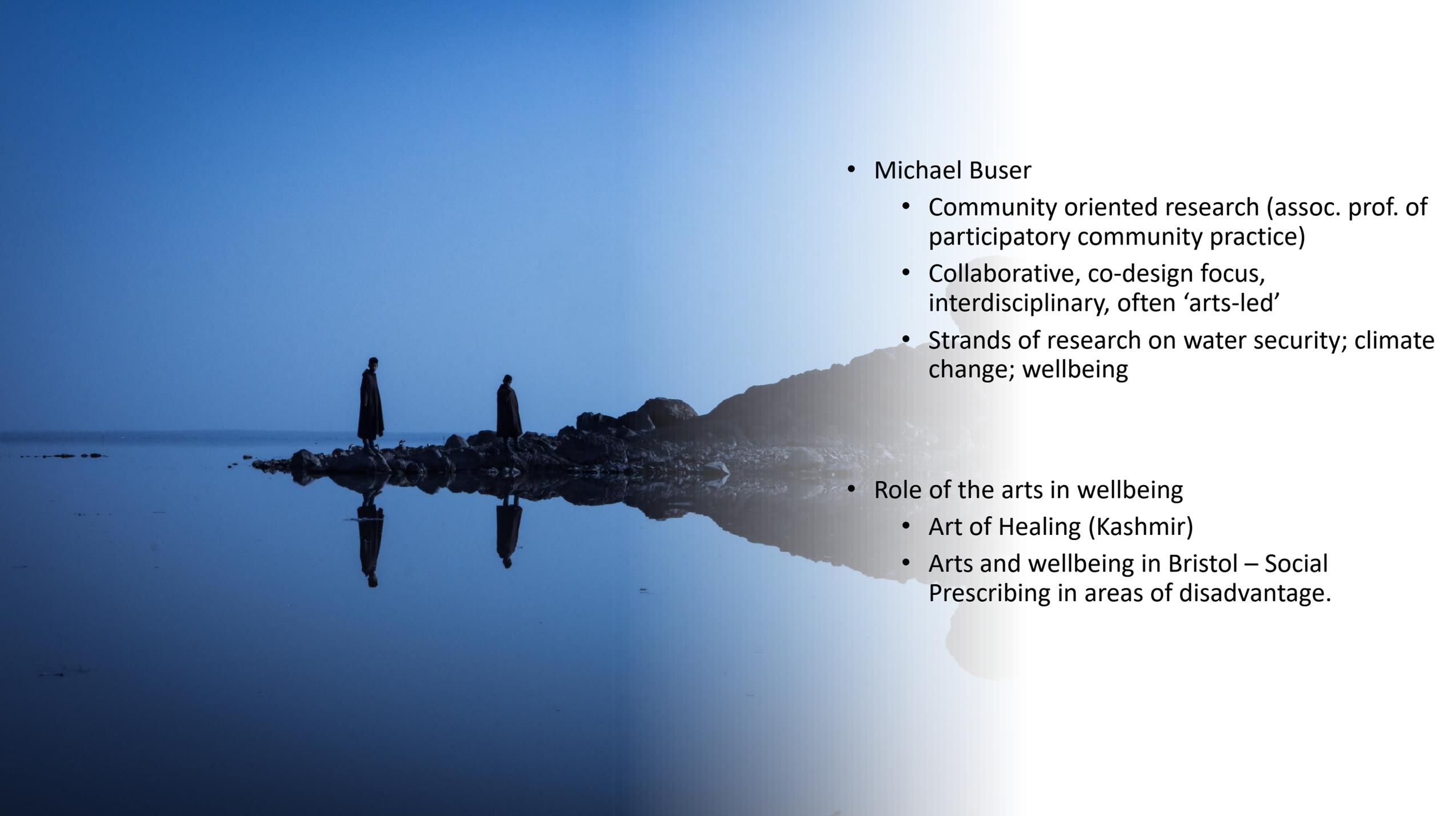


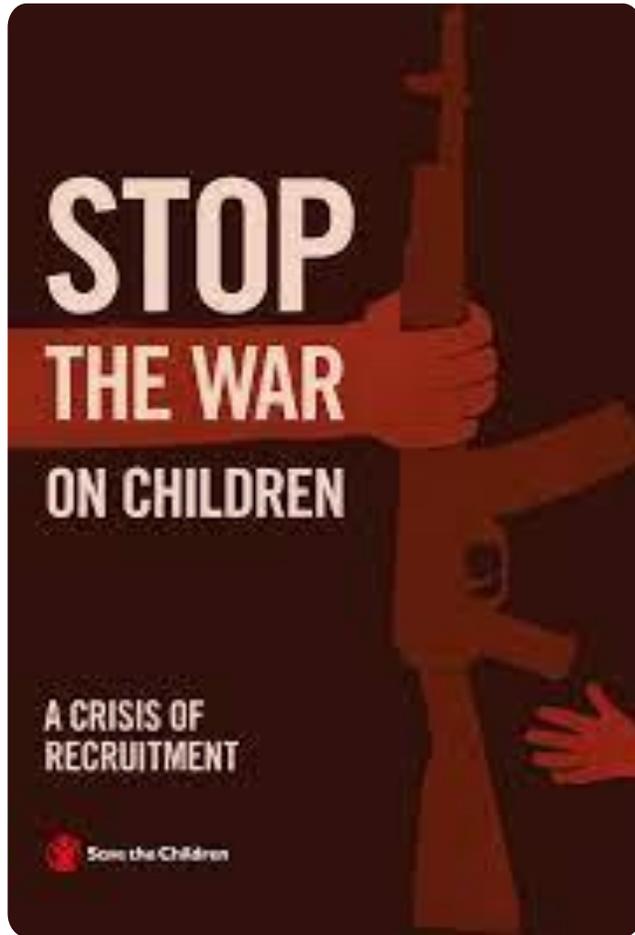


Art and child wellbeing in conflict affected areas

Michael Buser, UWE Bristol



- Michael Buser
 - Community oriented research (assoc. prof. of participatory community practice)
 - Collaborative, co-design focus, interdisciplinary, often 'arts-led'
 - Strands of research on water security; climate change; wellbeing
- Role of the arts in wellbeing
 - Art of Healing (Kashmir)
 - Arts and wellbeing in Bristol – Social Prescribing in areas of disadvantage.



Art, Child wellbeing, and conflict

- 450 million children living in conflict zone in 2020 (Save the Children, 2021)
- Many young people have lived entire lives in conflict
- Multiple impacts (physical, emotional, developmental)

Art, child mental health, and conflict

- Global interest in art for mental health and wellbeing (as well as other activities)
- Social prescribing (UK)
- India has a rich tradition of healing arts that includes music, dance, theatre, and yoga (among other cultural art forms and practices).
- Research suggests that involvement in arts interventions may support increased expressive ability, resilience, and a shift in an individual's sense of self-worth (Cohen-Yatziv and Regev, 2019)



