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Using a collaborative working group model to develop an ADHD resource for school staff

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Abstract

Inclusive education for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) presents challenges for school staff and professional development is lacking. Training is not always available when needed, strategies suggested by external experts can be impractical and staff lack autonomy in choosing the best way of being resourced. Additionally, the experience and knowledge of the range of school staff is not utilised. A collaborative working group of school staff and a researcher explored an alternative method of ADHD resourcing. Co-construction of knowledge defines how the group discursively identified actionable knowledge from the different perspectives and knowledge brought by individual group members. A systemic framework was used to critically reflect on the collaboration. The framework enabled reflection on four areas to understand how and why the collaboration led to a published web-based school staff ADHD resource. Firstly, starting conditions and assumptions were considered to identify and articulate the rationale for the resource. Secondly, the context and system dynamics enabled consideration of the socio-cultural and political landscape of the project and the impact of COVID-19. Thirdly, the different voices of participants and power dynamics were reflected on. Finally, emergence was a frame in which to elucidate knowledge production and changes in practice. The collaborative working group addressed the research–practice gap and the need for diversity of voices to be heard across the school. Knowledge co-construction positions staff as knowledge bearers

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and, together with different forms of knowledge, they can be empowered to create new, contextualised evidence-based knowledge.

KEYWORDS
ADHD, co-construction, resources, schools, teachers

Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

ADHD training for school staff has been shown to be ineffective over the long term. Issues of timing, contextualisation and delivery style have led to a need to improve how school staff are equipped to support children with ADHD.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

ADHD resourcing for school staff is more effective when school staff share tacit knowledge with academic/clinical knowledge. This collaborative project describes the co-construction of a website about ADHD in the classroom which is available when needed, gives autonomy to staff and provides tried and tested classroom strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The education policies set forth by the UK government assert a commitment to inclusion, providing for children with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream school, enshrined in the SEND Code of Practice (Children and Families Act, 2014; Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). The merits of inclusive education extend from issues of social justice and human rights to critiques of current pedagogy and educational practices (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2015; Miles & Singal, 2009). However, inclusive education is not without its challenges for both children and school staff and, although professional development in this area has been deemed critical for teaching children with SEN, it has also been described as lacking impact in the findings from the Teaching and Learning International Study (TALIS) (Rutkowski et al., 2013).

There is little research exploring the views of school staff on professional development in ADHD, which may be due to the lack of training available for practitioners (ComRes, 2017; Martinussen et al., 2011). However, studies that have sought the perspectives of teachers and other school staff indicate a lack of relevant, practical professional development opportunities in ADHD (Ward et al., 2021). One perspective that has been reported is that ADHD training is not timely, and suggestions made by external professionals for supporting children with ADHD in the classroom show a lack of understanding of the classroom context (Braude & Dwarika, 2020). Additionally, difficult-to-understand jargon and over-medicalised language arises because of a gap between academic, clinical and educational contexts (Braude & Dwarika, 2020).

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Consistently, the research–practice gap in education is well documented and has been identified as a barrier to research-informing practice and more tacit forms of knowledge-informing research (Rynes et al., 2001; Watling Neal et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the benefits of bringing academics and practitioners together to bridge this gap are considerable; for example, greater diversity in knowledge and experience, potential for quicker impact on practice, design led by users grounded in everyday practice and differing assumptions being exposed and challenged (Honingh et al., 2018; Lau & Stille, 2014; Nastasi et al., 2000; Rynes et al., 2001).

The literature examining ADHD training interventions for teachers shows that the majority of programmes are written and delivered by academic or clinical staff, positioning them as experts and school staff as lacking in knowledge (Ward et al., 2020). This knowledge transfer model shows limited gains in teacher knowledge and skills, which deteriorate over time (Ward et al., 2020). A survey of UK teachers in 2017 revealed that almost 90% of teachers have experience of teaching children with ADHD and so have tacit knowledge of supporting children with ADHD in the classroom (ComRes, 2017). Although research–practice partnerships in autism are discussed in the literature (Parsons et al., 2013), there does not seem to be a similar movement in the field of ADHD.

This paper describes an innovative approach to the production of educational professional development ADHD resources using a collaborative working group model designed to address this research–practice gap. This model enabled the co-construction of knowledge and was used to produce a web-based ADHD resource for school staff entitled ATTIC (ADHD Tips and Tricks in the Classroom: https://attic.org.uk). Analytically, we critically reflect on the collaborative working group model through the views and experiences of participating staff using a systemic framework which aims to elucidate how and why the collaboration led us to our ADHD resource. To situate this analysis, we firstly present our theoretical and methodological approach.

CO-CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

Co-construction in education 'is conceptualised as teachers collaboratively constructing knowledge, using different sources, such as the practical knowledge of colleagues, educational research literature, knowledge of external experts, and/or collaborative research activities' (van Schaik et al., 2019, p. 31). The collaboration in this project was between educational professionals working in schools and an academic researcher (the first author) specialising in ADHD research. Collaboration was a deliberate action as a group in discussing and critiquing current knowledge and practices, defining goals and actions to meet them and sharing responsibilities to produce the resource.

In the ATTIC project, each individual member brought their own knowledge, experience, perspectives and skills, but it was as we discursively identified the actionable knowledge that would resource school staff to support children with ADHD, that new knowledge was constructed. This collaboration was designed to reduce the research–practice gap by recognising the different yet complementary and equal forms of 'expert knowledge' brought by staff and the researcher, and to recognise that the interaction between these different forms of knowledge may lead to positive change in understanding and practice for all participants (Hamza et al., 2018; Paavola et al., 2004).

