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Participatory action research: Implementing positive psychology in north-east primary schools

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University of Sunderland | Research and Knowledge Exchange

Dr Kate Duffy is research lead for Initial Teacher Education (ITT). This involves supporting colleagues in the School of Education (SoE) with their research activity and convening the Centre for Research in education (CRE) Public Seminar series. The series showcases the wide range of research that is undertaken by the SoE at its different stages of development. Within this role I also work with external partners such as Global SpiritEd and support the Global Research Network which is committed to exploring ways to personalise education and increase student agency.

Dr Elizabeth Hidson is research lead for the International Initial Teacher Training (IITT) team in the School of Education. She is also a Vice-Chancellor's Research and Knowledge Exchange fellow. Her research focus is research collaboration with schools and teachers, with the goal of co-constructing evidence-informed solutions to teaching and learning priorities that schools and teachers want to focus on, and to facilitate reciprocal knowledge exchange between teachers, schools and the University.

The InterAction Unit

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Schools engaging with research

- Research in schools is arguably mostly **top-down**, but…
- The sector is geared towards developing a **research-rich** and **self-improving** educational system predicated on the capacity for teachers to engage with research
- Schools are part of the **solution**, not the **problem**
- **Local** insights and context are vital

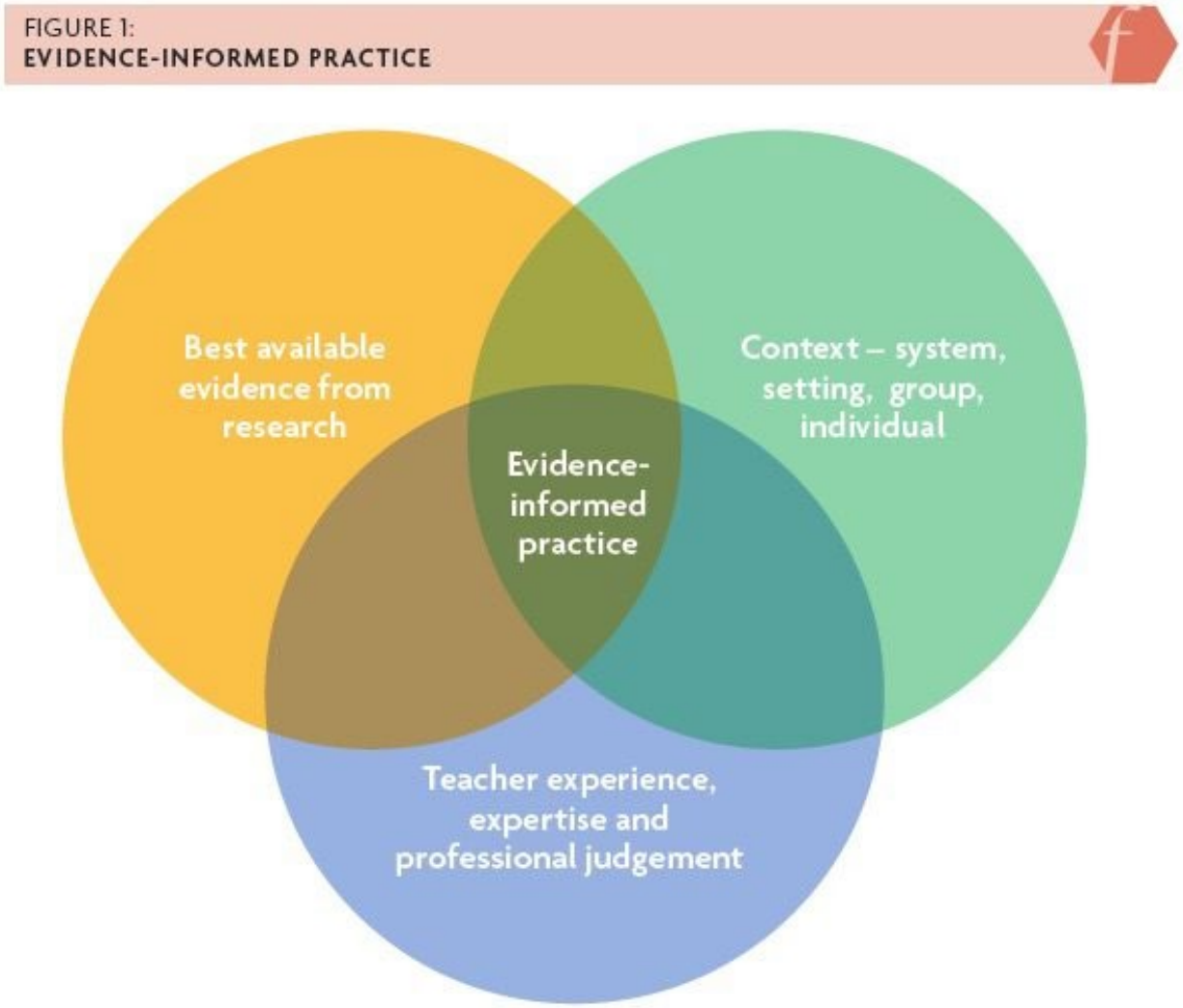


Figure adapted from Scutt (2018)

Background to this PAR project

UK Research and Innovation

Global Spirit Ed

Mini MIND

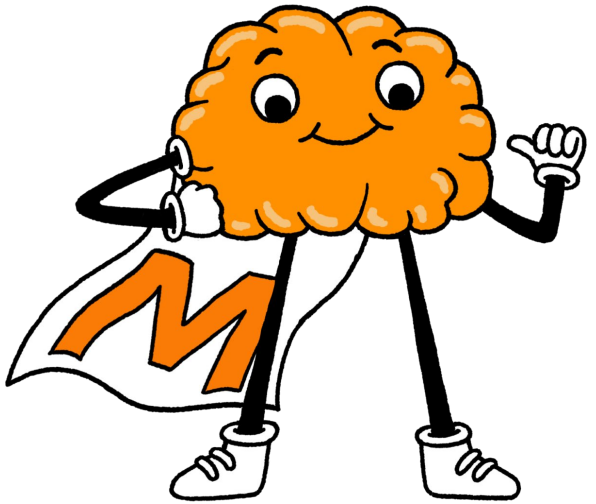
- Research England allocations to develop or increase the scale of **research conducted in partnership with diverse communities**.
- Participatory research involves the communities and **users of research**, **better recognising their experience, needs and preferences, and supporting communities to implement findings**.
- UoS existing partnerships with local schools for teacher training → general **invitation to participate**.
- Four* local schools / 9 teachers trialling **Mini Mind** – from EYFS to mixed Y3/4

What is Mini Mind?

The Mini Mind Programme is designed for children to understand how they think about themselves, life, and the world around them. The aim of the 12 hour programme is to empower children to take responsibility for their actions and choices, provide greater understanding of how their mind works and consider the relationships around them.

The ‘WHAT’– the Mini Mind Programme

- WHAT – Mini Mind **positive psychology** – helping pupils to understand how they think about themselves, life, and the world around them
- WHY – school has identified psychological wellbeing and resilience as a **school priority**, especially post-pandemic
- HOW – delivery and evaluation of **12 hours of learning**
- WHO – schools identify initial **trial group**
- WHEN – must be completed by **June 2024**
- WHERE –training at **university;** trial in schools



