



THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION

Volume 5 | July 2019

ISSN 2059-0466



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An introduction to B.A.S.E.® Babywatching as a whole-class nurture intervention in primary schools, contributing to a therapeutic school culture

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION

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Aims of the Journal

The International Journal of Nurture in Education aims to attract papers that explore themes related to the effectiveness of nurture groups, nurture in education, whole-school approaches to nurture and related subjects. The intention is to present the most up-to-date research of how nurture principles and practice improve the socio-emotional functioning and academic achievement of children and young people.

The journal aims to cater for a wide audience and the intended readership includes:

- Nurture practitioners, special needs practitioners and mainstream teachers;
- Academic researchers concerned with education, psychology and child development;
- Educational and clinical psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists;
- School leaders, consultants, social workers and local authority officers working to support the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people

Review process

Articles submitted to *The International Journal of Nurture in Education* will first be seen by the editor who will decide whether the article will be considered for review or not. Articles then go through a rigorous double-blind review process where both the author and the reviewer remain anonymous throughout the evaluation.

More information on the review process can be found at: www.nurtureuk.org/research-evidence/international-journal-nurture-education/reviewer-guidelines

Author guidelines

The call for papers for the Volume 6 of the International Journal of Nurture in Education will be open from 1 June until 30 September 2019. A guide for authors wishing to submit their research is accessible at:

www.nurtureuk.org/evidence/international-journal-nurture-education/author-guidelines

Published by The Nurture Group Network Limited
Charity Registration No. 1115972



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Michele Crooks is CEO of B.A.S.E® Babywatching UK, trained as a group leader, mentor and trainer and is also a primary school therapist. Previously Michele worked in a variety of educational settings in a support role with children with emotional and behavioural needs and as a lecturer in further education.

Dr Amy L Gibb is a child and educational psychologist, and currently works for the London Borough of Barnet. She completed her doctoral training at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

Dr Rebecca Hibbin is a research associate in the Educational Research Department at Lancaster University. While her academic work is diverse and interdisciplinary, she maintains a particular interest in language and children and young people's psychosocial wellbeing and development, stemming from her doctoral studies examining oral storytelling in primary education.

Maura Kearney is a deputy principal psychologist in Glasgow City Council and has a remit for research and nurture.

Griselda Kellie-Smith is co-founder of Babywatching UK. Training and working as a B.A.S.E.® group leader, mentor and trainer, built on experience as a special education teacher, dyslexia tutor and integrative child and adult psychotherapist.

Dr Richard Lewis has worked for many years in Surrey as a community, child and educational psychologist. He currently lectures on the Tavistock and Portman doctoral training programme and is professional and academic lead at Real Group Ltd.

Sylvia Lucas trained as a primary school teacher in the 1950s, opened the first non-pilot nurture group at Kingsmead Primary School in Hackney, later becoming headteacher there and in three other schools in East London before joining staff of Institute of Education, University of London. In retirement, she continues to be involved in nurture and related work with IOE and voluntary organisations in UK and overseas.

Andrea Janet Middleton previously worked in a large junior school setting where she piloted and led several nurture groups and led a team of professionals in creating a whole-school pastoral support offering. She completed her MA Education at Edge Hill University and currently works as an ELSA and SLCN Assistant in a primary school in Hampshire, where she is leading a Nurture-in-Nature group.

Gail Nowek was an education officer with the Inclusion and Equalities Team in Education Scotland where she held a remit for the development of nurturing approaches across Scotland. Gail recently took up post as a deputy principal psychologist for North Ayrshire Council.

Andrea Perry is a co-founder of Babywatching UK, and trained as a B.A.S.E Babywatching group leader, mentor and trainer. She is an integrative psychotherapist and author, former Chair of the British Association of Dramatherapists, and an international consultant on the British Council's programme supporting development of the Iraqi education system.

WELCOME

Dr Marianne Coleman, Editor of the International Journal of Nurture in Education and Trustee of nurtureuk

Welcome to the fifth edition of IJNE.

Looking back over the past issues, I am struck by the range and content of our coverage of research relating to nurture and I am delighted that we are expanding and consolidating knowledge and understanding of nurture within the wider field of emotional health and wellbeing. We owe grateful thanks to the researchers and writers who contribute to the Journal, and also to our expert reviewers who ensure that we are abiding by the highest academic standards through the provision of double-blind peer reviews. My personal thanks go to Dr Florence Ruby, Research and Evaluation Manager of nurtureuk for her work as associate editor of the Journal.

The papers in this current volume both build on past knowledge and make new contributions to the field. The first paper, 'On the Origins of Nurture' is written by one of the pioneers of nurture, Sylvia Lucas. It reminds us of how nurture groups started and how both theory and practice were developed. It takes us back to first principles and Marjorie Boxall's maxim 'be and do for these children as you would your own young children'. The paper is valuable from both an historical and practical stance, and foreshadows next year's celebration of the 50th anniversary of nurture. Sylvia reminds us that the idea of a nurturing school is not a new one, but one that she explored and utilised as a head back in the 1970s.

The second paper in this volume is a testament to how far and wide the concept of the nurturing school has spread since the early days outlined by Sylvia. Maura Kearney and Gail Nowek take a countrywide perspective to map the development of nurturing approaches in Scotland where 27 out of the total of 32 local authorities taking part in a survey confirm they are supporting the implementation of whole-school nurturing approaches. The authors indicate the challenges in implementing the whole-school approach, including the importance of evaluating the impact of the nurturing approach, and of all stakeholders sharing a clear understanding of nurture.

The concept and practice of a whole-school approach to nurture is thriving, but the remaining papers in this volume of the Journal examine aspects of practice within nurture groups, in two cases focusing on the relationship between the individual practitioner and the individual child.

The paper by Amy Gibb and Richard Lewis is a detailed study of the practice of five excellent practitioners, mapping the journey to establish a 'close' relationship between the individual practitioner and the child. Using psychodynamic and attachment theories, the research reveals the challenges in building such a relationship, and focuses particularly on the emotional load that is carried by nurture group practitioners and their resulting need for support. The paper ends with implications for the training of nurture practitioners including a 'story' of the journey towards establishing the close relationship, which could be used in their training.