Kashmir Context



Context – Pulwama and the Dolphin International School

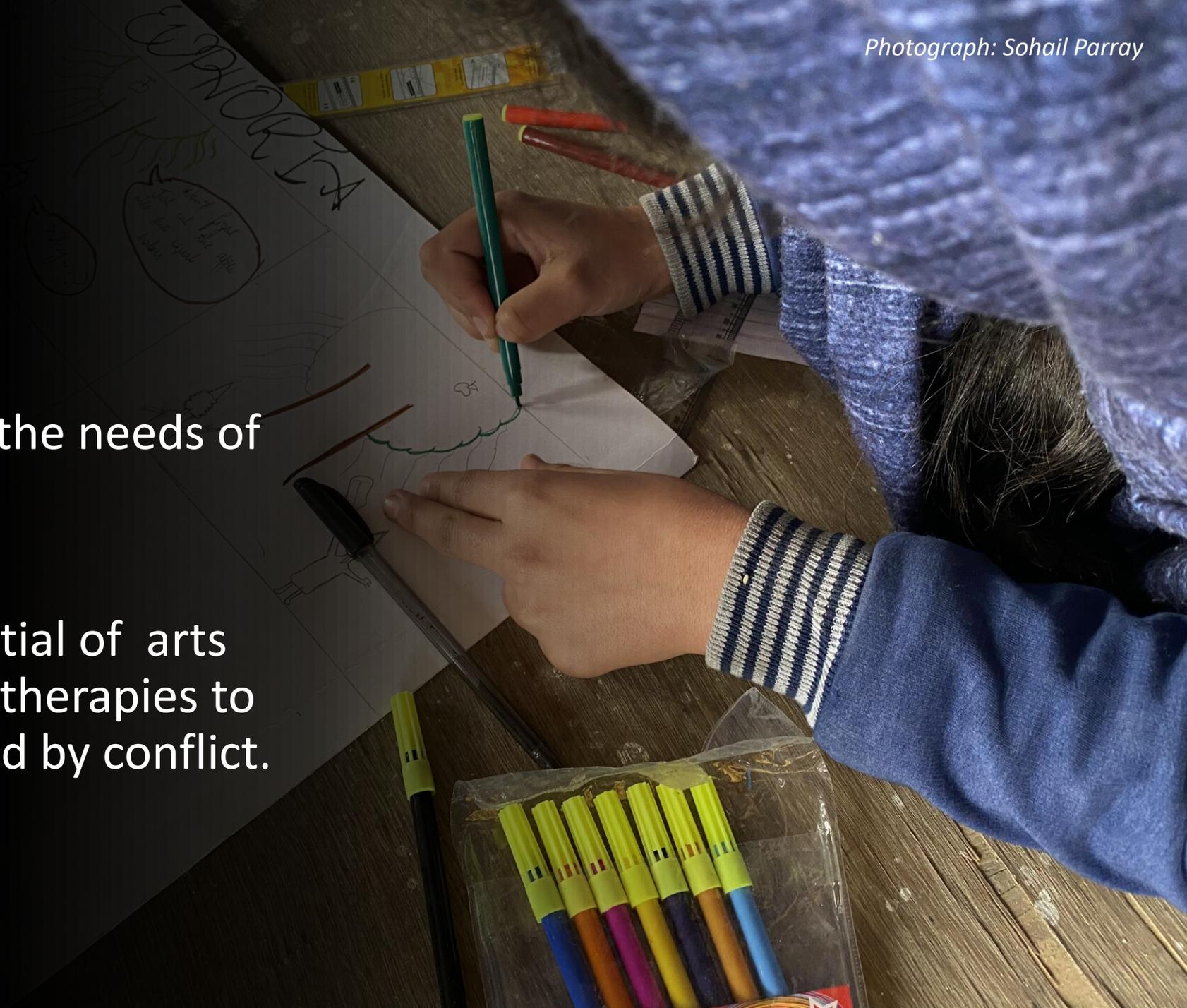
- Kashmir: between 500,00 and 800,000 soldiers deployed at varying times (Mathur 2019)
- August 2019 lockdown
- Mental health of young people in Kashmir is in crisis (Khan 2016; Shah and Mishra 2021; Mushtaq et al 2016; Dar and Deb 2020; Firdous 2019).
- Mental health facilities and resources available for Kashmiri children are limited (Varma 2012; Shoib and Arafat 2020; Paul and Khan 2019)
- At DIS: challenging circumstances of violence, uncertainty, mistrust, fear, hopelessness





The Art of Healing

- To identify and address the needs of children in Pulwama
- To investigate the potential of arts activities and art-based therapies to support children affected by conflict.



Participants

30 children from
years 6, 7, and 9
(ages 11 to 15).





