

Supporting speech and communication development in early years through mindful pedagogy

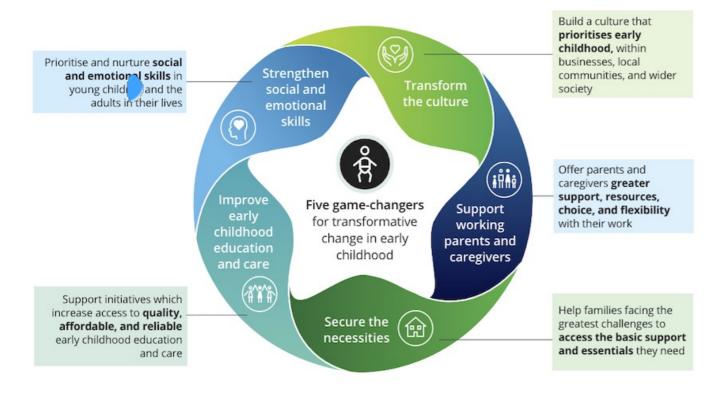
- Led by:
- Dr Kate Russell & Dr Kim Bartholomew
- Co-investigator Mrs. Eleanor Milligan
- SRA Mrs. Emma Clough







Project overview



"The first five years of our lives fundamentally shape the adults we become, the role we go on to play in our communities, and the society that we build together."

"Communication skills are a key building block for a child's social and emotional development and can contribute to early learning, confidence and wellbeing."

Prioritising early childhood for a happier, healthier society How businesses can drive, and benefit from, transformative change in the UK Report for The Royal Foundation of The Prince and Princess of Wales On behalf of The Business Taskforce for Early Childhood May 2024



Research aim

To co-create a mindful pedagogy to support speech and communication development in early years





Speech and communication does not happen in isolation





Realist Review

- Realist approaches aim to uncover explanations of how, why, for whom and under what conditions change happens (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).
- This causal process is captured in a heuristic called a context-mechanism-outcome-configuration or CMOC (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).
- These CMOCs are brought together in a programme theory (PrT).





The connection between mindfulness and speech and communication skills





- Focus/attention
- Bodily awareness
- Emotional regulation
- Improved sense of self





- Working memory
- Inhibitory control
- Cognitive flexibility



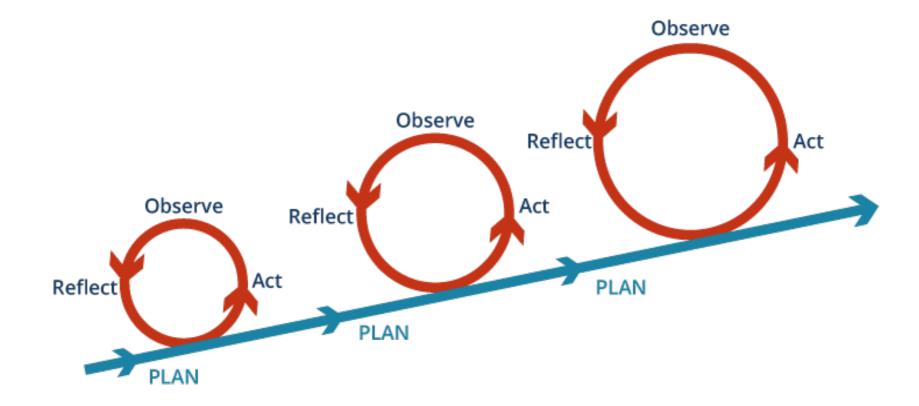
Improved Speech & Communication Skills

- Listening
- Planning/Organisation
- Interaction/Speaking

Co-Regulation



Participatory action research



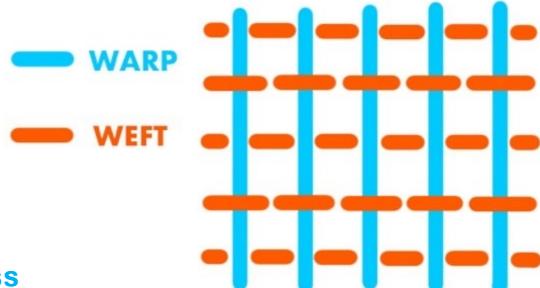


Initial trial - 6 weeks (focus on practitioners)

