

The Attachment Research Community

Our approach to Action Research

Action research methodology needs to work with schools' agendas, practices and pressures. Thus, research methods need to be selected for their functionality and convenience for busy practitioners to use in the context of school practice, as well as for being robust and accessible. An action research approach facilitates adoption in practice, whole school engagement and school ownership. A university partnership enables cross-group analysis, ensures ethical protocols are followed and facilitates dissemination/publication of findings.

We make a distinction in content on the ARC website between case studies, which will be the account of work undertaken and outcomes from schools and settings, and research, which will have the oversight of an HEI partner. The action research undertaken may also yield evidence based case studies.

To illustrate the way in which we would expect action research to be overseen and validated by HEI partners, the following describes the approach that has been used in our work in the past.

A model for action research in Attachment Aware Schools

The Attachment Aware Schools Project involved a series of pilot projects in Stoke and Bath and North East Somerset. It was a collaborative project between Virtual Schools, local schools and PRUs, an HEI (Bath Spa University) and a training company (Kate Cairns Associates). The projects incorporated a whole school programme that supported the emotional and social development of all children, in addition to targeted support for the most vulnerable learners. It offered practical, effective tools and techniques, underpinned by a programme of training and online training support. The core training incorporated an understanding and insight into attachment theory, the neuroscientific evidence which appears to support the research on the attachment process and an outline of the impact of trauma on the developing brain and subsequent behaviour. Links were made to the implications for school learning. Over a period of one year, participants adopted an action research approach to implementing AAS strategies and interventions into everyday practice, adapting them to their own contexts, such as Emotion Coaching and Nurture Group provision. Support was provided by the HEI at network/ booster meetings and training sessions to report progress, clarify application of the strategies/interventions, explore the complexities and challenges of adopting attachment-based strategies and provide general support to the action research. The action research incorporated the tracking of selected case study children deemed to be 'educationally at risk' e.g. SEMH difficulties, Looked After and Pupil Premium pupils as part of the process for ascertaining impact.

The training models differed slightly between the two Authorities. In Stoke, a whole school training model operated where all staff of all participating schools and specialist provision settings were trained together. In B&NES, a cascade model operated where larger number of schools and specialist provision settings participated, but fewer staff attended the training (at least two staff members, one of which was a senior leader) – the training was then cascaded by the trained participants. In both models, the main intention was to implement whole school approaches where feasible, with some more targeted interventions. The programme draws upon a review of relevant literature, preliminary

findings from a preliminary pilot study and the contributions of the participating schools, as well as relevant literature in the field regarding whole school cultural change. It operated on principles of joined-up thinking and interagency collaboration firmly endorsing the concept of 'the team around the child' and community-wide collaboration.

Data was collected using a mixed methods approach generated both quantitative (descriptive using SPSS (V21) and Excel, and inferential statistics using chi-square and t tests) and qualitative data (using NVivo, cloud generator and thematic/content analysis) as indices of effectiveness. Data was collected by participating schools adopting an action research method and utilising specific AAS generated data collection tools and standardised measures. All schools used the same data collection tools for consistency and for cross-school analysis. Data instruments included the AAS audit, progress data (attendance, English scores, maths scores, reading scores), behavioural incidents (internal and external exclusions), SDQs (Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires) and exit questionnaires.

Progress data on pupil academic achievement (including reading, writing, maths and English), exclusions (inside and outside of classroom) and improvements in SDQ were analysed before the intervention at the end of terms 1-2 (Time 1) and after the intervention at the end of terms 3-5 (Time 2), with the aim to explore pre- and post-intervention differences. Purposive sampling was undertaken for pupils considered 'at risk' but limited demographic data was collected. Selection was made by senior school staff.

For categorical data (expected academic achievement levels), chi square was used to explore pre- and post- differences according to observed and expected frequencies, using Excel. For interval data (exclusions, sanctions, SDQ scores), t-tests were used to explore mean differences, using Excel. All summary statistics and data visualisations were produced by Excel. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, content analysis and constructivist grounded theory employing analyst triangulation.

A series of small case studies were collected using Friedman's OBA (Outcomes Based Accountability) framework. Each case study was based on a target child, chosen by the lead teacher for the AAS project at the school. Demographics and information for each case study was acquired.

All ethical protocols were followed. An ethics approval form was submitted to and approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee. Schools were required to complete consent forms and, where appropriate, seek permission from pupils and gatekeepers. Information sheets were distributed for interested parties and gatekeepers. Consent forms were adapted for signing by Parents/Guardians and Young People, where appropriate.

Data was collected by the partner university (at a cost of £300 per school, funded by Virtual Schools) and analysed by independent statisticians and analysts. Amalgamated data was analysed per Virtual School/Local Authority and a meta-analysis undertaken across all schools. An independent evaluation has also been undertaken by Oxford University in two local authorities largely utilising focus group and telephone interviews of participating staff.

Future research possibilities

The pilot studies have not addressed attachment research such as those related to attachment in multiple relationships. There is scope to utilise Pianta's student-teacher measures and other short form validated psychometric measures such as meta-emotion philosophy, wellbeing (pupil and staff), expressive reluctance, thinking and feeling, empathy, self-esteem etc. However, utilisation of other measures needs to accommodate the realities of school and time available to staff to complete the measures.

Examples of Publications to date

Academic

Rose, J., McGuire-Snieckus and Gilbert, L. (forthcoming) Attachment Aware Schools: Findings from a pilot study. *International Journal of Pastoral Care and Education*.

Rose, J., Gilbert, L., Gus, L., McGuire-Snieckus, R., McInnes, K. and Digby, R. (2017) Attachment Aware Schools: case studies from a pilot programme. *The Open Family Studies Journal*, 9, 3-14.

Gus, L., Rose, J., Gilbert, L., Kilby, R. (2017) The introduction of Emotion Coaching as a whole school approach in a primary specialist Social Emotional and Mental Health setting: positive outcomes for all. *The Open Family Studies Journal*, 9.

Rose, J. and Gilbert, L. (2017) Attachment Aware Schools. In Colley, D. and Cooper, P. (Eds) *Emotional Development and Attachment in the Classroom: theory and practice for students and teachers*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Parker, R. and Rose, J. (2016) Attachment Aware Schools – an alternative to the behaviourist paradigm. In Noddings, N. and Lees, H. *The International Handbook of Alternative Education*. London: Palgrave.

Rose, J. (2015) Emotion Coaching – a strategy for promoting behavioural self-regulation in children/young people. *Journal of the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties*, 28.2, 7-13.

Rose, J., Gilbert, L., McGuire-Snieckus, R. (2015) Emotion Coaching - a strategy for promoting behavioural self-regulation in children and young people in schools: A pilot study, *European Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 13, 1766-1790.

Gus, L., Rose, J., Gilbert, L. (2015) Emotion Coaching: a universal strategy for supporting and promoting sustainable emotional and behavioural well-being. *Journal of Educational and Child Psychology*, 32.1, 31-41.

Professional/Media

https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/8852/think-piece_at.pdf

<https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/media/bathspaacuk/education-/research/digital-literacy/education-resource-introduction-to-attachment.pdf>

<http://www.headteacher-update.com/best-practice-article/pastoral-support-emotion-coaching/152306/>

<http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/student-wellbeing-emotion-coaching-in-schools/>

<http://theconversation.com/how-emotion-coaching-brings-out-the-best-in-children-60359>

<http://theconversation.com/one-theory-all-teachers-with-disruptive-children-should-know-about-43561>