulter (2020) and Duberg et al. (2016) both

linked the making of new friends during dance sessions to sustained engagement.

Social affordances of art stimuli and practices. - Finding statements relating to the affordances of specific art stimuli and the practice structures surrounding them suggested several ways in which these helped scaffold social connection between young people within the protected space, as well as between practitioners and youth. Several papers (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; MacPherson et al., 2016) reported that engagement in shared PAB activities connected young people to each other. For example, youth learned about each other and exchanged personal stories (MacPherson et al., 2016) whilst working productively together. Atkinson and Robson (2012) reported the growth of a sense of 'communitas' (community solidarity) through collaboration on specific art outputs. Several authors (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Daykin et al., 2017; Miao & Stewart, 2022) focussed on the role art outputs played in facilitating reciprocal support between young people as they acknowledged and praised each other's efforts. Other papers (Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Lai et al., 2021; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021) highlighted that shared interests and passions in PAB activities can serve as a joint focus of interest which pulled youth in whilst helping lower social barriers. Arts-based activities draw on leisure-time pursuits (e.g. music, dance, and drama) that may already feature and have positive associations and meaning in young people's everyday lives.

Specific art stimuli and related practices themselves helped forge social connection (Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Lai et al., 2021). Production in drama programmes is reported to shift the emphasis towards collaborative theatre making, rapidly creating a sense of community as a production team (Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017). Theatre practice also engenders inclusion with different opportunities and roles for young people, including backstage activities for those who do not want to perform. Duberg et al. (2016) and Ritchie and Gaulter (2020) referenced the shared embodied joy that adolescent girls experienced dancing together, connecting through a newly found acceptance of their bodies. Daykin et al. (2017) made the important point that these affordances are situated. A specific art stimulus, such as a particular sound or type of music, which functions as a tool of social connection between some young people, can disrupt interpersonal engagement for another who finds the sound aversive or lyrics offensive. Other authors highlighted that an art task that is too difficult can lead to disengagement (Baker et al., 2018; Miao & Stewart, 2022).

Most included papers reported that CYP felt positively about their participation in the participatory arts activities, with 'enjoyment' and 'fun' being the most frequently used terms to describe their affective state (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Baker et al., 2018; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Daykin et al., 2017; Duberg et al., 2016; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Lai et al., 2021; MacPherson et al., 2016; Miao & Stewart, 2022; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020; Parker et al., 2018; Stephenson & Dobson, 2020). Authors evaluating dance programmes (Duberg et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2021; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020) all emphasised young people's enjoyment as a pathway to engagement that is interlinked with making social connections with peers, something commonly reported in the dance intervention literature (Dinold & Zitomer, 2015; Zitomer, 2016). In turn, development of friendships fostered enjoyment of dance sessions. Lai et al. (2021) described participants continued attendance at hip-hop dance sessions as being connected to shared pleasure experienced with friends they had made there.

In summary, finding statements suggest that the development of a sense of being free, being protected, and socially connected, as well as a sense of self-identification and enjoyment, may all support CYP's sustained and deep engagement with PAB programmes as protected spaces in which social rules can temporarily be subverted. Deeper engagement, in turn, appeared to open up possibilities for developing more positive or 'authentic' self-narratives, with the PAB activities and practices described in the next section facilitating the discovery and exploration of new skills, strengths, and identities leading to an increased sense of agency, accomplishment, and belonging and a number of outcomes related to well-being (see Figure 2).

Cluster 2: Creating a more positive self-narrative

Validation from performances and exhibitions of art outputs. Finding statements suggest that the immediate positive validation received from family, friends, practitioners, and other participants who view the performances and art exhibitions generated a sense of pride and accomplishment in young people (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Brown & Jeanneret, 2015; Caló et al., 2020; Daykin et al., 2017; Ennis & Tonkin, 2018; Miao & Stewart, 2022; Parker et al., 2018). Some authors linked this to increased self-confidence (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Caló et al., 2020; Daykin et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2018). From a psychological perspective, a sense of having succeeded, validation from other people, and witnessing similar peers succeed (vicarious performance) are all different ways in which sense of self-efficacy can be increased (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Furthermore, the sense of group capability or collective self-efficacy derived from

performances and exhibitions noted by some authors is also thought to positively influence self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Katz-Navon & Erez, 2005).