- Development of CPD training for early years practitioners and managers
- Development of new reflection tools:
 - Little Minds Reflective Practitioner Tool
 - Little Minds Holistic Environment Tool
- Online mindfulness resources for continual CPD
 - Little Minds Ongoing CPD Reflection tool



Ways of working with mindfulness in your setting



WARP – core mindfulness principles.

WEFT – EYS flexibility.

A mindful pedagogy

 Being mindful means being aware of approaching and relating to our experiences/work in a mindful way – it's an embedded way of being

As compared to....(only)

- Doing mindfulness the explicitness of 'I am now doing my mindfulness meditation', 'I am now going to do my mindful yoga with you' - and then drifting back into a lack of awareness of our actions afterwards
- Its great to be doing mindfulness as long as we are being mindful about it



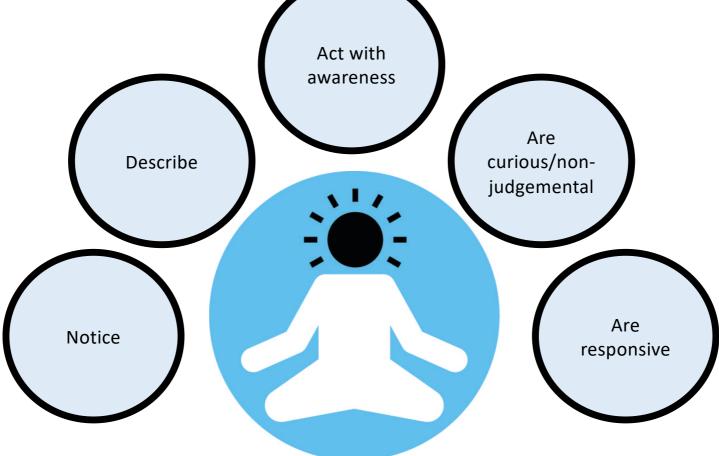


Mind Full, or Mindful?



As adults we mindfully guide children through play







The mindful teacher

- Developing strategies to help you as the practitioner support yourself is one of the most important ways to enable you to support others.
 - Mindful meditations
 - 3 step anchoring space/S.T.O.P exercise
 - Noticing stress responses
 - Body/thoughts/feeling/action model
 - Setting intentions approaching working with a mindful attitude



Mindful meditations (formal and informal)

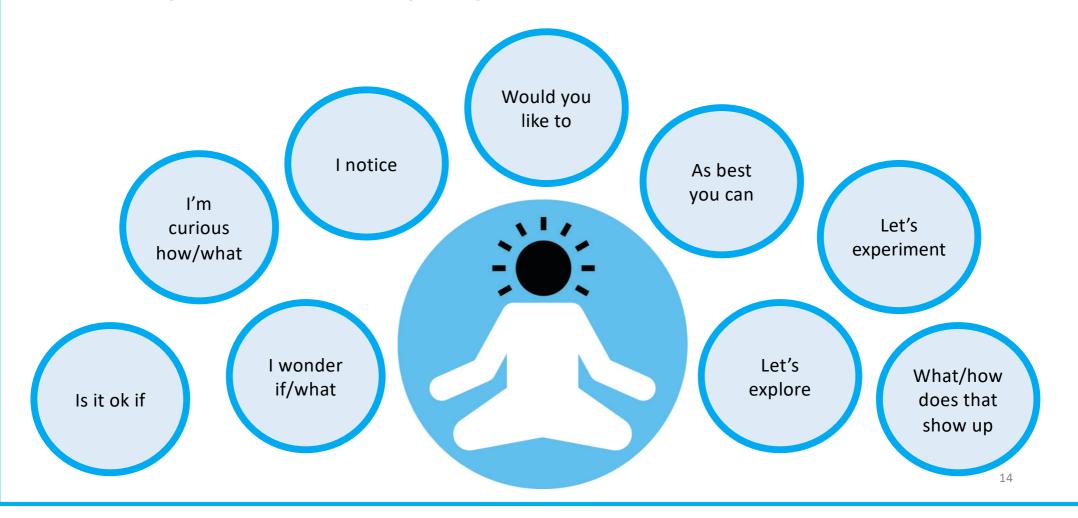
- Breath awareness
- Body scan
- Mindful movement
- Mindful eating
- Sense awareness