Co-construction does create challenges; Cornwall (2008, p. 278) points out that 'being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice', and issues of power, access, confidence, capacity and inclusion can inhibit participation or affect its results (Cornwall, 2008; Jones & Stanley, 2010; Nind, 2014).

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CRITICAL REFLECTION OF COLLABORATIVE WORK USING A SYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK

Fransman et al.'s (2021) systemic framework for critical reflection on collaborative work addresses many of these issues and others, such as understanding the specific local context and the effects of interaction across boundaries. Four areas of reflection are outlined: starting conditions and assumptions; context and system dynamics; difference; and emergence. The framework is based on complexity theory and this theory-based approach is particularly suited to evaluating the working group model because it considers the complex nature of collaborations. The use of complexity theory aims to elucidate how and why the collaboration has led to the current situation, in contrast to the traditional method of simply what works and 'seeking to draw direct and transferable "rules" for practice' without understanding the importance of the local context and its history (Callaghan, 2008, p. 409; Sanderson, 2000).

EMPIRICAL CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The objectives of this study were fourfold.

1. To create a working group for the development of a teacher ADHD resource, including assignment of roles and timetable for meeting.
2. To design a project plan that enables sharing of ideas and a decision-making process.
3. To create an ADHD resource specifically for teaching staff, reflective of the experience and contributions of the working group.
4. To reflect on the working group model and the experiences of participating teachers.

The purpose of the collaborative working group was to co-produce ADHD resources for school staff and was established by the researcher prior to the group being formed. Eight school staff members were recruited to work alongside one researcher. Emails were sent to head teachers and adverts were placed on social media. A short bio written by each member of the group is included in Table 1. This breadth of roles demonstrates that different forms of knowledge were equally valued and important to build a usable resource for all school staff. Financial reimbursement was provided for school staff, aiming to provide parity between the staff and the researcher.

Staff participants completed an initial questionnaire detailing their experience in supporting children with ADHD and asking about their expectations for the project. The working group met monthly using Microsoft Teams. The first meeting was planned by the researcher and included introductions, followed by a discussion concerning school staff perspectives on ADHD reported in Ward et al. (2021). In subsequent meetings, through discussion, the group prioritised an area of content to be addressed at the next meeting. Each meeting concluded with reflective questions about the meeting for all participants to complete. After the meeting, the researcher circulated a summary of the meeting and invited any comments or edits from the rest of the group. A similar pattern was followed for each of the working group meetings.

Staff participants identified the child's voice as an important component of the resource. The Ideal School activity was used to enable children with ADHD to contribute their knowledge to the project (Moran, 2001). In this activity, staff met individually with children and invited them to talk, write or draw their responses to a variety of questions that the staff asked. Three children, whose parents had provided consent and who themselves had provided assent, contributed to the project and the staff questions plus child responses can be viewed at https://www.attic.org.uk/a-child-s-perspective.

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TABLE 1 Working group bios

Deputy head	I have 12 years' teaching experience and 7 years' leadership experience. I wanted to be involved in this project as I think there is a need for much more information for teachers of children with ADHD. I hope the resource will provide insights to help classrooms become more inclusive, and help education professionals better understand neurodivergent brains (including learning the best ways to harness their strengths and minimise their challenges).
Behaviour manager	I have 15 years' experience in education and have supported many young people with ADHD. Meeting SEMH needs is a very important part of the work we do, and I wanted to be part of developing a resource that would make a difference to more children with ADHD.
Head teacher	I have been lucky to have spent nearly 30 years as a head teacher and my career has often been defined by the child who required me to turn upside down and look at their needs from a different perspective. I would still say that 'inclusion' runs through me, like a stick of rock and from my work locally and nationally I know that it is often children's social, emotional and mental health needs that can have the biggest negative impact on educators in schools. Finding ways to support staff to recognise and respond to need and not react to behaviour makes such a difference for pupils with ADHD, enabling them to feel valued and able to learn. I hope the resources on this website will add to a school's toolkit.
SENCO	I have been teaching since 1997 when I qualified. I spent time working as an EY advisor, and Specialist SEN teacher before becoming a SENCO in 2019. I became involved in the project as we have a significant number of pupils in our school who have an ADHD diagnosis, and I felt it would be good to share our successes and also to learn from colleagues to ensure we explore all opportunities to enable our pupils to achieve their highest potential. This resource bank is an exciting tool for all of us to explore and learn more about our young people in a positive way.
SENCO/class teacher	I have been teaching for 8 years and a SENCO for 5 years. I got involved to develop my own understanding of how to be more supportive and inclusive. I hope this project allows other professionals to feel more confident in an inclusive classroom and how an inclusive classroom is beneficial to each child in it.
SENCO	I have 5 years' teaching experience (both key stages 1 and 2), 11 years as a SENCO in three different schools. ADHD is becoming more widely diagnosed and therefore every teacher needs to be equipped with the knowledge and strategies to ensure that pupils in their class with ADHD are recognised and supported so they can reach their full potential. I wanted to be involved in a project that would provide practical advice and resources for teachers that can be used within the mainstream classroom on an everyday basis.
Inclusion manager	I have been a teacher for 28 years, working in a variety of schools. Over the last 20 years my leadership roles have involved me working closely with the school SENCOs and supporting staff with inclusion.
Class teacher/ SENCO	I have been teaching for 5 years and have been SENCo for 3 years. I wanted to be involved with this project as I felt that it would be so beneficial for our school and all schools, as ADHD can present so differently in each child. I wanted to help develop resources that would support staff to meet the needs of children with ADHD to reach their full potential in school, as well as allowing them to feel fully included in school life.
Researcher	I have supported children with ADHD for over 10 years and have been conducting research projects in ADHD since 2016. I previously worked as a youth worker and an alternative education teacher. Working with young people with ADHD, and hearing the challenges they faced throughout their education, inspired me to work with education professionals to find ways of resourcing school staff to support children with ADHD.