Progress so far

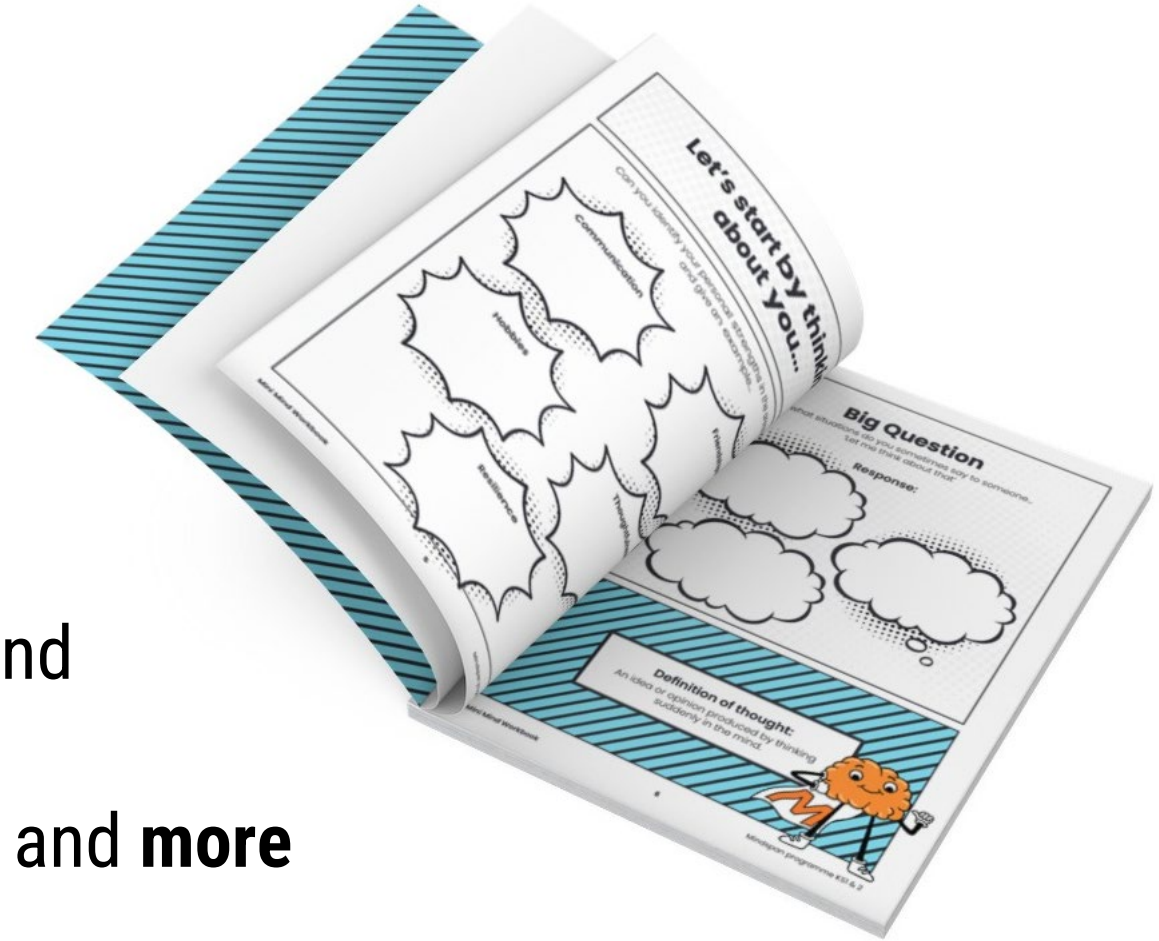
- Full day of **training** on campus at UoS – booklets, materials, planning
- Documents to structure thinking, **planning** and research questions for each school
- Individual school **meetings** to capture first cycle reflections, tweaks, insights
- Capturing and **sharing** progress so far with a view to reporting back to the university and to UKRI in July

School example

- Three mixed Y3/4 classes on a **carousel** for 30 minutes per week
- Delivered by the same (**trained**) teacher
- Each class progressing at their own **pace**
- Want to **complete** the programme – considering drop-down days
- Considering **progression**, **curriculum** design and **integration** with other provision e.g. NHS Y5 programme (mental health-related); **PSHE**
- **Challenges** with children thinking of **examples** to share; teacher **scaffolding**, teacher developing **bespoke** resources
- **Keeping track** of teacher insights and evaluation, annotating the booklet, research journal, developing a report for governors etc, prompts to guide the teachers
- **Future** review e.g. in a year's time;
- Becoming Mini Mind schools; **champions**; training other schools;

Impact on children

- Children taking **pride** in their booklets
- Now have **tools to articulate**
- **Less dysregulation**
- **Better behaviour** around school
- Notable in **comments at break times** and **relationships** between each other
- Much **more reflective** on their actions, and **more quickly**



Teacher insights

“I feel like we've got **more questions than answers**”

“There's **not enough research-driven changes in school**. It's difficult when you're in school to access that.”

