UKRI Participatory Research Fund

# The Mini Mind Project 2023-2024

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## Background and context

### The need for positive psychology

Post-pandemic, we know that cognitive, social and emotional resources must now find their place alongside more traditional learning (Wear and Bethune, 2021). Our teachers felt that a combination of external evidence, staff perceptions of pupils, and feedback from parent voice demonstrated an increasing need to support children with self-regulation strategies. Through participatory action research (PAR) those who are concerned about an issue take a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it (Pain et al, 2019). ↓

## Activities funded

### 1. TRAINING AND RESOURCES

To kick-start the project, we brought a Mini Mind trainer to the university to engage in a day of training, reflection and planning on campus as a research group made up of university staff and school staff.

### 2. CLASSROOM RESOURCES

We bought in class sets of the Mini Mind booklets, which are the materials that the teachers would be using with the children back in their schools.

### 3. CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOOL COSTS

Recognising that we could not pay for all of the time needed for teachers to be involved in the project, we were able to make a contribution to school costs. All schools were already initial teacher training partner schools, so we could make these payments through the university's placements team direct to the schools.

### 4. DISSEMINATION

Some of the teachers have been able to attend close-to-practice and practitioner research conferences. We have been able to network, share our project and invite other teachers to learn from our project.→

Mini Mind training and planning day at the University of Sunderland

## What have we learned?

- Participatory action research works well with schools as they are actively involved in the research, and it aligns with the way that they already work.
- University staff act as a catalyst, bringing together schools, ideas and funding opportunity to support schools to be part of their own solution for self-identified research questions.
- Funding is the stimulus for being able to take action with schools – time for university staff to get things set up; contribution to school time – a little funding can result in a wealth of impact.
- Once teacher gets involved in research, they quickly start thinking like researchers and asking questions about reliability, validity and impact.
- As one of our teachers said – they now have more questions, and so we now want to find ways to develop our work with schools and teachers. →

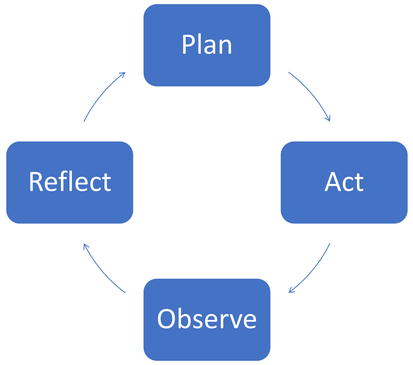


Figure 1: Typical action research cycle, which works well with school academic cycles.

## Pathways to impact

- Created a new network / pathway for impactful research with schools and teacher by inviting schools to participate in PAR project.
- Involved nine teachers from four schools, including one multi-academy trust, enhancing their research skills through participatory action research.
- Trained nine teachers in the implementation of Mini Mind approach and materials.
- Different implementation models in each school mean that we have reached approximately 150 students across those schools.
- Impacted on schools' approaches to curriculum design and progression as they look to embed Mini Mind for next year and beyond.
- Set up an internal agile research team of approximately 12 additional staff to help work on this project as well as others, thereby enhancing their research skills in parallel.
- Communication and engagement with different school communities through sharing the project at conferences and publications. ↓

## Impact on children and staff

1. **CHILDREN NOW HAVE TOOLS TO TALK WITH**
   - They are using the positive psychology language in the classroom and playground
2. **IMPROVED SELF-AWARENESS**
   - Teachers notice children's improved relationships, and their own awareness, too
3. **TEACHERS AS RESEARCHERS**
   - Teachers' heightened awareness of research issues in relation to curriculum planning. ↓

## Contact details

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## References and links

Mini Mind https://mind-span.co.uk/mini-mind/

Pain R, Whitman, G. and Milledge, D (2019) Participatory Action Research Toolkit: An Introduction to Using PAR as an Approach to Learning, Research and Action. Practice Guide. Durham University. Available at: https://eprints.icstudies.org.uk/id/eprint/293/

Weare K and Bethune A (2021) Implementing Mindfulness in Schools: An Evidence-Based Guide. Guidance report. Available at https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/implementing-mindfulness-in-schools-an-evidence-based-guide

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