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It was decided that a website would ensure the resource was widely accessible and staff could access the information when needed. The researcher used Wix (wix.com) because they had previous experience of this software.

The current analysis is based on data collected between December 2020 and September 2021. This comprised qualitative interviews following the final working group meeting, correspondence between school staff and the researcher, initial questionnaires, working group meeting videos, reflective question responses and the researcher's field notes (Ritchie et al., 2013). A semi-structured topic guide was used for the qualitative interviews, which were conducted on Microsoft Teams (see Appendix S1). Staff were also explicitly invited to share any other thoughts at the end of the interview.

The focus of the analysis was shaped by the theoretical approach, exploring how the collaborative working group model enabled the production of an ADHD resource, and so the spotlight is on the process of co-construction of knowledge rather than the resource itself.

The critical reflection presented in this paper is derived from a deductive framework analysis using the systemic framework for exploring research collaboration (for a detailed description, see Fransman et al., 2021). Initial codes were used to describe sections of data considering the relevance to each area of the framework. Assumptions and starting conditions related to nested systems of the broader educational system, local schools and policies, and the working group. The context referred to the landscape in which the group worked, considering areas of policy, socio-cultural norms, resource availability and humanitarian events. Of note was the backdrop of COVID-19. The different voices of participants were considered, and how the collaboration led to knowledge co-construction. Emergence was used to elucidate what was produced and what changes in practice and knowledge production resulted from the project.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical approval was provided by the University of Southampton School of Psychlogy ethics committee (ERGO ID: 61926). Informed consent from school staff was obtained prior to the start of the study, followed by parental consent for participating children and informed assent of participating children. Collaborative research raises challenges in the ethical approval process as the nature of the collaborative working group model is that decisions are made by the group during the process. The initial ethics application was broad enough to allow for some flexibility (e.g., in the meeting schedule), but other group decisions during the project required an amendment to be approved by the ethics committee.

EXPLORING RESEARCH COLLABORATION IN THE ATTIC WORKING GROUP

It is difficult to capture the whole story of this collaboration, but here we present our reflections using themes produced through a deductive analysis (see Figure 1). The framework spans the main journey of this project, so begins with the starting assumptions, moves into making sense of the context and dynamics throughout the project, considers how the participants' diversity influenced the project and then reflects on what emerged from the collaboration.

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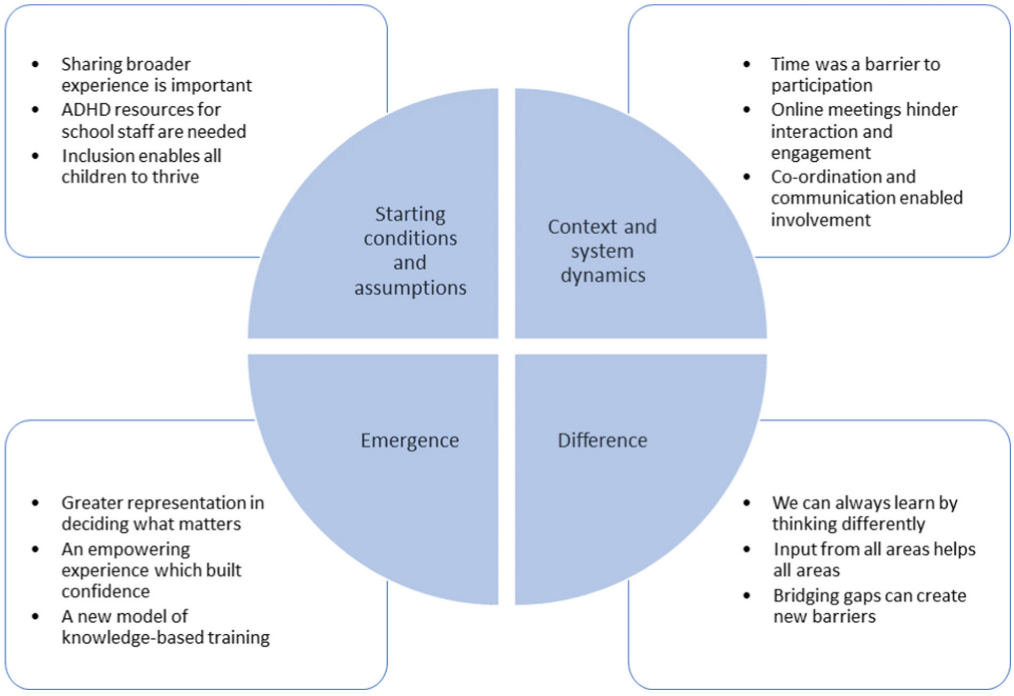

FIGURE 1 Thematic diagram.

Starting conditions and assumptions

This is the story of where the collaboration started. It considers what motivated people to get involved, what the purpose of the group was and what would ultimately be achieved.

Sharing broader experience is important

Group members described the value of meeting with other like-minded professionals, with diverse perspectives and experience, but a common interest in inclusive practice. Each thought they had valuable experience to share but would also benefit from hearing other perspectives.

> *… there's always something we can learn about SEN* [Special Educational Needs] *so you know it does not matter how much you study. There's always something new and there's always somebody else's perspective.*
>
> (03)

The concepts of experience, knowledge and skills were intertwined as participants described the collaboration between school staff and the researcher. Sharing was meaningful because it brought different forms of knowledge together, from research and in the field.

