



Evaluation of Place2Be in Teacher Education Scotland: Executive summary

August 2019

1. Background

At Place2Be we believe there is a vital need to support our teachers, who are facing growing challenges resulting from the mental health and wider wellbeing needs of pupils within their classrooms. This is an area that teachers tell us they need more input on; in response Place2Be, as experts in children and young people's mental health, now delivers a range of high quality programmes – helping both teachers and school leaders to build their confidence and expertise. We've also started piloting support – called Place2Think (which is already a well-established element of our 'whole school' model) for students in Teacher Education establishments in Scotland. Place2Think provides reflective space - helping student teachers process the impact of supporting the mental health and emotional needs of children in their care.

There is a growing body of hard evidence in Scotland that teachers feel they require a stronger focus on children's mental health. The recent SAMH survey (Going to be... Well Trained)* of over 3,000 school staff in Scotland showed that many of teachers do not feel they have received sufficient training in mental health to allow them to carry out their role properly; and that only a third of school staff felt their school had an effective way of responding to pupils experiencing mental health problems. Noticeably only one in 100 respondents recalled doing detailed work on mental health when they were student teachers. Sixty-three per cent said their Initial Teacher Education did not cover mental health and wellbeing at all.

In light of this survey evidence and other recent reports, and alongside Place2Be's extensive experience inside more than 280 schools, Place2Be was motivated to establish partnership programmes within two (of the nine) Scottish University Schools of Education as part of our strategy to ensure future generations of teachers feel better equipped with the skills and understanding to support children's mental health - thus building the capacity of the teacher workforce.

The pilot programme commenced in the 2018/19 academic year and this summary presents an overview of the evaluation of the first year, drawing on findings from the evaluations conducted by Place2Be, University of Edinburgh (van Wyk, 2019) and University of Stirling (Priestley and Hennessey, 2019). The full reports provide a more detailed analysis and insight and the key findings across both evaluations and are summarised here to provide an overview of the evaluation of Place2Be's role in Initial Teacher Education across the two institutions.

<https://www.samh.org.uk/documents/welltrained.pdf> *

2. Aims and Methods

The initial two-year pilot programme embedded two Place2Be specialist trainer clinicians (Mental Health Practitioners) into two Schools of Education – bringing mental health expertise to all stakeholders within the school (students, tutors, lecturers). The objectives were to:

- Strengthen the two Schools of Education’s approach to mental health/emotional resilience
- Embed reflective practice in order to specifically engage deeper learning in supporting children’s emotional wellbeing
- Through direct teaching input enable students to gain knowledge, skills and opportunities for critical reflection in relation to mental health in schools (for example attachment theory, Adverse Childhood Experiences)

To explore progress towards achieving these aims, the research methods across the evaluations comprised the following.

Place2Be

- Monitoring of use of the different aspects of the service
- Survey of Initial Teacher Education Students in Edinburgh

Edinburgh University

- In-depth qualitative interviews with 16 students who had accessed Place2Think and three members of staff

University of Stirling

- In-depth interviews with ten students who had accessed Place2Think
- Survey of all undergraduate students of professional education.

This summary draws on the findings from across the monitoring data, surveys and interviews.

3. Key findings

3.1 What was the delivery and take-up?

The delivery was tailored to the context and needs of each of the individual Universities and their students, but in both cases included:

- Lectures to large groups of students
- Seminars and workshops for smaller groups
- Place2Think consultation sessions for individuals or small groups.

The seminars and lectures had the wider reach and in some cases, lectures were attended by whole year group, while seminars typically had between 10 and 20 students attending.

At Edinburgh, 49 students had participated in 151 Place2Think sessions and 43 students attended 179 sessions at Stirling. Place2Think was used less in the first term and more in the second term in both institutions, with most use in March 2019.

The Place2Think consultations were responsive to the issues the participants chose to discuss and consequently covered a range of areas with the most common including pupil’s mental health and wellbeing, self-care, stress, anxiety, the pupil-teacher relationship, self agency and self-esteem and students’ concerns about their teaching placement including the student mentor relationship.