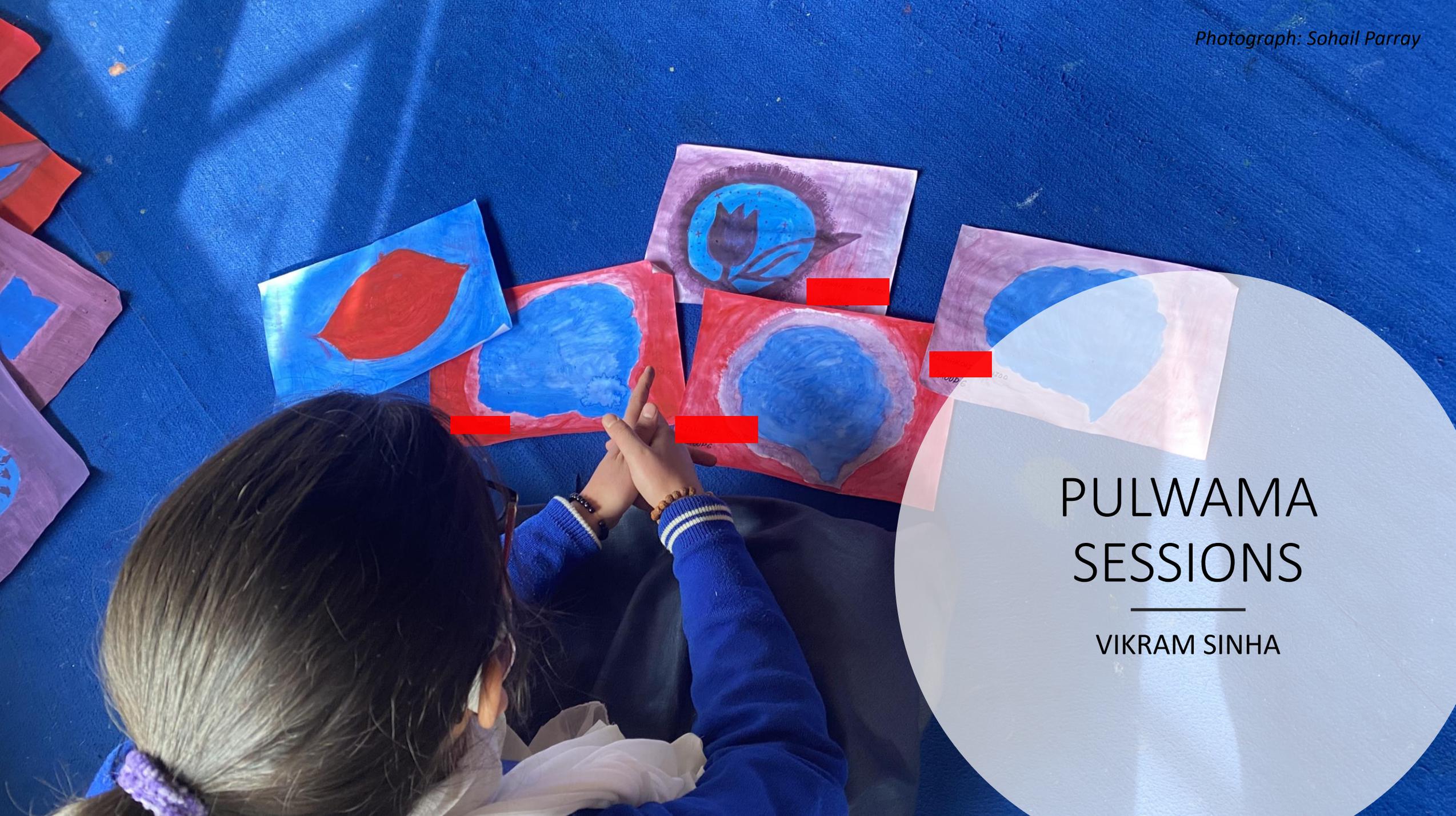
Art and Photographs: student participants