> *It's educational professionals bringing their knowledge, but I think the link up with the university worked really well… The skills that people bring are all different, aren't they? University professionals bring that depth of knowledge about that particular field or about the process.*
>
> (02)

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However, barriers to enabling this experience-sharing to happen, threatening democracy within the group, were also acknowledged. Opportunities to join research projects were perceived to be restricted to qualified teachers, rather than the wider school staff, even though teachers say they rely on support staff (Ward et al., 2021). Some participants raised concerns that they might be perceived to be less qualified or less experienced by others and, consequently, their contributions might not be equally valued. This emphasised the need to build a secure relationship of trust at the start. There was also a concern that the demands of staff roles—or unexpected changes to their timetable—would disrupt people's attendance at working group meetings.

ADHD resources for school staff are needed

It was widely recognised that ADHD resources are needed but lacking for school staff.

> *I think that there's a real dearth of information out there around ADHD for teachers. I do not… it's not something that's particularly covered in training, and it's not something that particularly much has been put in place for in school*.
>
> (02)

Staff felt that ADHD was becoming more common and had a big impact on the class. ADHD resources would provide information and skills to recognise the needs of children so that better individualised support could be provided, both for staff in the classrooms and those advising them.

> *I wanted to know more so that I can support staff, children and families with more than just a gut instinct and felt the working group would be the way to do this*.
>
> (08)

> *I wanted it to kind of support me in supporting teachers to support the children with ADHD within our school*.
>
> (07)

In fact, professional development was commonly talked about, both in terms of participating in the working group, but also ensuring that a usable, widely available resource would be produced. There was a shared assumption that bringing together research knowledge and tacit knowledge from practice would produce a better resource than one type of knowledge alone.

Inclusion enables all children to thrive

A key motivator for participation was the sense that children were not being supported as well as they could be and not thriving in school because of their ADHD. It was recognised that meeting all the children's individual needs was a huge challenge, and yet staff were committed to keeping inclusion at the heart of their school. One staff member wanted to support the production of a resource because of their own school experience of specialising in social, emotional and mental health needs which could help others.

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> *I think, you know ADHD, obviously we specialise in children with social, emotional and mental health needs, which includes ADHD, and I see so many children from so many other schools who fail to thrive really and it just seems wrong. It makes me actually very, very cross really, because I think… you would not… teachers would not do that with any other type of disability and difficulty, and yet it seems OK to do it when it is a social, emotional and mental health need. So, I think anything that can support that. I do feel very passionately about it*.
>
> (05)

At the core of the whole project was the sentiment that this was for the benefit of the children; it was about raising awareness and support for schools, so that children with ADHD would be better supported.

> *I wanted to be part of developing a resource that would make a difference to more children with ADHD*.
>
> (06)

Context and system dynamics

There are several layers to understanding the context in which our project was situated. The wider context is that of inclusive education, and this agenda provided the impetus and opportunity for staff to act; joining the working group was one opportunity. Next was the impact of COVID-19, in both positive and negative ways. From there was a layer of the availability of our resources (i.e., our group members) in terms of time and capacity. And within that, we were all grappling with a new way of working and challenges to find a consensus.

> *It is hard initially whilst people get to know one another as well as get their heads round the focus for the project*.
>
> (08)

Time was a barrier to participation

Time in a school context is always pressured and staff felt it was the type of profession where you can set aside time but something may happen without warning to disrupt your plans. The project took place between February and July 2021. The impact of COVID-19 meant that staff time was further reduced as extra duties were introduced to enable social distancing at the start and end of the school day. Additionally, staff were covering classes for self-isolating colleagues and providing both in-person and online teaching.

> *COVID has affected some of the stuff that's going on in school, so I think potentially it's had a bit of a knock on effect and meant that people aren't available some of the time… we have had road closure duties, we have had gate closure duties, you know there's all sorts of additional things that we are doing in school as a result of the fact that… COVID is around, so you have to change the way you are managing it, and that means a greater staff presence in order to ensure the safety of everyone*.
>
> (03)

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In fact, time was one of the biggest issues that affected staff participating in the working group. It was difficult to find a time of day that suited all staff given that some were in classes throughout the day and meetings with colleagues, external professionals and parents often happened at the end of the school day; those with multiple roles felt overwhelmed by demands and the specific time of year included additional activities.

> *I do just think it's about timing and about what a hectic year that we have had in school. A lot of the lockdown kind of played into it as well, in that I had no release time over the lockdown. I was teaching full time 'cause I had no TA. So then after lockdown finished, I had a backlog of work as well. So there was just so many different factors that come into it*.
>
> (07)

The issue of time was closely linked to support from senior leadership in the school. Staff felt that having the support of senior leaders enabled them to prioritise the working group, even when school was busy and extra demands were being placed on them.

> *Getting head teachers signed on board. So I've been able to say to our head teacher, 'Actually, I've got the ADHD project group meeting. Would you rather I missed that or would you rather I did this?' So actually putting that across and because we have a significant proportion of children with ADHD, I think that was the bargaining chip*.
>
> (03)

Having said that, this staff member also found that even with a supportive head teacher, they were not alone in experiencing instances when something else was prioritised over the ADHD project.

> *School is constantly morphing and if there's a three-line whip, you cannot argue, 'I've got my ADHD project', you just cannot. And that happened to me on one evening and the head teacher just said, 'No, I'm sorry, you are doing the training.' With two days' notice*.
>
> (03)

This issue of time underlines the threat to democracy mentioned earlier. One mitigating factor for this pressure on time was that COVID-19 forced us to meet online, which saved time as there was no travel needed and staff could participate from school or at home.