3.2 What was the impact of Place2Be's role in Initial Teacher Education?

The survey of students at Stirling found that most reported they were more clear on their knowledge of mental health and wellbeing, understanding of children's mental health and wellbeing, understanding of their own mental health and wellbeing and understanding of behaviour after taking part in seminars, the lecture, the resilience documentary and Place2Think consultations. The different modes of delivery had different impacts, with the Place2Think consultations having the most impact (indicated by the strongest increase in clarity regarding mental health and wellbeing) although the less intensive interventions also had contributed to improving knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing.

The survey of Edinburgh students similarly found that the seminars and workshops had helped most students to enhance their knowledge and understanding of children's mental health and helped give them a better understanding of the emotional needs of children, had added to their teaching methods and changed their practice in class. Those who had attended Place2Think consultation sessions had also found them helpful. More specifically, the majority of students in both institutions said the sessions had helped with their understanding of their own wellbeing, supported their self-awareness, gave them a better understanding of the emotional needs of children, encouraged them to take a more reflective approach to their practice and gave them an insight into children's behaviour.

All of those surveyed in Edinburgh, and Stirling, would recommend Place2Think to their peers and this is similarly reflected in the qualitative interviews from both Edinburgh and Stirling, where all interviewees said they would recommend Place2Think including describing it as '*it's a life line*'.

The interviewees across both Universities also revealed the impact of Place2Be's involvement in Teacher Education on them including:

- **Staying on the course** – some students from both institutions reported that they felt Place2Think had helped them stay on their placement/course. *"In regards to practice it definitely gave me back some confidence because I was actually going to quit the whole course, because it knocked me so much."*
- **Personal Development** – interviewees reported gaining in, or regaining, their confidence as teachers as a result of reflecting with the Place2Be Mental Health Practitioner during the sessions through, for example, being guided to recognise the skills they had and have developed: *"I don't need to be perfect and be the best teacher out there and instead realise I can be a great teacher by embracing the good qualities that I have"* and *"I have a lot of skills and capacity to do teaching but I don't always have the confidence to believe I do. I felt Place2Think helped me to do that."*
- **Linking theory and practice** – the sessions helped the students to link their theoretical knowledge about, for example, attachment theory, to their practice: *"I'm quite familiar with attachment theory but I just didn't make the connection between the theoretical stuff that I knew and how it presented in the classroom"*
- **Reflective practice** – participating in Place2Think sessions had led to some participants reporting they had become more reflective in their practice: *"not immediately reacting, thinking what is my impact on children"*
- **Changing how they work with specific children** – while not all interviewees had the opportunity to apply what they explored through Place2Think into their immediate practice, as Place2Think often happened post placement, there were instances where they reported that it had impacted on their work with individual children and would inform their future practice: *"I'm thinking of two or three kids actually who it was really transformative with"*
- **Ripple effect** – there was an indication that the Place2Think sessions had a wider effect than the direct impact on the individual who attended as they encouraged others to attend and shared their knowledge, experience and resources with other students: *"I have shared"*

books that [Place2Be mental health practitioner] has recommended and...casual communication...I've said this is what I did and I found it really helpful

- **Formal assessment** – the extent to which the learning about mental health and wellbeing had an impact on students was reflected in the observations of tutors interviewed in Edinburgh who noted the Mental Health related content in the students' portfolios submitted for formal assessment.
- **Identity formation** – although there was some evidence of Place2Think as a therapeutic space the overriding focus was on practice. The students identified this as an educational space: *“So therapy and counselling but also focused on my practice”*.

Overall, the responses from the students surveyed and interviewed indicate that Place2Be's role had complemented the Initial Teacher Education in both Universities and access to the two Place2Be Mental Health Practitioners was a key component in students feeling supported, to the extent that three students interviewed said they felt that the Place2Think session had helped retain them in the course when they considered leaving: *“I'm not sure I'd have made it through the five weeks if I didn't speak to her”*.

The contribution of Place2Be to the students' learning is summed up in the following quote from a student:

“For the one-to-one sessions, which obviously you only got if you went and found them, were entirely different and were certainly where I did a lot of my best learning about children's mental health and how to approach things. Which is something I came out of sessions feeling certainly more confident than a lot of my course mates about approaching”.