“But we have these **conversations**, yeah, like **all the time** in the corridor.”

“I've actually really enjoyed teaching it. It's been lovely to teach. I think **I learn more about myself every week that I teach it as well**. It's been really good.”

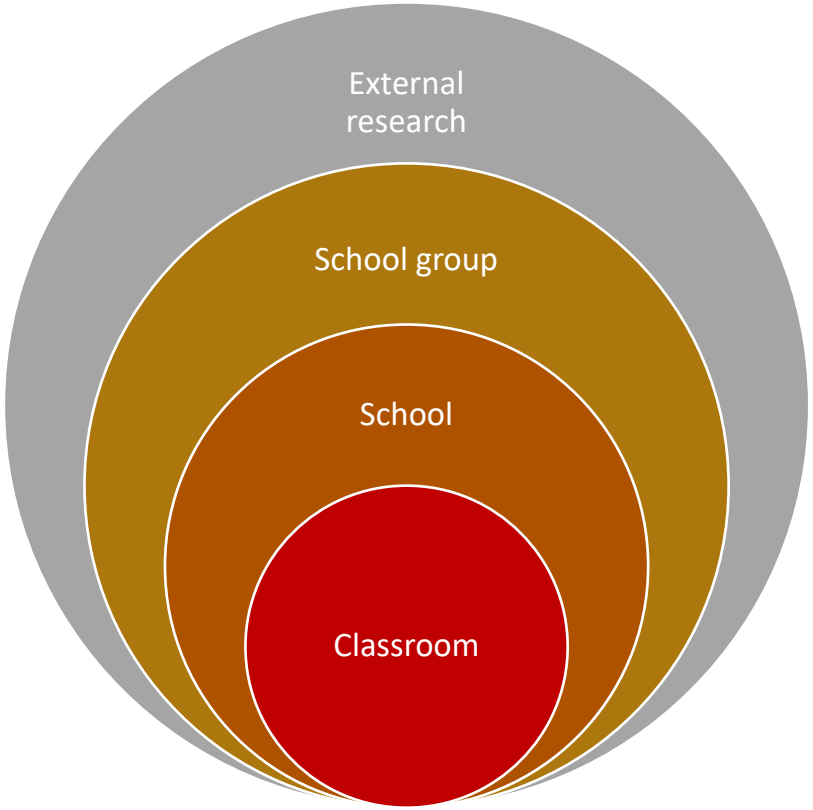
“Might not be something you can **see on paper”**

“How they'll **retain** it when it's not being delivered weekly will be a test of it”

Next steps and outputs

- School **visits** – data collection* (RAs, ethics etc)
- End of term **review** meeting all schools on campus
- Sharing **progress**: BERA practitioner research SIG newsletter, Chartered College Impact abstract, BERA practitioner research showcase, NTU Close to Practice conference
- Formal **write** ups for stakeholder, practitioner and academic audiences
- Seek further **funding** to continue/scale up project

Can school research influence the sector?



- **Macro**
  - Region
  - School group
- **Meso**
  - School
  - Department
- **Micro**
  - Classroom
  - Teacher

QUESTION:

What is our (HE) role?

Interdisciplinarity and Collaboration

- **Collaboration** between university, external partners and local schools
- We (InterAction@UoS) acting as a **catalyst** for this project (and others)
- Bringing people, ideas and funding **together**
- Interdisciplinary – the **right people on the team** to move projects forward

Questions, comments, insights, suggestions?

References and further information

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