Online meetings hinder interaction and engagement

However, in terms of space, the online format was generally perceived to hinder interaction and engagement. The group felt it took longer to get to know each other, it was hard to take a step back when you felt attention is on you throughout the call and virtual meetings make it more difficult to interact and engage. Staff talked about the small, seemingly insignificant conversations when you enter a room or make a cup of tea, which help you to relax and get to know each other. Some said they found it harder to concentrate online in comparison to being in the same room with others, and felt they would have been more productive in person. Similarly, as building relationships was more difficult, factors such as body language to gauge other people's opinions felt more important.

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> *I'd rather sit with people so I struggle with that bit really. Yeah 'cause I just think it's… you can read people's body language and stuff when you are sat in a room with them. So actually, if you are talking utter crap, you can see that in somebody else*.
>
> (06)

The technology itself was not a barrier and several staff explained that the rapid learning curve transferring to online learning in the first COVID-19 lockdown had stood them in good stead for online collaboration.

Co-ordination and communication enabled involvement

As well as bringing my own expertise and knowledge as a researcher to the working group, I also saw a key part of my role as being a facilitator for the group. I had more time to write up agendas and meeting notes, source information and manage schedules than the staff participants. This meant that for the staff, meetings and any time given to the project between meetings could be directed towards the resource and its development rather than administrative tasks. This was a deliberate decision to maximise the time the group had in the co-construction of knowledge.

> *I think that the way that you were able to oversee and run it meant that it flowed a lot better. I think if it was just education professionals, I'm not sure it would have flowed quite that well, just in terms of you were able to send through agendas, sum up what we have done*.
>
> (02)

The technology used also played a part in enabling full participation. Microsoft Teams had some useful features beyond the video calls, by providing an online space in which to gather information (e.g., pinboards, embedded PowerPoint slides and shared files). One teacher also set up a Google Doc, which the group were able to access and use to collate information (see Figure 2). This had the added benefit that people still felt involved if they missed a meeting and could ensure they were up to date by the next meeting.

> *So just being able to go into the Google Docs and add things if you needed to. Or you know, sharing the links and things so, in that way, I felt I was involved. And just having the summary of the meetings. It was done in a really good way*.
>
> (04)

Difference

Within complex systems, change occurs when there is some instability or restructuring, as people adapt and construct new ways of working. However, such change must be neither too chaotic nor too rigid (Rose-Anderssen & Allen, 2008). 'It is the middle ground between these extremes, characterised by diversity and multiple possible pathways… where action can be taken' (Fransman et al., 2021, p. 333). The working group was designed to cross boundaries and bridge gaps as we sought to bring different types of knowledge together. We aimed to not only bring these diverse voices together, but also provide space for each voice to be heard and celebrated (Bakhtin, 1981). However, there also needed to be some common ground and some boundaries within which we could work.

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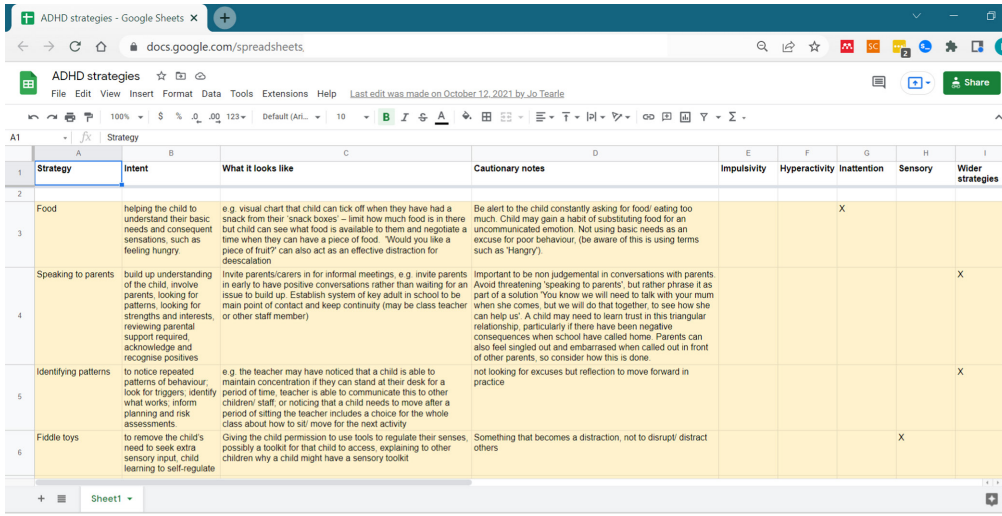

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	**Strategy**	**Intent**	**What it looks like**	**Cautionary notes**	**Impulsivity**	**Hyperactivity**	**Inattention**	**Sensory**	**Wider strategies**
2									
3	Food	helping the child to understand their basic needs and consequent sensations, such as feeling hungry.	e.g. visual chart that child can tick off when they have had a snack from their 'snack boxes' – limit how much food is in there but child can see what food is available to them and negotiate a time when they can have a piece of food. 'Would you like a piece of fruit?' can also act as an effective distraction for deescalation	Be alert to the child constantly asking for food/ eating too much. Child may gain a habit of substituting food for an uncommunicated emotion. Not using basic needs as an excuse for poor behaviour, (be aware of this is using terms such as 'Hangry').			X		
4	Speaking to parents	build up understanding of the child, involve parents, looking for patterns, looking for strengths and interests, reviewing parental support required, acknowledge and recognise positives	Invite parents/carers in for informal meetings, e.g. invite parents in early to have positive conversations rather than waiting for an issue to build up. Establish system of key adult in school to be main point of contact and keep continuity (may be class teacher or other staff member)	Important to be non judgemental in conversations with parents. Avoid threatening 'speaking to parents', but rather phrase it as part of a solution 'You know we will need to talk with your mum when she comes, but we will do that together, to see how she can help us'. A child may need to learn trust in this triangular relationship, particularly if there have been negative consequences when school have called home. Parents can also feel singled out and embarrassed when called out in front of other parents, so consider how this is done.					X
5	Identifying patterns	to notice repeated patterns of behaviour; look for triggers; identify what works; inform planning and risk assessments.	e.g. the teacher may have noticed that a child is able to maintain concentration if they can stand at their desk for a period of time, teacher is able to communicate this to other children/ staff, or noticing that a child needs to move after a period of sitting the teacher includes a choice for the whole class about how to sit/ move for the next activity	not looking for excuses but reflection to move forward in practice					X
6	Fiddle toys	to remove the child's need to seek extra sensory input, child learning to self-regulate	Giving the child permission to use tools to regulate their senses, possibly a toolkit for that child to access, explaining to other children why a child might have a sensory toolkit	Something that becomes a distraction, not to disrupt/ distract others				X	