Expression and exploration of difficult emotions. PAB activities provide a way in which young people can externalise and come to accept difficult feelings (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Duberg et al., 2016; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; MacPherson et al., 2016; Miao & Stewart, 2022). Duberg et al. (2016), for example, reported that the enriched body awareness and body language gained through participation in creative dance sessions provided a 'new language' for the cathartic expression of emotions, facilitating acceptance of them, which is experienced by participating adolescent girls as 'strengthening'. Sensory stimuli, such as colour, sound, and body movements, were used as metaphors to safely express, manage, and explore negative and potentially self-destructive feelings (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Duberg et al., 2016; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; Levstek & Banerjee, 2021; MacPherson et al., 2016; Miao & Stewart, 2022), ultimately producing art outputs admired by others. Using art as a creative output for difficult feelings was said to give increased autonomy to young people to work through their own issues (Clennon & Boehm, 2014; MacPherson et al., 2016; Miao & Stewart, 2022) with less reliance on external support. The capacity to create one's own meaning through engaging creatively with various art stimuli restored a sense of agency (Bennett, 2022).

Exploration of alternative perspectives and identities. In some included papers, largely drama-based ones, young people's imagination was harnessed to explore alternative perspectives on the self, as well as different ways of engaging with other people and the environment. Activities included the following: playing themselves as they were in the past (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017); imagining themselves as a character in specific historical situations (Stephenson & Dobson, 2020); reflecting on feelings and values of different personal qualities in different situations (Atkinson & Robson, 2012); and writing/performing characters representing different aspect of themselves (Ennis & Tonkin, 2018). These examples all involve a distancing or 'othering' of the self and are said to bring about a shift in young people's understanding of themselves resulting in deeper self-understanding. There is a progression here from the pleasure of creative play and freedom to be other to the normative sense of self, through to risk taking and an agentic awareness of the potential for changing identities and narratives. This represents another potential pathway to positive well-being in that displacement or transposition of the self gives rise to an increased sense of agency in young people, opening up a different sense of what is possible for them and their view of themselves. The identification of new possible future selves is linked to increased self-esteem, optimism, and hope about the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Duberg et al. (2016) also described a profound change in the self-perspective of participating adolescent girls as the dance programme progresses. They moved from being outwardly focussed on the critical judgements of others and of the self to an embodied focus on, and 'trust in', their own body. They shifted from a tendency to make upward social comparisons (Festinger, 1954) linked to lower self-esteem, seeing other girls as 'competition', towards a focus on shared experience and similarity, which is associated with increased self-acceptance and self-esteem (Meltzer & Rourke, 2005; Wayment, Eiler, & Cavolo 2020).

Sense of communitas. Sustained engagement in a PAB programme was linked to CYP's growing sense of becoming part of a group (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; MacPherson et al., 2016) or community (Atkinson & Robson, 2012) as the programme progresses. Duberg et al. (2016) described a developing sense of 'supportive togetherness' as the dance intervention continued. Most papers suggested that this fostered a sense of belonging in young people and being accepted for who they are (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Duberg et al., 2016; Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017; MacPherson et al., 2016; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020). Finding statements indicate this was, in turn, connected to various beneficial well-being outcomes, including increased self-confidence (Atkinson & Robson, 2012; Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Ritchie & Gaulter, 2020) and self-esteem (Hanrahan & Banerjee, 2017), as well as increased sociability and social competence (Clennon & Boehm, 2014; Lai et al., 2021). There was a shared sense of collective and community responsibility with youth working together as agents of change.

Discussion

This systematic review addressed two questions. The first concerned evidence of the effectiveness of PAB programmes in improving the mental health and well-being of CYP and the challenges that exist, if any, to capturing or demonstrating this. The second asked what common and specific mechanisms of change in relation to youth mental health and well-being are reported in PAB studies and how context shapes these.

In answer to the first question, the small number of quantitative studies identified, coupled with several methodological weaknesses, limits conclusions about the effectiveness of PAB programmes based on included studies. A key difficulty identified was the use of standardised measures in community (uncontrolled) settings with CYP. The completion of standardised measures for PAB studies can be burdensome, for both young people, whose primary

interest is in making art rather than research, and for staff who may have low confidence in administering them. Young people often perceive standardised measures as tests and worry about giving the 'correct' response, or resent being used as 'guinea pigs', raising questions about the validity of their responses for evaluation purposes. Improvements are needed in the construction and implementation of mental health and well-being measures for CYP in the context of participatory arts-based programmes so that their use is acceptable, meaningful, and increased in PAB programme research, rather than presenting a barrier to engagement (see Table 4). Changes should be strongly informed by the perspectives of young people, in line with the 'no research about me without me' agenda.

The second focus of this review was on mechanisms of change in PAB approaches for CYP mental health and well-being. We offer a unique contribution to the field via a provisional model of mechanisms of change, capturing reported, potential processes and apparent active ingredients from our eligible studies. Many observations can be made about our model, but we draw attention here to the resonance between potential mechanisms in PAB programmes and those in both counselling and clinical approaches. For example, there are clear similarities in the claim that therapeutic work in both clinical and PAB programmes rests on a critical relational foundation and can progress only if trust and safety are established (see Pavarini et al., 2021).