ONLINE
SESSIONS

ANURUPA ROY, MOHAMMAD SHAMEEM
& VIKRAM SINHA

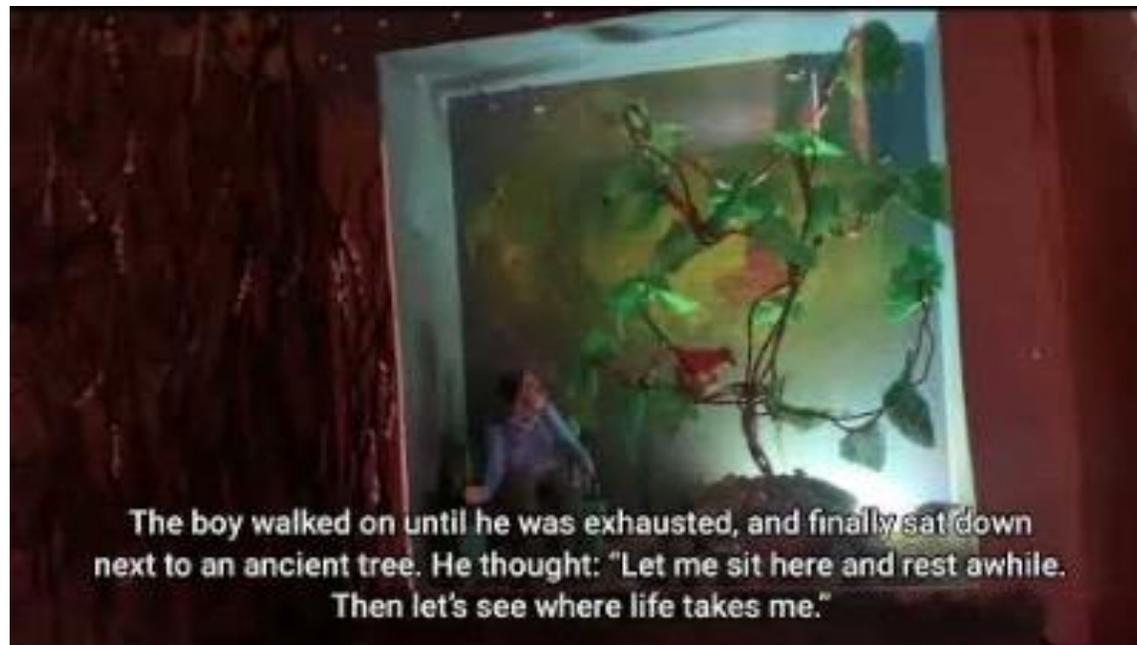
Photograph: Sohail Parray



PULWAMA SESSIONS

VIKRAM SINHA

Performances / Exhibition



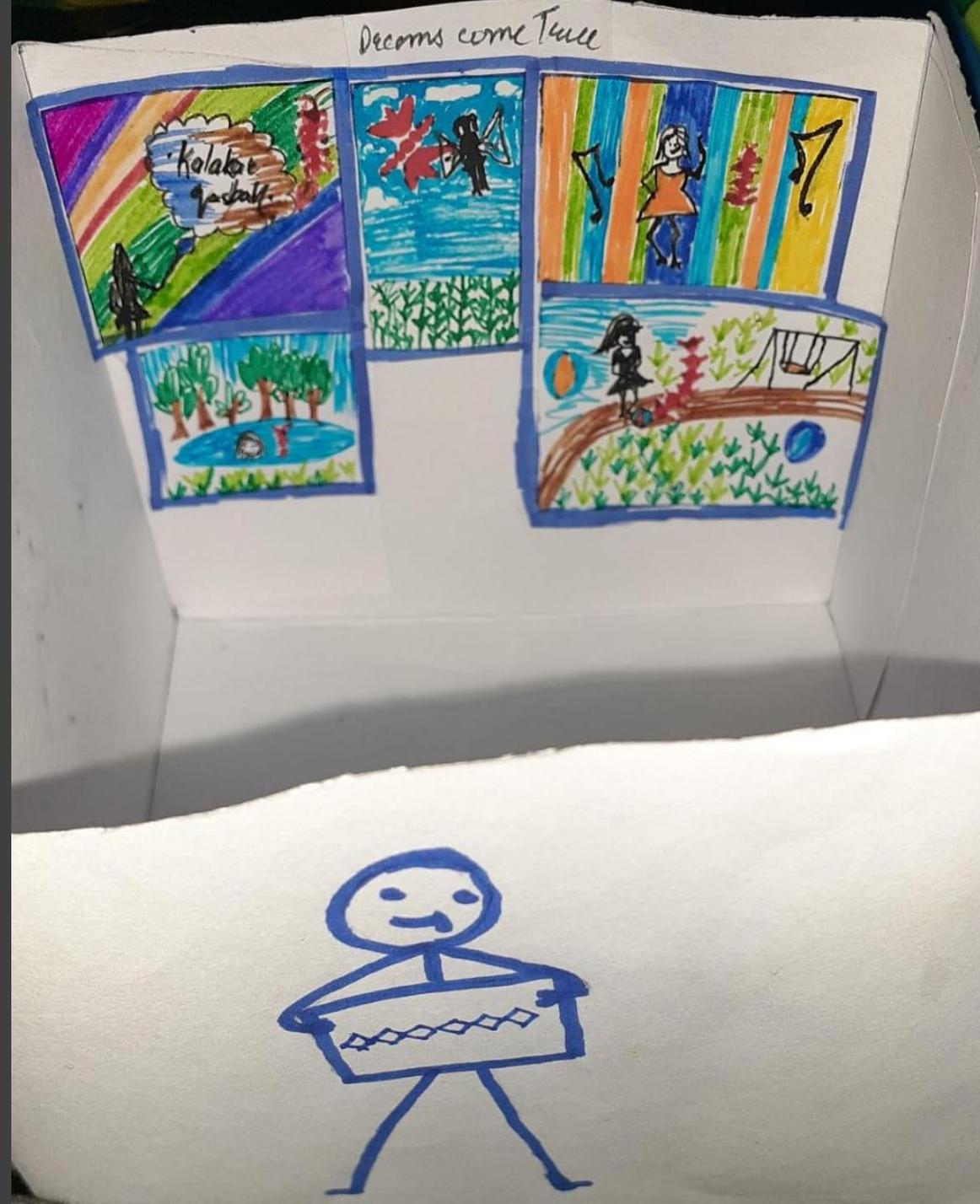
The boy walked on until he was exhausted, and finally sat down next to an ancient tree. He thought: "Let me sit here and rest awhile. Then let's see where life takes me."

Performances / Exhibition



How we are evaluating this...

- Quantitative
 - Behaviour checklist
 - Human Figure Test
 - Art Therapy checklist
- Qualitative
 - Interviews / dialogue
 - Artwork
 - Observation
 - 6 Piece Storytelling
- Programme Theory
 - Context / Issues / Desired Outcomes / Methods



SETTING Military lockdown, Ongoing conflict with army, Every protest perceived as an act of terrorism, Whole community angry, Hartals, Covid-19 exacerbates sense of powerlessness, Parents have perceived ideas of values of position and rank

Box 1: Present reality
CHILDREN
Are confined within home
Experience PTSD symptoms
Have limited self-expression
Have limited opportunity for creation
Loss of faith in own future in the wider world, myopic reality through an altered lens
Repressed protests
Child feels unseen and unheard at school and home
Hierarchical relationship with teachers

Box 2: Leads to.....
Child replicates observed forms of violent expression
Deflection into the larger political narrative for azaadi (freedom)
Everything is weaponised
Risky behaviour (self-harm, martyrdom)
Perceived options are death or numbness
Focus on loss of political 'power'
No motivation, boredom, dullness & frustration
Sexual violence may occur
Studying is perceived as pointless if there is no future

Box 3: Which causes.....
Child withdraws into self as the only safe space
Exhibits anger and/or anxiety
Increase in polarised political narratives as only way out
Boys intent on joining militant groups
Vandalism
Children unable to attend school
Choose not to attend online classes
Schools close
Children join in stone pelting