The theme of nurture practitioner welfare is picked up in Andrea Middleton's paper on nurturing the nurturers. As in the Gibb and Lewis paper, the Middleton paper uses a grounded theory approach to analyse qualitative data. This small-scale study in one English county looks at nurture group practitioners, their wellbeing and at interventions to support it. While adding her voice to the need to support practitioners, for example through supervision, she also concludes that practitioners tend to have a unique resource capability allied to high levels of emotional intelligence that is a protective factor in aiding resistance to stress. This paper also provides rare demographic data on nurture practitioners that raise questions for possible further research.

The fifth paper in this volume brings the focus back to the micro level of relationships between practitioners and children but also picks up on the need for practitioner support. Rebecca Hibbin writes about the importance of the use of positive language and communication in the context of both nurture and restorative practice in school. Her paper is theoretical but also quite practical in outlining how practitioners might implement some of the conclusions in their work. She makes use of psychoanalytic theory to examine positive language and behaviour and work towards the development of best practice. She also touches on the recurring theme, examined in the previous two papers and elsewhere in IJNE, of the emotional toll experienced by practitioners and the concomitant need for their support.

The last contribution to this issue of the Journal is a short paper, focusing on the description of a specific intervention that is being used in nurturing classrooms. Rather than outlining a research project, this is a brief introduction to the programme 'Babywatching' and

includes anecdotal examples of impact. Although the programme has not yet been formally evaluated, our reviewers felt that nurture practitioners would find information about this programme to be of real practical interest and value.

The papers in this edition of the Journal indicate yet again the potential range and depth of research into nurture. We welcome hearing from you with regard to future contributions researching nurture and related concepts as we celebrate 50 years of nurture in British schools.

ON THE ORIGINS OF NURTURE

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Keywords: learning; relationships; intuition; observation and recording; a continuum of nurture

ABSTRACT

The approaching 50th anniversary of nurture is an opportunity to tell the story of nurture groups and consider what the underlying rationale, philosophy and principles have to offer now in meeting today's challenges, especially the high numbers of exclusions from education, the increased demand for mental health services and the impact on individuals, families and society. This paper is the story of nurture: it is a personal memoir as well as our collective story seen through the eyes of the first non-pilot nurture group teacher. In addition to nurture groups it refers to early applications of nurturing principles to a whole school. The paper draws on archives from Kingsmead Primary school, Hackney nurture group that contain much of Marjorie Boxall's original work. It concludes with Marjorie Boxall's maxim: 'Be and do for these children as you would your own young children'.

THE CONTEXT FOR THE EARLY NURTURE GROUPS: OUR STORY

The six principles of nurture were defined some 30 years after nurture groups began and were part of the formalising of the nurture movement at the turn of the millennium. But first, understanding the origin of these principles will, I believe, enable the new generation of nurture teachers to interpret them with imagination and creativity as they seek to meet today's challenges.

In compiling the nurture archives¹, my attention was caught immediately by the differences in expectations, understanding and experience of the world of 'then' and 'now'. To understand the 'why' and 'how' of nurture it helps to know a little about the world of education of 50 years ago, especially of Hackney, where Marjorie Boxall was an educational psychologist.

Hackney was on the fringe of the Inner London Education Authority, distant from County Hall. There was no tube or major road. The Divisional Office, with locally based officers, and the Child Guidance Clinic were a considerable walk and two bus journeys away and there was minimal contact. Kingsmead, then a one-form entry infant school where the first non-pilot group was established in 1972-3, served a pre-second world war housing estate of 15 blocks built on marshland bordering what is now the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. It was known to many as a 'dump' estate (Harrison 1983) taking 'problem' families, largely struggling immigrants, from across the GLC area into a poor and isolated community of older East End families. These families, rehoused from earlier slum

clearance programmes, were unsettled by the new arrivals and were leaving for the suburbs or Essex, with their vacated flats let to even more newcomers. Pupil mobility was very high with few staying throughout an academic year. A total of 146 new admissions out of 230 were recorded in 1972-3 and as teachers we rewrote our class attendance registers every term. Staff turnover too was very high and morale, low. Break-ins and vandalism occurred frequently. Within two years of my arrival the head, deputy and the two most experienced teachers had left. The usual support services, education welfare, social services and health visitors, all had high staff turnover and the local GP was the only long-term professional in the area.

Education was becoming politicised. Nineteen seventy-one saw the publication of the first of the Black Papers (Cox and Dyson 1971). A small minority of the residents were politically active, especially in challenging perceived exclusion and disadvantage but most had little time or energy for anything apart from survival. The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) had recommended the creation of Education Priority Areas (EPAs) to receive additional resources aimed at raising standards. But implementation was patchy and mostly left to individual schools to respond.

In 1971 with my young family I arrived at Kingsmead from the north east. I had taught there since leaving teacher training college. With the collapse of the steel industry the north east faced extensive unemployment. Colleges in London offered opportunities for retraining

1. The 'nurture archive' referred to is my collection of children's records and notes from the Kingsmead group, particularly those children with features that contributed to the drafting of what is now known as the Boxall Profile, together with some records of meetings with Marjorie Boxall, headteachers and others, which eventually led to the structure and organisation of the nurture movement into what is now nurtureUK. There are notes too of work that Marjorie and I were doing to develop a 'nurture' curriculum and which we were working on together until her death.

and the ILEA had generous incentives to relocate. Before a GLC flat became available we shared a house with a family from the Caribbean. It was our first close contact with what we now know as the Windrush generation and it influenced our thinking as a family profoundly. The different perceptions and challenges of inner-city London life held valuable lessons, especially for me as a teacher. We had friendly conversations about our differing approaches to child care and the inappropriateness of many resources. Reading scheme books at the time were particularly unhelpful, even for my children let alone those from Africa or the Caribbean, with their stereotypical images of families and life style.

My post-war teacher training had prioritised child development. Child study and observation were central, and I was able to adapt the teaching materials available for basic literacy and numeracy to the needs of my class of 35 six-year-olds. I was keen to learn more about the lives of the children and families, partly for teaching purposes but also to help my own children understand and cope with their experiences of school. And I was fascinated by the behaviour of many of the children which I saw as more appropriate for much younger children rather than deviant. I recall describing my response as that of a mother rather than a teacher, unknowingly anticipating Marjorie Boxall's insights.