We note particular similarities between PAB programme mechanisms and those in Person-Centred Approaches to Counselling (PCC; Rogers, 1957, 1959). For example, the PCC therapist has a responsibility to establish therapeutic conditions, in the form of understanding, acceptance, and unconditional positive regard, and second, to use these to help their client reconnect and consolidate living by their 'authentic' self (Motschnig & Nykl, 2003). In PAB programmes, arts practitioners aim to create a non-judgemental, accepting, 'safe' space for CYP to take social and emotional 'risks' through engagement with art stimuli and practices in order to help them reconnect to their thoughts, feelings, and bodies (see Table 4). A further similarity with PCC is that, in PAB programmes, CYP are supported to express themselves and create their own meanings (phenomenology) through engagement with the arts activities, restoring or building a sense of agency and self-direction (Bennett, 2022). Rogers' (1961) hypothesised therapeutic mechanisms in PCC thus show several commonalities with those in PAB programmes. Rogers (1961) suggested that facilitative therapeutic conditions would help the client:

> ... experience and understand aspects of himself which previously he has repressed, will find himself becoming better integrated, more able to function effectively, will become more similar to the person he would like to be, will be more self-directing and self-confident, will become more of a person, more unique and more self-expressive... (Rogers, 1961, p. 37–38)

Our review suggests that, like many clinically therapeutic approaches, PAB programmes in turn open up possibilities for the development of a more positive or 'authentic' self-narrative.

However, our review identified distinctive mechanisms in PAB programmes compared to traditional clinical/therapeutic approaches. PAB programmes seem to be an alternative therapeutic social space particularly well-suited for CYP. These programmes also cultivate a sense of communitas (or community belonging) in organic ways that young people do not resent or perceive as coerced; working collaboratively

Table 4 Key points

• Youth-centred approach	Tailor PAB activities to youth interests (considering individual and group) and follow youth lead. It is beneficial for practitioners and/or the creative team to offer a palette of skills and engagement strategies to meet different needs and interests
• Create 'safe' space	Trust, flattening of hierarchies, and non-judgemental and positive validation help create a space in which young people feel protected enough to engage more deeply in PAB programmes and take 'risks'
• Practitioner background/social identity	It is helpful if a young person can make a connection between a practitioner's background/social identity and their own; perceived social and cultural differences can present barriers to engagement
• Managing power structures	'Walking the line' between providing a space in which young people feel free to be themselves and the need to set boundaries (especially behavioural) to ensure 'safe play' in sessions is difficult and needs careful reflection/management. A co-produced agreement on rules or codes of practice supports this process
• Duration	PAB programmes typically last around 10 weeks, but a longer period is often needed for programme delivery to build trust, deepen engagement, and support agency and positive change, especially with vulnerable populations
• Barriers to engagement	Barriers include the following: art tasks perceived as 'too difficult'; perception that not creative/good at art/dance/music, etc.; creative stimuli can have negative and positive effects; lack of interest in activities; self-consciousness/embarrassment/inhibitions when engaging in activities that involve self-expression, particularly physical engagement; and use of standardised measures resulting in young people feeling 'objectified'

as artists involves the pleasure of community engagement in composition, which often involved beneficial validation from practitioners and peers.

Another distinctive element of PAB programmes identified in our review is that they offer a 'play space' that taps into CYP intrinsic motivation and de-pathologises the therapeutic space. This is a critical finding from our review, as the stigma that CYP associate with mental health problems, their tendency not to seek help for these types of difficulties, and a high level of disengagement with services once accessed (Colizzi, Lasalvia, & Ruggeri, 2020) point to reasons why traditional CAMH services may be unable to meet rising youth mental health need alone, even if resources were not so scarce.

Limitations

Transferability of findings. Given the predominance of studies from the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries, caution is needed regarding the transferability of the SR's findings beyond this cultural context. It is notable, for example, that the study conducted in Hong Kong by Lai et al. (2021) shared few metasummary finding statements with other included studies and was distinct in having a very strong prioritisation of group over individual self-expression. This suggests that evidence from a more diverse set of countries is needed to tell us how cultural context shapes mechanisms of change, highlighting a gap in the literature. The focus on PAB studies involving collaborative engagement means further work is needed to determine to what extent the key mechanisms identified are transferable to PAB studies involving more directed or passive approaches. Whilst focussing on a particular type of PAB approach can be described as a limitation, we contend that synthesising very diverse studies is likely to obscure key mechanisms, suggesting a need for separate SRs.