FIGURE 2 Google Doc for collating strategy information.

We can always learn from thinking differently

The benefit of joining a working group with staff from different schools and the university meant that multiple perspectives were brought to the table.

> *There was a wide range of schools involved, and it wasn't even just schools from our cluster, it's from people who got really different experiences coming into it. So there's things on there that I would never have thought of, would never have thought to try, so it just gives a much wider perspective on it.*
>
> (01)

By sharing and receiving from people with diverse experience, the group was able to look at issues in multiple ways, consider different approaches and bring ideas together. Of particular note to the staff was listening to different school practices, talking with people that they would not normally cross paths with and considering suggestions that they may have previously dismissed. Staff felt reassured that other professionals experienced similar challenges—that common ground—which not only encouraged them in their day-to-day practice, but also contributed to the feeling of the group being a safe space in which they would be understood.

> *When you have got perspectives from other schools, it does really help. You know, schools in different environments as well. You know, it's nice to see it's not just us.*
>
> (03)

Input from all areas helps all areas

By bridging the gap, not only between research and practice but also by bringing together school staff with different roles within a school (e.g., head teachers, SENCOs, teaching assistants, class teachers) we were able to think more widely about the needs of children and the multiple ways in which different staff support them. The working group demonstrated

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that all were involved, and all voices were valued, contributing together to the actionable resource that was produced. Some staff noted that, in their experience, opportunities to take part in research projects were limited to teachers and lacked the diversity we had.

> *The joy, if you like, of having a more multifaceted group of people is that it does not exclude people. People do not look at the list of who was involved and think, 'Oh that's just the Head so yeah, actually they have got nothing they can tell me' … it gives a wider appeal but also it does bring different perspectives and is important because, in truth, something like supporting a child with ADHD, everybody does have a very different perspective, do not they? From the parent to the LSA, to the class teacher to the NQT. So… I think… it can be very levelling and actually* [we have]*… a resource that has drawn on a wider range of people*.
>
> (05)

Staff thought that this crossing of previously held boundaries would lead to wider appeal for school staff, because users of the resource would see that they were represented in the group that created it. Additionally, the group saw the importance of bridging the research–practice gap, bringing research-based evidence together with educational professionals' knowledge, to inform changes in practice.

> *I think it's really valid that it's educational professionals bringing their knowledge, but I think the link up with the university worked really well… The skills that people bring are all different, aren't they?*
>
> (02)

> *It's so important that we do still have that… commitment to evidence-based learning and using that evidence to inform improvements in practice. It's vital, is not it?*
>
> (05)

Similarly, we discussed the importance of the language that is used when bringing academic knowledge into a practitioners' resource. The language used on the website needed to be readily understood and relatable to the school context in which it would be used.

> *Working with a head teacher who is so knowledgeable and has such an academic understanding of things can sometimes make you feel that what you say and understand is not academic/professional enough but through the discussions and creation of resources I was able to see that it's a balance and also as a teacher resource, how a teacher 'puts it' is sometimes more accessible for professionals, especially when in need of support*. (08)

Bridging gaps can create new barriers

It was a deliberate decision to bridge the gaps that we have identified and yet we found that barriers emerged in their place. We have mentioned time as one of the biggest barriers in this project, and attempting to bridge different roles, schools, part-time and full-time staff made it difficult to get everyone together. Staff described feeling disappointed when

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individuals missed meetings because they wanted to hear their perspectives on particular issues. Similarly, those that missed a meeting felt like they had let the group down.

> *I do not like letting people down and I really feel like I let the whole team down. So yeah, I would* [do a project like this again], *but I would want to make sure that I have the time to do it*.
>
> (07)

The online environment contributed to this as the group felt it took longer to get to know each other online and so if someone missed a meeting, it felt more significant in the development of relationships.

Schools have relatively fixed identities attached to roles and hierarchies within the system. The challenge was whether we could set these aside and be more dynamic in our interactions.

> *A lot of it is my issue because I have to get my head around, actually when it comes to a lot of this, I do probably know as much if not more than others but I always think people are instantly judging* [me]*… because that's what's happened in the past, and does happen. Now instantly I think, 'Well, they are gonna be judging on that there'*.
>
> (06)

In fact, this staff member found that their confidence grew over time because they did feel they were treated equally. But it does highlight that reflection throughout the project, not simply at the end, was vital to continuously identify any barriers as they emerged and find ways to overcome them.

Interestingly, barriers created by bridging research and practice were less evident. One explanation may be that individuals also bridged that gap. Several school staff had completed postgraduate qualifications, including at Master's and Doctoral levels, and the researcher was a qualified teacher who had extensive experience of supporting children with ADHD.