3.3 What was the distinctive contribution of Place2Be?

The evidence suggests that the involvement of Place2Be in the Initial Teacher Education in the two Universities had a positive impact on the knowledge, understanding, practice and personal development of the students surveyed and interviewed. Their reflections on their experience also provide an insight into the distinctive contribution that Place2Be made and how it differed from other aspects of their education. The following emerged as the elements which students felt added value to their experience:

- **Independence** – the two Place2Be Mental Health Practitioners were independent of the academic staff of the university, in contrast to their personal tutor. This enabled students to feel they could be more open about their experience of the course and any challenges: *“I needed that separation so there wasn't that conflict when I was critiquing the courses or placements”* and *“it's a confidential space where you know that your opinions and comments are not ... linked to your academic work”*
- **Non-judgemental and confidential** – linked to the independence was the non-judgemental approach which students felt the Place2Be Practitioners adopted. *“I was worried that tutors would see me as inadequate and judge me”* and *“I can discuss emotional issues without fear of judgement”*
- **Different perspective and professional expertise** – interviewees acknowledged the specialist expertise of the Place2Be practitioners, and the alternative perspective they brought, and the value this added to their learning *“she's highly experienced and very, very knowledgeable in the field of wellbeing, mental wellbeing”*
- **Safe space** – the calm environment when they met the Place2Be Mental Health Practitioner was valued by interviewees and the fact that, for some, it provided a safe space to have a more in-depth discussion than they had elsewhere, and process their experiences *“I don't know if I've ever spoken to anybody on that kind of level”*
- **Practical** – some interviewees reported that the Place2Think session were practical and applied learning: *“this is about putting it into practice. So you have that difficult child, how*

do you deal with that in real terms, what are the actual strategies you/re gonna use and what are the tools available and how do you find them?"

- **Realistic** – there was a perception that the Place2Be Practitioner brought a more realistic insight into the issues children experience that the teachers would encounter: *"it dealt directly with some unpleasant and, kind of, unworkable in a lot of ways, truths about the job"*
- **Flexible and accessible** – the students valued the flexibility and accessibility of the Place2Be practitioners who the students had widely experienced as being available, responsive and flexible in the timing and mode of communicating using emails and phone calls as well as face-to-face meetings: *"I emailed [Place2Be practitioner] giving her an explanation of the challenges these two boys faced and she replied very quickly in which we decided a time to meet over the next following days"*

4 Issues for consideration

The first year of the pilot has demonstrated that there is value in embedding Place2Be Mental Health Practitioners in the Initial Teacher Education programme. The learning to date outlined in the evaluation reports raises some issues which are worthy of consideration.

- **Sustainability of Place2Think consultations:** the two Mental Health Practitioners each had met with around 40 students, some for more than one session. The students valued the accessibility and flexibility of the Practitioners and their availability. As more students become aware of the service, consideration may need to be given to how to balance demand and the capacity of the Practitioners.
- **Timing of sessions:** some of the students observed that they would have valued accessing more Place2Think sessions while they were on their placement as they would be actively teaching in classrooms and could discuss some of the issues and challenges as part of the sessions. This was available in year one at both Universities. Students at Stirling and Edinburgh highlighted the flexible support available on placements was a valued offer, engagement during placements will be replicated by both mental health practitioners in year 2.
- **Clarity of offer:** there was some evidence that the students were not completely clear on the role of Place2Be on their course, how far this would be integrated or a separate service they could choose to access. The nature of the Place2Think space, and how far it is reflective or a form of supervision would also be worthy of further discussion. There would be value in clarifying this for students at the start of the year.
- **Balance of lectures and seminars and Place2Think:** the lectures and seminars made a contribution to students' learning, albeit to a lesser extent than the more intensive Place2Think sessions, and enable reach to a greater number of students. For the next year of delivery there may be value in considering the balance between the different aspects of delivery.
- **Integration into the wider course:** some students reflected that the course as a whole could benefit from the content from Place2Be's contribution to be more integrated into the course. While they acknowledge the challenge of achieving this with all the other content that is required, there may be value in exploring this further.
- **Feedback from students informing provision for new students:** some of the feedback from the students regarding the challenges encountered and the support needed could usefully inform the tutors of the new cohort of students and enable them to address these issues.