The publication of the James Report on teacher education and training (DES 1972) drew attention to important areas pertinent to the early development of nurture groups. In-service training was recognised as necessary for all teachers with longer courses being an entitlement for all experienced teachers. During the autumn of 1972 I completed a six-week course on educational disadvantage which was considered essential for teachers in relevant areas. During this course I first heard the name of Marjorie Boxall and her experimental nurture groups.

Hackney headteachers were aware of Marjorie's work from a talk she had given following a visit to the West Indies. We met soon after her return and agreed to set up a nurture group at Kingsmead as soon as possible. Space was found and equipped with furniture and resources for 12 infant children. An experienced nursery assistant volunteered to help as the second adult. The group began to operate in the spring term 1973 with children carefully selected by teachers to ensure a balance.

Who the groups were for: nurture, not nurturing or therapy

The nurture groups were for those children who were unable to meet the expectations and demands of the ordinary infant classroom and whose behaviour suggested that they had experienced some disruption

or distortion in their early parent-child relationship. Nurture, Marjorie insisted, is allowing the child to relive their earliest years. It is essentially about learning, although at a very early level; it is not therapy. For instance, the earliest interactions of a baby with an adult are making eye contact and smiling, the normal behaviour of a healthy six-week-old baby and is the first step in learning about one's identity, that one is valued and can form a relationship, it is at the root of 'wellbeing'.

The organisation and management of nurture groups flowed from this simple observation, that is, what best facilitates this early level of interaction and the normal thrust for growth. Our failure to identify and understand this, insisting on conformity beyond the child's capability, adds further layers that cannot be processed, increases alienation and leads to later mental health issues (Lucas 2010).

Nurture is about a relationship; nurturing is something that we do. Therapy 'unties' the knots.

The classic nurture group: size, balance and the role and responsibilities of the adults, nurture teacher, class teacher and assistant

After trial and error, groups of 12 proved to be the optimum size to allow relationships to develop. Smaller groups were too limiting in the range of personalities available for friendships to form, larger groups presented too many challenges and did not easily 'gel'. Of these, experience suggested that no more than two in three should be 'acting out' children with one in three 'withdrawn' or non-communicating.

Nurture groups were for those children who could be helped to function, at least part-time, in their ordinary class. There was a clear time limit, usually a term. The children remained on the register of their own class, began the school day with them and joined in any activity or lesson they could manage, PE for example. Class teachers retained responsibility for monitoring the child's academic progress and worked closely with the nurture teacher on deciding appropriate lesson content. Nurture groups were not appropriate for children with chronic disabilities or conditions requiring lengthy therapy although, occasionally, if space was available, a short-term place was helpful. From the beginning it was emphasised that no child should become 'hidden' in the group; they were part of a regular class. Typically, over a week, the children were in the nurture groups for nine sessions for the first term, then part-time with increasing class contact as confidence grew during the second term and occasional visits in the third term. The place would be offered to another child in need as the time was freed up. One session a week was kept for the nurture staff to observe or for meetings with other staff or visitors.

The adult child ratio of two to 12 seemed even more of a luxury then, when teaching assistants were unknown and classes were 35+, than it would today. But it was an essential requirement for a group for the reasons described elsewhere (Lucas 2010). Importantly, the adults would keep up a running commentary, verbalising the activity in progress – as two adults might at home – and they were free to relate to the children at their different developmental levels, with one managing a class activity, perhaps hearing children read, while the other supported an individual in difficulty with a task or their behaviour. Roles were generally interchangeable, and it was the nature of the relationship that they responded intuitively. Essentially, they demonstrated a model of positive, supportive interaction for children who were unlikely to experience it elsewhere.

Intuition, recording and theory

'Informed intuition' based on Marjorie's maxim: *be and do for these children as you would your own young children*, best describes the methodology for decision making about the selection of children, organisation of the room and the day and all subsequent decisions until, after detailed record-keeping and much discussion, clear criteria began to emerge. We were not ignorant of child development and attachment theories, having been trained in the post-war period, but theory was not to be our starting point; we were to follow our instinct, to 'be and do' as we would for our own young children.

The documentation that emerged from this approach as evidenced in the existing archives, became the origin of what we now know as the Boxall Profile and the Nurture Principles. At a time when planning, record-keeping and assessment were minimal if they existed at all in many schools prior to the Education Reform Act (1988), it was itself revolutionary in teachers' practice. All staff were engaged in observing and recording and the benefits of improved behaviour and morale were soon evident. For instance, the smallest reduction in the frequency of fights or temper tantrums, while barely recognised during a busy day was clear evidence of even marginal improvement over a week or two and encouraged new attention to detail, accurate observation, description and recording.

These observations were shared with other nurture group teachers and assistants at monthly meetings with Marjorie at the Child Guidance Clinic. It was from these discussions that the first Boxall Profile, known then as the Diagnostic Developmental Profile, was formulated. Every item in the Profile can still be traced back to an individual child. I have vivid memories of many of them and some of the original records are being archived.

Occasionally we had input from other Clinic staff, notably, Elinor Goldschmied (1987), who introduced us to Daisy, an eight-month-old baby, from whom we learnt

about the treasure basket and how a very young child concentrates and learns if provided with interesting materials at the appropriate level (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006). Gill Gorrell Barnes (CCETSW 1978) guided us in running meetings for parents, a very new and intimidating development, but one that would become increasingly important.

Working with parents and the local community

It was unusual at the time for parents to come into the school unless invited, usually by the school nurse or doctor. Children generally arrived unaccompanied unless there was a problem. The Education Welfare Officer (EWO) would follow up welfare or attendance concerns, often with home visits. The introduction of meetings with potential nurture group parents was an innovation but one we came to insist on and require as an ongoing commitment to helping the child. Knowing the family circumstances and the child's early experiences such as child minding or fostering, parental employment and work patterns became increasingly informative. Wherever possible, we compiled detailed child studies, to help our understanding of individual needs and to discern patterns in behaviour.