Box 4: A new context (our desired process / method, "inputs")
A safe space
A listening and accepting environment
A nurturing space
Respected as individuals
Art and trauma healing integrated into curriculum
Non-judgemental place for discourse
Artist facilitator is a role model for teachers
Teacher as a 'partner' and not perceived as a predator
Non-hierarchical relationship with teacher
Teacher provides a restful response
Education aligns to the child's reality
Child's work is showcased allows child to feel recognised
Creative expression given a structure
Online and face-to-face activities allows continuous simulation
Art activity: drama, movement, puppetry, drawing, making, collecting, music
Art as a process
Children working in a team
Artist facilitators lead children to the end of the journey and then extract themselves from the school.
Children do not become dependent on the art facilitator

Box 5: Leads to..... (child's experience, internal perceptions)
CHILDREN
Children feel 'held' and 'heard'
Able to reflect on themselves, their peers, their world
Perceive they can break from mainstream ideas of how to 'be'
Can recognise destructive and disruptive patterns of behaviour in self & others
Sense of belonging to an arts community
Realises their own solutions
Self-esteem & pride in own work
Sense of a positive future
Understand the power of other forms of resistance
Meaningful and relatable experiences
Emotion becomes an entry point to explore their own worlds.
Perceive themselves to develop agency
Recognise alternative futures
Develops own identity independent of enmeshed collective identity
Feeling less anxious, bored, and more motivated.
Feeling more able to trust others
More interested in school

PARENTS
Value child's unique capabilities and growth

Box 6: Leads to..... (things we might observe "outputs")
CHILDREN
Children dynamically express experiences and emotions through their art
Improved motor skills
Child absorbed in their work
Sharing with others
Children are seen and heard safely, through their art
Children show greater empathy towards others
Child builds relationships
Children attend online classes
Motivated to participate
Reduction in destructive behaviours e.g. vandalism
Child able to tell narratives, able to recall and make connections
Spontaneous and expressive
Personally meaningful and meaningful to others
Thoughtful.
Consciously symbolic and use a language of metaphors
Awareness of story structure.
Listens, understands and responds appropriately
Reflective silence
Meaningful listening

TEACHERS
Recognise behaviours as part of child's journey
Become more attuned to child's needs
Teachers respond appropriately to child's needs e.g. affectionate, loving

Box 7: which causes..... (the desired reality) (things we might measure "outcomes")
CHILDREN
Self-efficacy
Improved wellbeing
Positive affect
Ability to problem solve
Improved attention span
Participate in society with dignity and responsibility
Ability to cope with uncertainty
Sustained coping mechanisms
Resilience
Reduced anxiety
Arts community persists beyond the intervention duration
Children use safe ways of expressing their political views and their feelings
Sustained concentration and complete work assignments at school
Academic progress
Children influence the school community through their experience of the art intervention



Emotional Expression

- *'now when I put colour on paper or walls, I see the feeling and emotion conveyed... Like when I feel angry and I paint, the anger goes out'* (Nadia).
- *'my anger got converted into a painting... you can show what is going on inside of you, you can draw your imagination on the page'.* (Abnan)



Belonging

- Group working and performances built a sense of 'collective' (Kalakar Qasbah)
- Spaces where children could be in control allowed for experimentation and ownership

The story is about a white queen (Qasbah) and her red queen. The white queen got all her power the red queen. But the red queen did not like it. She turned away from the white and left all the story to her and with some friends of her story she decided to give her having the power and she makes a battle of her own. After a decade the red queen wins about the white queen's attention to fight with her and demands around her three queens' attention. The white queen says that she is not interested in her and she says that she is not interested in her. The white queen says that she is not interested in her and she says that she is not interested in her.

Agency

- Presenting to the school and public
- Designing and collaborating with other schools (Delhi)
- Taking action in their lives (discussions of hopeful futures)
- *'...after the exams, I will try to build an environment of freedom for myself. I want to create my own art lab'* (Nadia)



Next...

- Follow-on work (hopefully) in India and elsewhere
- Collaborating with organisations and artists here in Bristol

Thanks!

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