Emergence

Emergence describes the process during which the roles of the individual participants, resources and tools are developed within the working group. This process was interactive in nature and culminated in a new pattern of growth and sustainability which led to the published resource. Firstly, I examine representation within the working group and the effects of widening diversity. Then I reflect on the empowering nature of the group as power dynamics changed over time, and the effects of these changes, particularly for those with less experience or less senior positions. And finally, I consider the resource built through co-construction of knowledge and the lessons learned along the way.

Greater representation in deciding what matters

We discussed the importance of diversity in the working group to be able to bring together multiple perspectives and create a resource that is usable by a variety of school staff. Staff described their disappointment when they, or other members of the group, were unable to attend meetings because they wanted the resource to be developed by a representative group of staff. Additionally, capturing children's voices in the Ideal School activity demonstrated to the children that staff were wanting to find ways to support them.

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> *The voice… the ideal school… that's something that's really beneficial for them, especially… and lots of our children, especially the older ones, they know that they have got a diagnosis of ADHD, so I think it's helpful to them to know that we have got an understanding and that we all want to put strategies in place to help support them. And looking at strategies that they think work for them*.
>
> (04)

There was also greater representation in deciding what matters when evaluating the resource. On a practical level, the group were concerned with the usability of the site, as the layout was designed to ensure quick and easy navigation to relevant information. However, discussion about evaluation was closely linked to the aims of the resource and centred around how staff might use the website in practice. The group wanted to develop a resource that placed agency with the user, so that visitors to the site were empowered to choose which information was needed when supporting a child rather than having a more prescriptive approach given to them. This resonated with the aim of giving more ownership to staff rather than relying on one 'expert' within the school to prescribe strategies and approaches.

> *Because at the moment sometimes I feel like I'm in a meeting and someone comes to me and I just tell them how to do it. Whereas this puts the ownership back on to people that are with that child, and rather than me saying, 'Oh I had a little one who was a bit similar so this is what we did, give that a try.' And this is saying like, these are loads* [of strategies]*… some of these I have not tried, some of these I do not want to try, some of these I've done lots of. And then putting it back on to them, because ultimately* [they are] *there every day with the child*.
>
> (01)

Alongside this sense of ownership, staff also wanted to know how useful the resource would be to staff with different levels of experience and supporting individual children who may present with a diverse range of needs.

An empowering experience which builds confidence

Identifying and reflecting on the power dynamics within the group highlighted the hierarchy that exists within a school context. We had members of the group from the senior leadership team as well as non-teaching staff. Years of experience in education ranged from 5 to over 35 years, and staff ranged from feeling 'not very' to 'very' confident in their ADHD knowledge and support of children with ADHD. For staff to be able to take ownership, they need to feel empowered and confident in their roles. This was illustrated in the experiences of the members of the working group. Several staff described their motivation to join the project being rooted in a desire to build confidence in themselves, both for their own practice and to be better able to support other staff members. The way the power dynamic manifested was dominance in the discussion. Those lower in the hierarchy deferred to others in discussions or were more reluctant to share their views. In the first meeting, after the initial introductions, members of senior leadership teams contributed almost all the discussion, with two members lower in the hierarchy not sharing their thoughts. In subsequent meetings, I deliberately called on the less vocal contributors, who then shared their views and examples of practice. These staff explained how their confidence in the working group developed over time. This was an important aspect of the working group model, which highlighted the need for planning multiple meetings spaced apart to cultivate relationships.

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It's about self-confidence really, not wanting to say or suggest the wrong thing. Over time, as with any group, self-confidence and trust builds.

(08)

This confidence was not only about feeling comfortable in a new group but confident in the knowledge and experience that they were bringing to the group. Members of the group described how they often felt unable to challenge school policies or give a strong enough rationale for the strategies they were suggesting, but having their ideas and suggestions validated by a group of professional peers was empowering.

What I did learn was things about myself that actually I do know more than what sometimes I give myself credit for.

(06)

This was particularly important for staff members with fewer years of experience or those who were in less senior positions who sometimes felt they had less power in decision-making because of their status. Staff explained that being on the project has given them currency and confidence to provide evidence as a rationale for their proposals.

I think my transition handover to his year one teacher will be really strong because I can say I've done this [project]. *Like the food—he wants to eat all the time and this* [picture card] *really helps him to understand that he has eaten, or he writes better when he's got his shoes off. And that's not because, you know, I'm just airy fairy like, 'Oh yeah, take your shoes off!' but actually it really does work for those sensory needs he's got and how he feels when he's sitting in the chair. And so I feel like being able to say I was part of this* [project], *I can say, well actually it's backed up*.

(01)

A new model of knowledge-based resourcing

The co-construction of knowledge in developing this resource challenged traditional knowledge bases to recognise that knowledge was situated in practice and in research literature. Knowledge was also situated throughout the hierarchy and diversity of roles within the school, which provided the understanding that all the different roles of school are bringing knowledge.

You know the input was there from other areas [of school]*… I think making it exclusively teachers would almost be disastrous in the sense of… what does it look like from learning support ways? How does that affect them?*

(06)

Co-construction also provided a way of bringing the broader research or clinical knowledge into focus for scrutiny of how this compares to the knowledge gained through experience of supporting children with ADHD in school. Staff were able to create the resource in a way that took the different forms of knowledge and applied it into the school context.