Slowly, parents, usually the mothers, came to feel more at ease as we became more confident in running 'parents' parties' when, over a cup of tea, they were encouraged to chat about their children. Their morale, too, usually improved as their children were more settled and made progress (OU 1976). There were, of course, more difficult cases where the EWO, school nurse or health visitor was needed to intervene. In cases of what was then known as non-accidental injury, little advice was available. The few social workers frequently changed, however useful contacts were established with local hospitals and GP training programmes, including Hackney (now Homerton), Royal London, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for children and the Winnicott Centre. Kingsmead, unknowingly and intuitively, was piloting an early multi-disciplinary way of working (CCETSW op.cit.).

Nonprofessional Community representatives became involved through setting up the Tenants' Association, which continues today to be active through a Residents Association and Hackney Marsh Partnership, working particularly with young people (Green 2005). At this point, although Kingsmead was a community school, the value of nurture groups was perceived by the late Cardinal Hume and other senior Church figures.

The origin of the nurturing school

Towards the end of the first year of the Kingsmead's group life, the headteacher resigned, the deputy followed suit soon after. An acting head was appointed for a term and I was given a post of responsibility. As the nurture group teacher and now, the longest serving after little more than two years, I became the point of

reference for parents and the LA, was appointed to the headship in the summer term 1974 and continued to run the group until I could appoint and train a teacher for the following school year, 1974-5.

Happily the new nurture group teacher worked constructively with the assistant, who was now experienced with nurture practice and the procedures we had introduced. After the departure of most of the previous staff, new teachers were appointed based on their interest in, or support for, nurture practice. Divisional Officers who were at the time responsible for allocating staff, were understanding and helpful, as they saw the benefits of 'nurture' in their local schools. ILEA published a pamphlet written by Marjorie in 1976, the first published documentation of nurture practice which later appeared as chapter 2 in the book *Effective Intervention in Primary Schools: nurture groups* (Bennathan and Boxall 1996). The ILEA made films at Kingsmead and De Beauvoir Junior, another Hackney school, for in-service training. A former nurture group teacher came to work with us on home school 'nurture' liaison, which was now seen as an essential part of our work. Together, with new and enthusiastic staff, and with the nurture group now at the heart of the school, we developed whole school policies and procedures based on what we had learnt from nurture practice (Lucas, 1999). In 1976, nurture groups came to the attention of the Open University which made a film for their programme, *Personality and Learning*, broadcasted on BBC2.

In 1980, Kingsmead was reorganised and designated as a Primary School. Children had long been disadvantaged in having to leave the estate at the age of seven, a move particularly unsettling for nurture children. From September 1980 they remained at Kingsmead until 11. The school was now more stable and the neighbourhood itself withstood episodes of social unrest, particularly the wider effects of the Tottenham riots, in 1985.

The 1981 Education Act with its new definition of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion, was an incentive to share our expertise beyond the school. One assignment, when I took on the acting headship of a school in difficulty, became a turning point. This new role demanded a different level of leadership and management skills and, through a course at the Tavistock Institute, I developed an interest in consultation, drawing on organisational and group theory and beginning to consider how nurture might help in understanding adult relationships and learning and creating healthy organisations (Silverman 1970). A much-needed consultation group was set up for nurture teachers and ran successfully until funding was withdrawn.

At the same time, the political landscape of London was changing, the GLC was dissolved in 1986 and the ILEA in 1990, transferring responsibility for education to the inner London boroughs. When Hackney Council became responsible for education, funding for nurture groups ceased; schools appeared more stable and nurture groups were closed.

This was the impetus for my move to a very different school. My final headship took me to another school taking on new and different challenges. A largely high-achieving school, it nevertheless had a 'tail of underachievement'. Exclusion was accepted as the ultimate sanction and used as a deterrent. I believed that nurture principles could be articulated in a way that would raise standards for all children, especially those considered less able. Using the understanding and principles of nurture, all the adults, teachers, parents and community were encouraged to work together as I described in the paper for the journal, *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* (Lucas 1999). With the general improvement in behaviour and morale that this collaborative approach brought about, standards improved further, and exclusions were no longer necessary (Ofsted, 1997).

Further developments: formalising nurture; beyond the school

Meanwhile Marion Bennathan, then Chairman of the Association of Workers with Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (AWCEBD), liaised with Marjorie Boxall and others to formalise and promote the wider development of the nurture movement following its endorsement in the DfEE paper, *Social Inclusion; Pupil Support* (DfEE 1998) and described in Bennathan and Boxall (1996). The Nurture Group Consortium, later to become the Nurture Group Network, set up as a sub group of AWCEBD, worked with Dr Paul Cooper then of the University of Cambridge School of Education to promote and research nurture groups.

I continued to work closely with Marjorie particularly on a detailed nurture curriculum (unpublished), contributed to meetings of the Consortium and the four-day course, the *Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups* at Cambridge. After retiring from headship in 1998, I joined the staff of the Institute of Education as a tutor to develop a new part-time open learning primary PGCE and as a mentor for *Headlamp*, the new programme of support for newly appointed headteachers. This gave access to many schools across London and the South East as well as to IOE resources. The success of the Cambridge course led to requests for training to be available in London and IOE. The four-day course model was accepted and ran with the help of another experienced member of the IOE staff, Kim Insley, who continued to oversee it until the merger of the IOE with UCL in 2014.

There was now a widespread interest in nurture, especially the nurturing school. There were requests for advice and consultancy from a range of institutions, including special schools and some faith schools that understood the concept as compatible with their ethos. Charitable organisations, working with some of the world's most disadvantaged children in Africa, Central America and the Philippines too, with support and advice have begun to adapt the principles to their culture and language.

Closer to home, current research is addressing exclusions from school. Could the provision of more nurture groups help to diminish the need to exclude? Surely the rise in violence among our young people also raises serious questions about our current education and mental health provision.

CONCLUSION

Nurture has an important founding story that it is taking forward into the future. The desire to improve the life chances for children in the 1970s seemed like an impossible dream, but it is being realised and today there are great opportunities in and beyond our schools to spread the message of nurture.

My own dream for the future is for a continuum of nurture to resolve the world's problems – people, especially children and their families are the future; all our politics and economics must focus on support for families as an absolute priority for our future wellbeing, for the future of all of us and for our world.

For us as nurture teachers, it is essential that we do not lose sight of what makes nurture unique. That is Marjorie Boxall's original, and very simple vision: that nurture is about children's learning at their present developmental level, it is not therapy. We do it by following her maxim: be and do for these children as you would your own young children.