Anything and everything





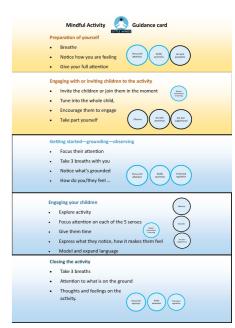
Using mindful language...



As practitioners, we mindfully guide children

through play by....

- preparing ourselves to be mindful be present in the moment
- tuning into how the child is experiencing the activity/working with the resources on offer and inviting the child to....
 -take their time in the engaged activity
 - ...notice/observe/be curious about using their senses what they can physically see/feel/hear/smell/taste
 - ...notice/observe/be curious about their emotions
 - o ...describe these observations
- taking part in the play/activity ourselves and model/narrate what we see/notice/feel (modelling the language to the children)
- engaging with curiosity and be responsive
- closing the activity calmly by returning to the breath



Mindful Activity



Preparation of yourself

- Breathe
- Notice how you are feeling
- Give your full attention



Engaging with or inviting children to the activity

Invite the children or join them in the moment



- Tune into the whole child,
- Encourage them to engage
- Take part yourself



Getting started—grounding—observing

- · Focus their attention
- Take 3 breaths with you
- Notice what's grounded
- How do you/they feel ...



Engaging your children

- Explore activity
- Focus attention on each of the 5 senses
 - Deeper Involvement In learning
- Give them time
- Express what they notice, how it makes them feel
 - judgemental

Model and expand language

Closing the activity

- Take 3 breaths
- Attention to what is on the ground
- Thoughts and feelings on the activity.







Early findings



Challenges reflective of wider sector

Turnover of staff

Participation in CPD



Potential of Little Minds Reflective Practitioner tool

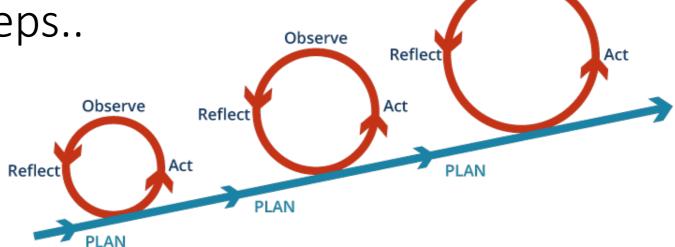
Holistically reflect on practice and managers used this tool to support individual and team development/awareness



Mindful approach to teaching young children through preparation of self



Next steps..



Observe

- Revise intervention based on evaluation
- Design ways to explicitly assess children's speech and communication in settings
- Implement and test revised Little Minds intervention over 6 weeks from Oct-Dec 2024 in 5 new settings
- Evaluate outcomes and impact
- Implement and test revised Little Minds intervention over 6 weeks from Jan-Feb 2025 in 5 new settings

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"what I found really refreshing...was that you don't ever really talk about yourself in training. It's always about what can you do for your children...But actually for me, I opened up a new side because I'm really confident with co-regulation and behaviour and emotions. What I hadn't really thought about was how my own feelings and emotions might impact that, and how the children can pick up on that. So for me. I found it really beneficial because I was able to sort of see the other side of it"

"it (mindfulness) should be part of the whole level three, early years training."

"In essence- this is what we want to teach the children, but how we need to start with ourselves."