I think sometimes a lot of the things that you look up online can be kind of more from a medical point of view, but what's going to work practically in school, and

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> *that's, I think, that's what I quite liked about the strategies, is there are things that are workable in the classroom because sometimes you look at the advice and you think, 'Well, that's impossible for me to manage that. I'm like one teacher and one teaching assistant. I cannot do that.'*
>
> (04)

There was also a challenge to traditional training from a deficit-based model (i.e., an expert to a non-expert practitioner) to a bank of resourcing that can be used in ways needed by the practitioner (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002). Staff were involved as knowledge bearers producing a resource for other knowledge bearers, yet mindful that there is always more to learn or a different perspective to consider.

> *Some of the ideas and sources are great launch pads for staff to use and then do further research about… they could take some of the information on it on board, change their approach to the provision they provide and make a difference to that child.*
>
> (08)

> *I love that we have developed something that I as a professional would find like, even now, even now with my wealth of experience* [laugh], *would still find useful. I think that's great. Really exciting.*
>
> (02)

A consideration for future development would be to incorporate some form of collaborative space where visitors to the resource could discuss their practice and share ideas on an ongoing basis.

However, the model was not infallible, and lessons were learned along the way. The decision to work online was pragmatic in the face of a global pandemic and brought both positive and negative impacts. A hybrid model was suggested, in which the benefits of initial interpersonal face-to-face connection for building relationships would be combined with a series of online meetings to save time. Additionally, the online space provided a repository to collate information, a different forum for discussion and development of ideas and a way of keeping people informed when they did miss a meeting. Pre-establishing meeting times may ensure dates are in the diary far in advance but do not consider the 'things come up' nature of school life. However, we felt it would be a worthwhile change to trial in future. We felt the group would have benefitted from greater diversity, which could be addressed through broader recruitment processes with a longer lead time and targeting of specific roles across the school.

DISCUSSION

In this paper we critically reflected on the experiences and perceptions of a collaborative working group guided by the principles of co-construction to create an ADHD resource for school staff. The ATTIC collaborative working group was built on the following starting conditions and assumptions: sharing broader experience is important; ADHD resources for school staff are needed; and inclusion enables all children to thrive. The context in which this collaboration took place was inclusive, primary education in the United Kingdom, heavily influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Time was a barrier to participation; the necessity for online meetings hindered interaction and engagement, but co-ordination and communication overcame some of these barriers and enabled involvement. Diversity within the

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working group produced the context in which co-construction could be realised and the group shared values that we can always learn from thinking differently, input from all areas helps all areas, yet bridging gaps can produce new barriers. Overall, we reflected on achieving greater representation in deciding what matters in developing and evaluating the resource. It was an empowering experience which built confidence and we developed a new model of knowledge-based resourcing.

Given the merits yet challenges of inclusive education, and the lack of timely and appropriate professional development opportunities, this study aimed to explore this new model of collaborative resourcing. Employing co-construction of knowledge by school staff and a researcher bridged the research–practice gap as well as addressing the need for readily accessible and practical professional development resources. Co-construction also confronted the traditional notions of where knowledge is situated and recognised that knowledge resides in both research and practitioner domains, and across the breadth of practitioner roles. The challenges of co-construction were overcome through our shared motivation for developing confidence and resourcing for supporting children with ADHD, although time remained a significant hurdle throughout.

One strength of the working group model was empowering school staff to present their knowledge and challenge the status quo in how staff professional development resources are created. More than this, the working group gave agency to school staff in producing a resource that gives ownership to the practitioner as they use it; crucial elements in producing contextually-based best practice (Ketelaar et al., 2012; Lambirth et al., 2019). Although the literature, and government directives, concentrate on teachers in their focus on school improvements, we wanted to include the wider staff team who often provide more support to children with ADHD (Department for Education, 2016; Groom & Rose, 2005; Lambirth et al., 2021). Additionally, including the voice of children with ADHD through the Ideal School activity has not been reported previously in the literature exploring development of teacher training resources (Moran, 2001). Co-construction was facilitated through creating a safe and democratic space, where knowledge from all areas of school was welcomed and discussed. This stimulated the sharing of knowledge from all group members and the construction of new knowledge as adaptation to the school context was made.

There were some limitations to this study which could be addressed in future projects. School staff were involved in many aspects of this project (e.g., making decisions about the content and design of the resource, writing sections of the resource, reflection on the process, together with evaluation and dissemination of the resource). However, they were not involved in the initial design of the project and had limited opportunity to contribute to the writing of this paper. Future projects could explore ways of enabling staff and researchers to work together through all phases of the work. Several staff members talked about their lack of confidence in the first few working group meetings due to their sense of their own professional capital (Nolan & Molla, 2017). A context-specific factor which may have contributed to this hesitancy was the nature of online meetings, which slow the development of trusting relationships in comparison to face-to-face meetings (Mallen et al., 2003). To overcome this, a hybrid set of meetings was suggested by staff, with initial meetings being face to face to begin the process of fostering relationships, followed by online meetings to maintain efficiency and good use of limited time.

The ATTIC project provides a useful model for collaborative working groups comprising school staff and university researchers. This model addresses both the research–practice gap and the need for diversity of voice across the school. Knowledge co-construction positions staff as knowledge bearers, bringing their expertise to the table where other forms of knowledge are present, and through discussion and reflection, creates new, contextualised, evidence-based knowledge. The model raises questions around how we empower staff at all levels to feel confident in sharing their knowledge and address barriers to involvement, and

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specifically addresses the need to go beyond teachers to the wider school staff. Although this resource is focused on ADHD, the model could be used to develop any aspect of educational practice in a collaborative way.

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None of the authors declare any conflict of interest in relation to this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Anonymised data is available on request from the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The research presented in this paper was carried out with due consideration to all relevant ethical issues and in line with BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

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