In so doing we also discover how to nurture ourselves and all those around us; it is like good health, so often we value it only when we don't have it.

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BEYOND NURTURE GROUPS TO NURTURING APPROACHES: A FOCUS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF NURTURE IN THE SCOTTISH CONTEXT

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Keywords: nurture, nurture groups, nurturing approaches, educational psychology

ABSTRACT

In this paper the spread and direction of nurture within the context of Scottish schools is outlined. Through the process of interacting with key education stakeholders and consideration of the evidence base a picture of the development of whole establishment nurturing approaches in Scotland has emerged. The views of 27 of Scotland's 32 local authorities were identified through a questionnaire to establish the extent to which nurture groups and nurturing approaches are a priority for local authorities and then a 'drill down' activity was undertaken with a further 10 stakeholders. By speaking to four schools and six representatives from educational psychology services across Scotland a confluence for the rationale of implementing a nurturing approach is noted; an understanding of what a nurturing approach is and the challenges and benefits that sit alongside the embedding of the whole school approach are examined. From the process of consultation with stakeholders and literature review, next steps are proposed that will help the continuing development of an evidence base for nurturing approaches and link this to other emerging priorities within the wider landscape.

INTRODUCTION

From the turn of the 21st century, nurture and nurture groups have had a slow and steady rise across Scotland and have evolved and changed from being delivered solely as a traditional targeted intervention to becoming a whole school approach. This approach seeks to inform how schools and early years establishments support wellbeing and promote positive relationships within the wider school community. Wellbeing and positive relationships are a key focus within Scottish policy guidance and it could be argued that the focus on whole school nurturing approaches has been facilitated by this guidance. Education Scotland has now produced a national framework entitled 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach' which provides a national definition of a 'nurturing approach' (2017, p12) and supplies a framework for whole education establishments to plan, implement and self-evaluate a nurturing approach.

This article attempts to explore in some detail how we have moved from nurture groups to nurturing approaches in Scotland; what the current landscape is with regard to local authorities' focus on nurture groups and nurturing approaches; what the potential

benefits of taking such an approach might be as well as highlighting the possible limitations and challenges inherent within the implementation of a universal nurturing approach. It asks whether Scotland has developed a clear rationale for a nurturing approach, and whether there is a shared understanding of what is meant by a nurturing approach. There is exploration into how a nurturing approach links with other similar approaches and how the evidence base around nurture and other approaches can strengthen the rationale for a nurturing approach. Finally, it explores what needs to be done to further develop a shared national understanding of nurturing approaches and how we might go about developing an evidence base for the impact of a nurturing approach.

The evolution from nurture groups to nurturing approaches

Nurture groups were initially developed in England where much of the concomitant early research was undertaken (Bennathan and Boxall, 2013; Cooper and Lovey, 1999; Cooper et. al. 2001, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007). The first nurture group was created in London in 1970 due to the recognition by Marjorie Boxall that some children and young people demonstrated

Accepted on 14 March 2019; published on 29 July 2019

Citation: Kearney, M., Nowek, G. (2019) Beyond nurture groups to nurturing approaches: a focus on the development of nurture in the Scottish context. *International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 5(1) 12-20.

a profile of needs relating to the self-regulation of emotional and social behaviour that were underpinned by attachment issues arising from early adversity.

In England there was structural endorsement of the approach of nurture groups (Warnock Report, (DES,1978); The Fish Report, (ILEA,1985) but specifically the Department of Education and Employment (1997) produced a report that influenced the decision of Scotland's largest local authority to develop and fund four nurture groups. Glasgow City Council was one of the first councils in Scotland to commit significant funding to nurture groups and then to further create a strategy for additional nurture groups across the city. From this 2001 beginning many other local authorities have also developed nurture groups across the early years, primary and secondary sector but have also focused on developing nurturing approaches across schools. While many local authorities continue to combine both targeted nurture group support with more universal nurturing approaches, a number of local authorities have solely focused on a nurturing approach. The spread of nurture across Scotland has underpinned the need for a national definition and understanding of what is meant by a nurturing approach and a need to examine whether such an approach can have a positive impact on improving wellbeing, behaviour and attainment in Scottish schools.

The legislative, policy and research context

Many aspects of Scotland's legislative and policy framework have laid the groundwork for the flourishing of nurturing approaches that has taken place. The Children and Young People Scotland Act (2014) Getting it Right for Every Child, places children and young people's wellbeing at the centre of all assessment, planning and intervention. It recognises the part that the wider environment plays in the development of children and young people and places a responsibility on all adults to provide the appropriate support to help children to grow and develop in order to reach their full potential. This is now enshrined in legislation in the Children and Young Person's (Scotland) Act (2014) which reinforces the rights of children and young people and emphasises the need to support all pupils, including the most vulnerable. The National Improvement Framework (Education Scotland, 2018), one of the key pieces of guidance set out by the Scottish government to support improvement in Scottish education, sets out clear priorities to deliver excellence and equity, including closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people and improving children and young people's health and wellbeing. The Scottish Attainment Challenge is the key approach taken in Scotland to reducing the poverty related attainment gap and the Scottish government has invested funding at local authority, school and individual pupil level to tackle

this. The most recent iteration of this funding, the Pupil Equity Fund, has seen many schools investing money in developing either targeted nurture groups or whole school nurturing approaches. Additional funding has also been provided to the nine local authorities with the highest levels of deprivation and many of them have used part of their funding to focus on nurturing approaches as a key means of supporting wellbeing to reduce the poverty related attainment gap.

A nurturing approach has been promoted as a key means to support behaviour, wellbeing, attainment and achievement in Scottish schools in a number of policy documents including 'Included, engaged and involved, Part 2: a positive approach to preventing and managing school exclusion' and 'Better relationships, better learning, better behaviour' (Education Scotland 2013). Recent research that explored school staff experience of young people's behaviour in schools as well as identifying how they supported positive behaviour – Behaviour in Scottish schools research (BISSR), (Scottish Government, 2016) – demonstrates that a nurturing approach, along with other relationship-based approaches, is one of the most commonly cited approaches used to support positive relationships and behaviour and to prevent serious and disruptive behaviour in Scottish schools.