Quality of the evidence. A metasummary relies on the quality of findings from eligible studies. Whilst we found some very rich data, the potential value of some qualitative studies was limited by methodological issues (see Table 5). When analytic claims are made in reports about specific processes and the contexts in which they arise, these can only be extracted for the purpose of synthesis when they are clearly supported by the original data. Conversely, where original data are presented (e.g. in the form of quotes from CYP or practitioners) with limited analytic commentary to aid interpretation, then this also means that little can be extracted. PAB activities were sometimes intertwined with other elements such as CBT or tutoring. This made it impossible to disentangle what specific impacts are due to PAB activities and those relating to other elements. The participatory activities were sometimes poorly described, meaning it was difficult to determine the extent of co-creation between the CYP and arts practitioners.

Whilst the PAB programme setting in the included qualitative studies was often described in detail, any mechanisms of change relating to attributes of the art stimuli themselves often remained within the proverbial 'black box'. For example, Caló et al. (2020) note that the establishment of trust became a 'fundamental characteristic' (p993) in their programme, but the potential role of music in this process was unexplored. Creating rhythmic predictability, a non-judgemental environment, and safe place to explore/improvise through musical structured interventions are all possible practitioner approaches that could be used to support this process. In the articles reporting on dance programmes, there was limited analysis of the physical tasks and qualities in bringing about feelings of freedom and social connection. In Lai et al. (2021), the notion of 'synchronisation' is referred to (p149) in relation to 'teamwork' but the physiological 'prosocial' effects of synchronised moving together are not considered. In Duberg et al. (2016), one of the participants referred to spinning and twirling when describing her sense of freedom. However, no reference was made to these movements being culturally and socially associated with notions of freedom, and the fact that movements themselves

Table 5 Recommendations for reporting of PAB qualitative research

PAB activities and contexts	Sufficient information about the PAB activities is needed for it to be clear to another practitioner exactly what was done and who was involved (group information, settings, numbers, and age)
Practitioner perspectives	Practitioner reflections/field notes should be included in the analysis if they are not interviewed (and the interviews included in the analysis)
Role of art stimuli and related practices	More analysis and critical reflection are needed of the art tasks/methods/attribute themselves, particularly how these facilitate processes of engagement and change
Role of art stimuli /practices in representing change	More analysis is needed of the art outputs as a means of evaluating outcomes relating to mental well-being and mental health
Balance between analytic commentary and supporting evidence	There needs to be sufficient data presented to support analytic comments and sufficient analytic commentary to provide rich interpretations of the data to support future metasyntheses

contribute to these feelings as well as being an expression of them in a reciprocal process.

Findings from the metasummary indicate that practitioners are central to the processes of engagement and change and likely work with implicit assumptions about them. However, not all studies included their perspective. It would be helpful if they were interviewed and these data were analysed and triangulated with CYP data, or alternatively, their reflections or field notes were included in the analysis. More use could also be made of observational methods of data collection and analysis to provide an additional perspective on processes of change.

Conclusion

Evidence from our metasummary indicates that we can be confident that PAB programmes involve therapeutic processes. The model presented represents a first step to better understanding key mechanisms of change. A next step to build on and extend this work could be a search of the grey literature and to remove date restrictions, as this could be a rich resource for more qualitative data. Methodological development in this domain will help researchers generate better theories of change relating to their specific arts practices and generate guidance on what might work best and why in relation to certain youth populations with specific mental health issues. Richer and more robust reporting of qualitative analyses arising from practice-based evidence will increase the quality of any syntheses conducted. However, before entering into this there is a need for more discussion to explore tensions about what counts as evidence. Going forward, investigations of both processes and outcomes of PAB programmes with young people would be best conducted by transdisciplinary teams (Raw & Robson, 2017) to maximise the complementary strengths that the arts and science bring to the field. These must ensure sufficient space for sharing of perspectives if researchers are not to remain in their metaphorical bunkers, which risks limiting what we can understand about the effectiveness and processes of PAB programmes (Leigh & Brown, 2021).

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Key points

- Participatory arts-based (PAB) programmes appear to be helpful to children and young people's (CYP) mental health and well-being, but there is no systematic review of their effectiveness for this population and not much is known about their mechanisms.
- This systematic review synthesises evidence relating to the effectiveness and mechanisms of change in PAB programmes for CYP. Evidence of effectiveness from quantitative studies was limited by methodological issues. The metasummary identified mechanisms of change resonant with those of talking therapies. PAB programmes appear beneficial to CYP by fostering a therapeutic space characterised by subverting restrictive social rules, communitas that is not perceived as coercive, and inviting play and embodied understanding.
- There is good evidence that there are therapeutic processes in PAB programmes. PAB programmes may offer an alternative therapeutic space for hard-to-reach CYP.

Supporting information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article:

Appendix S1. Key word search.

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Conflict of interest statement

No conflicts declared.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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