The context of poverty and the Scottish Government's focus on breaking the cycles of poverty by using early intervention (Kearney et. al. 2016) has a particular focus on health and wellbeing and how this can help to reduce stress for children as well as fostering learning (Roffey, 2016). More recently, there has been an increased interest in Scotland due to the research evidence provided by the Adverse Childhood Experiences Studies (ACEs) that have been carried out in the USA (Felitti et. al. 1998; Herman et. al. 1997), England (Bellis et. al. 2014) and Wales (Bellis et. al. 2015). These studies clearly demonstrate the links between adversity in early childhood and later negative outcomes for children, young people and adults. This has led to a renewed focus on how early adversity impacts on children and young people's health outcomes, stress levels, ability to self-regulate and their consequent capacity to settle and do well in school. This research also emphasises the importance of having a buffering adult who can mitigate against many of these adverse childhood experiences. These key elements of understanding the importance of early adversity and early intervention; supporting health and wellbeing and learning lend themselves well to a nurturing approach.

Previous research (Mortimore, 2014; Myers, 1996) indicates that the environment of the school is important for developing positive behaviour. This research stated that schools that are highly considerate of ethos by evolving the elements of curriculum, leadership,

shared beliefs and relationships can help shape and support its pupils. The recent BISSR research (2016) also highlights a clear correlation between education staff perceptions of the levels of positive behaviour in school and their perceptions of whether a positive ethos and culture existed in the school.

The 'Growing up in Scotland' study (Anderson et. al. 2007), a large longitudinal study, currently following two cohorts of children across Scotland found that between 5% and 15% of those children studied fell within the borderline range for a spectrum of behavioural difficulties. Those researchers involved in the collection of data noted that there is still work to be done in understanding the extent and nature of the emotional and behavioural development of children in Scotland. This evidence provides a clear rationale for placing the wellbeing of all children and young people at the centre of any policy and approaches within Scottish education.

Evidence base for nurture groups and a wider nurturing approach

The last 16 years of the embedding of nurture, in its various forms, has led to a body of Scottish research that has demonstrated the benefits of nurture groups (Kearney, 2004; Gerrard, 2005; March and Healy, 2007; Binnie and Allan, 2008; Reynolds et. al. 2009; MacKay et. al. 2010; Grantham and Primrose, 2017). There have been fewer articles relating to whole establishment approaches even across the UK (March and Kearney, 2017; Warin, 2017, Doyle 2004 and Lucas, 1999). This said, the benefits that have been highlighted – increased attainment, increase in pro-social behaviours, the reduction in behaviours relating to attachment needs (Reynolds et. al. 2009), increase in self-esteem (Kearney, 2004) and the increase in the positive perceptions of the parents whose children have experienced nurture groups (March and Healy, 2007) – are important. Much of the research into nurture groups also indicates that the presence of a nurture group, when properly implemented and supported, can have a much wider impact on culture and ethos and children's outcomes than those who are only supported within the nurture group. The presence of nurture groups in schools can help schools to develop an increased capacity to support those with social, emotional and behavioural needs and make adaptations to their curriculum and pedagogy used by teachers (Binnie and Allen, 2008, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Sanders, 2007).

Bergin and Bergin (2009) also clearly articulate that while attachment to parents has often been demonstrated as having a positive outcome for children and young people in terms of learning and behaviour, attachment to teachers is also important. Attachment to teachers plays an important part

in developing positive outcomes for children and young people, including ability to maintain attention; improved attainment; increased academic motivation and more positive behaviour in school. Research into authoritative schools (Gregory et. al. 2012; Gill et. al. 2004; Dinham and Scott, 2008) highlights the importance of developing a school climate that is high in expectations and structure as well as being high in warmth and support.

In addition, there is strong evidence to support the importance of good relationships in a learning context. Frisby and Martin (2010) undertook a study of 232 students and their perceptions of the quality of rapport between students and between the instructor and students. This research highlighted the significance of the perceived rapport and those classrooms where there was felt to be a 'connectedness' between participants. This connectedness related to enhanced student participation. Importantly it is the relationship with the instructor, when positive, that predicted affective learning and cognitive learning. Similar results were found in the study by Prisbell et. al. (2009) and McLaughlin and Clarke (2010) who cited over 130 papers that demonstrate positive relationships in schools impact directly on positive academic outcomes. These studies highlight the need for the pupils and teachers to feel part of a school to support good academic outcomes. Hamm et. al. (2011) undertook a very small-scale intervention that found when teachers had undertaken a professional programme that focused on developing their attunement to social dynamics and early adolescent development, there was an impact. Students in the intervention schools noted that their teachers were more attuned to peer group affiliations and that this had a positive impact on the school social environment. Thus, concluding that teachers have an influence in making the context more supportive for young people.

Research into the importance of attachment and connectedness in schools; the importance of pupil-teacher relationships and the need for a balance between structure and support, provides a clear rationale for a nurturing approach, which emphasises these aspects.

What is a nurturing approach?

As indicated, there has been a definite move in Scottish education towards promoting a culture that focuses on building relationships across all of the establishment. In common with many education systems, the Scottish education system historically focused on a more behaviourist approach. March and Kearney (2017) outline how, prior to the citywide introduction of universal/whole school nurturing approaches, the predominant model of behaviour management in schools had been characterised by the principles of

behavioural psychology with a non-relational approach and ethos. Nurturing approaches are seen by many as a means of helping schools to move beyond a behaviourist approach to create: 'positive, emotionally and socially healthy environments that help promote good behaviour and the growth of...emotional wellbeing' (Weare, 2006). Nurture groups, and subsequently nurturing approaches, were conceived as a means of understanding and helping meet children's relational and attachment needs to support their inclusion in a mainstream context (Boxall, 2002). One of the main aspects of a nurturing approach is an emphasis on how a key adult can support the attachment needs of a young person, particularly where this early attachment relationship has been missed. The importance of a key adult in mitigating against the impact of early adverse experiences has been outlined in much of the recent research around Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (Hughes et. al. 2018). Cooper et. al. (2000) took first-hand accounts of pupils with SEBD and found that:

School regimes that were characterised by mechanistic and impersonal approaches to pupils' management were associated with pupil disaffection, whereas regimes that pupils and staff experienced as being underpinned by values of respect and care for all persons were associated with positive challenges to disaffection and lower levels of exclusion.

Nurturing approaches with a focus on attachment and relationship-based learning can be seen as an antidote to the more traditional, behaviourist approach and a means of supporting pupils who experience social, emotional, behavioural needs.

In recognition of the growing trend towards schools developing whole school nurturing approaches – a framework was developed in Scotland that supported an understanding of this approach and supported self-evaluation. This built on previous self-evaluation frameworks such as 'How nurturing is our school?' (Glasgow, 2014) and also made use of Scotland's effective broader approach to self-evaluation within education – currently seen in How good is our school? 4 (Education Scotland, 2015) and How good is our early learning and childcare (Education Scotland, (2016). Within the Applying Nurture (Education Scotland, 2017) as a whole school approach framework, a definition of a nurturing approach was outlined for the first time:

A nurturing approach recognises that positive relationships are central to both learning and wellbeing. A key aspect of a nurturing approach is an understanding of attachment theory and how early experiences can have a significant impact on development. It recognises that all school/Early Learning Centre settings staff have a role to play

in establishing the positive relationships that are required to promote healthy social and emotional development and that these relationships should be reliable, predictable and consistent where possible...the school environment...incorporates attunement, warmth and connection alongside structure, high expectations and a focus on achievement and attainment (op. cit., p13, 2017).

As part of the development of Applying Nurture framework, a literature search and consultation with key stakeholders (including children and young people) was undertaken to identify some of the key features which were felt to be important aspects of a nurturing approach. This literature search included many of the key studies cited within the evidence base for nurturing approaches above but also took into account research into effective practice in terms of wider social and emotional learning (Durlak, 2016; Yoder, 2014; Noble and McGrath, 2008). Some of the features that were highlighted as being important aspects of a nurturing approach included: the application of nurturing principles at a whole school level; the need for a focus on social and emotional learning across the school; a focus on play and developmentally appropriate curriculum; a focus on relationships at the heart of the approach; an inclusive approach that supports all learners; the need for a clear vision/aims and objectives and a consistent approach; an emphasis on practitioners being able to understand, support and predict the behaviour of children and young people; and clear focus on attachment and child development.

In addition, the national improvement agency Education Scotland has delivered a freely accessible four-day national training on primary and secondary nurturing approaches throughout Scotland. This has to date been attended by 31 of Scotland's 32 local authorities with many of those attending training cascading it further within their own school or local authority. This training focuses on an understanding of attachment, early adversity and trauma and its impact on development; the implementation of the nurturing principles across the wider school community and the use of implementation science to support the implementation of a whole school approach with a focus on the evaluation of impact.

This work and the subsequent development of the framework have helped to move the national conversation around nurturing approaches on and it was of interest to the authors of this paper to explore whether these themes continued to emerge in the discussions with local authorities and schools.

METHODOLOGY

The key research questions in this study were:

- how has nurture evolved in a Scottish context;
- has this led to a shared understanding of a nurturing approach;
- what is the rationale for employing a nurturing approach; and
- how has its impact been measured?

The literature base and the practitioner knowledge of the authors indicated that two of the key stakeholders across education services with regard to the implementation of nurturing approaches were senior school managers and educational psychologists and so, they were selected as the main participants in the research.

A brief questionnaire was developed by the authors (with initial direction and consultation with an Emeritus Professor) that focused mainly on the evolution of nurture within Scotland as well as the extent to which it was a local priority. At this stage the questionnaire was kept brief to engage as many stakeholders as possible. It was then trialled on four educational psychologists (EPs) who had worked in the area of nurture as well as being part of the Education Scotland group responsible for the development of the document 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach'. Feedback was taken in relation to the relevance of the questions to Local Authority-Educational Psychological Services (LA-EPS) staff as well as grammar and clarity of meaning. Minor adaptations were made to the questions following this focus group. The first set of semi-structured questionnaires was sent to all of the 32 LA-EPS by the authors. This was undertaken by linking with each principal educational psychologist (PEP) in Scotland through the Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP). Each PEP either completed a short questionnaire themselves or delegated this to someone within the service or local authority who had some direct responsibility for developing or implementing nurturing approaches in their context. This questionnaire was kept brief to ensure a high response rate.

The questions asked included:

1. Do you have nurture groups within your local authority?
2. Are nurturing approaches being taken forward in your local authority?
3. Is this a whole authority priority?

Answers were received via email and a thematic analysis was undertaken by an independent research assistant.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis can often be seen as lacking in a thorough definition, yet it is a qualitative analytical tool that many psychologists use. In essence it is an approach that helps identify themes or patterns in relation to different topics or ontological positions. Indeed, Ryan and Bernard (2000) suggest that thematic coding, as a process, is performed within 'major' analytic traditions rather than a specific approach in its own right.

Without clear and rigid guidelines to identify precisely what thematic analysis is there are two strains of thought. One is that thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool which allows a complex understanding of qualitative data. The other view is that when thematic analysis is used, 'anything goes' in relation to the data (Antaki, et. al., 2002).

It was a tool that was used in the interpretation of the local authority data in this paper as it helps minimally organise the data set but still allows the rich detail to remain. The six-step approach (or six phases of thematic analysis) that Braun and Clarke (2006) set out in their document was the process that was undertaken in this paper. These steps are: familiarising yourself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report.

From the initial semi-structured questionnaire 27 returns were obtained from 32 local authorities within Scotland that provided a clear snapshot of how nurturing approaches (including nurture groups) were being implemented in Scotland. To obtain a more detailed understanding of what both educational psychologists and managers in schools perceived as to the benefits and challenges of implementing a nurturing approach and what a nurturing approach looked like in their context, a further follow up semi-structured questionnaire with a number of the respondents was undertaken. The themes that emerged from the initial questionnaire also helped to develop the questions that were included in this more detailed questionnaire. This questionnaire was then delivered as in-depth interviews with five educational psychologists and one nurture development officer within six local authorities and four in-depth interviews with senior managers from four schools (two primary and two secondary schools). The participants from the local authorities were selected to ensure a spread of those who had high levels of deprivation and lower levels of deprivation in their local authority; those who worked in larger cities and those in more rural areas and those who had been developing their nurturing approaches for some time and those who were at an earlier stage in the development of their nurturing approach.

This in depth semi-structured questionnaire was trialled on three school staff who were also part of the Education Scotland development group for the 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach' document. Again, small changes were made to structure, grammar and clarity of the questions. Examples of the questions are as follows:

1. What is the rationale for nurturing approaches and its implementation in your local authority?
2. How are you evaluating the implementation of nurturing approaches within your school – have you been able to see any impact of it so far?

As noted above 10 education staff members undertook the second semi-structured questionnaire. All staff members who were approached to undertake the questionnaires agreed to this. Both the authors interviewed five individuals each and answers were transcribed verbatim as the interviewee progressed through the questionnaire.

An independent research assistant compiled the information. Both authors discussed the information and any ambiguous responses before undertaking a second thematic analysis.

Neither questionnaire was standardised and despite research into this area, no suitable publications were found that had been tested for reliability and validity. This meant that the authors were reliant on the research question they wished to answer and their knowledge of the subject area to develop the questionnaires. Consultation with an Emeritus Professor who had written extensively on the subject of nurture allowed the questionnaire to be developed with a significant degree of academic knowledge about nurture.

RESULTS

As indicated, 27 out of 32 local authorities returned the short survey, which is a return rate of 89.9%. Of these returns, 25 out of 27 stated that they have nurture groups within the local authority (LA). Twenty-seven out of 27 also said that they were implementing nurturing approaches in some form within their LA. Twenty of the 27 LAs indicated that implementing nurturing approaches across the LA was a priority, with one other indicating that they were implementing a relationship approach. The largest number of nurture groups in a LA was 96 and these were present across early years, primary and secondary settings. Many other LAs also indicated they had them across different sectors with primary having the most. The initial questionnaire asked a limited number of questions but many of the respondents added additional information about the training, implementation and evaluation of nurturing approaches in their local authority. For example, many respondents provided information on funding for

nurture groups which was a combination of LA funding, schools' own funding, funding through the Pupil Equity Fund and additional funding from the Scottish Attainment Challenge as a challenge authority. Of the 15 respondents who mentioned who was delivering training for nurture groups and nurturing approaches, the Educational Psychology Service was central to this training.

The further analysis was undertaken with a number of educational psychologists and senior managers from schools as indicated above. This was carried out as a one-to-one semi-structured interview with each respondent. This semi-structured interview built on the initial questionnaire that was undertaken by 27 EPS and asked questions in relation to the following topics: the development of nurturing approaches in schools; implementation issues in relation to nurturing approaches including evaluation and impact; the underpinning rationale for selecting nurturing approaches as a whole school approach; the 'key features' of what makes a school nurturing. Finally, there was a focus on the benefits and challenges of implementing Nurturing Approaches in schools. The themes that emerged were as follows:

Rationale for a nurturing approach

The impact of poverty was seen as a key driver for the implementation of a nurturing approach in schools by many of the respondents.

All school respondents said that changing the learning and teaching culture and promoting wellbeing for staff and pupils was part of the rationale for embedding nurturing approaches in their establishments.

Educational psychologists highlighted that they saw that a nurturing ethos and culture in schools helped to support inclusion of young people who had a profile of needs and also provided a shared language between education professionals to discuss the types of needs these young people have.

Key features of a nurturing approach

The need for whole school implementation of a nurturing approach as opposed to small-scale changes was seen as a vital feature of the approach. An establishment approach required training for all staff and needed to be led by the school's SMT. The involvement of all staff was viewed by respondents as one of the key aspects that differentiated a targeted nurture group from a whole school nurturing approach.

All school staff highlighted that a nurturing approach promoted respectful language and a consistency of language when working with and discussing young people. EPS staff also commented that a nurturing approach developed skilled and reflective practitioners. A knowledge of attachment theory

by staff, the importance of policies that focused on relationships and these in turn developing a safe environment for staff and young people were seen as key features of a nurturing approach. Many of these themes reflect the nurture principles.

Benefits and challenges of implementing a nurturing approach

As well as staff being clear in their rationale for a nurturing approach and articulating the positive features of a nurturing approach such as the use of consistent language, they were also able to identify other tangible benefits. It was felt by school staff that both the school culture and ethos were happier, safer and calmer for staff which had a direct impact on young people's learning and their wellbeing and connectedness to the school. All respondents felt that staff understood children's needs better and were more skilled in dealing with needs. Again, it was noted that when a nurturing approach was in place, that there was a consistency by staff in their approach to young people and in the language they used.

However, as in most large-scale approaches, a number of challenges were identified. These included ensuring consistent staff training, developing a shared understanding and consistent practice in supporting children and young people. The challenges were summed up by one head teacher. She noted that it was difficult: '...getting everyone on the bus. Some people aren't even at the bus stop'. A key challenge was ensuring that all staff were empowered to make changes in their thinking and practice in a way that articulated with the wider school vision. It was also important to ensure that all staff had ownership of this vision.

Again, the involvement and training of the SMT was highlighted as a key challenge to ensuring that nurturing approaches were implemented effectively. Ongoing training of staff was also important, particularly for newly qualified teachers and new staff members.

Challenges arose when working with parents such as the potential perception that nurture is 'soft' and that sanctions, such as exclusion, were more valued when dealing with aspects of difficult behaviour.

An additional challenge was the demonstration of impact in relation to the nurturing approach. EPS and school staff indicated that they were trying various ways to capture this information but collating the hard data and noting the direct impact was often difficult.

A final, but crucial point that can be seen as both a benefit and a challenge – it was reflected through the responses that supporting and developing relationships was key to developing a nurturing school.

EVALUATION AND IMPACT

The need to embed a thorough self-evaluation process in relation to the implementation of nurturing approaches was highlighted by nearly all respondents (nine out of 10 responses). Of the four schools, three indicated they were using Education Scotland materials to support this process.

One of the measures being frequently used by respondents to evaluate the impact of nurturing approaches was exclusion data. In addition, information was collated from referrals to internal and external supports, eg purchased education placements, support bases within schools, behavioural referrals to SMT. The views of young people, school leaver destinations and staff wellbeing measures were also used as a measure of impact – the last measure was gained via staff surveys etc.

CONCLUSION

The landscape in Scottish education has been changing at a rapid pace and has become more focused on the importance of wellbeing and relationships as a cornerstone of improving outcomes. This requires a whole school approach that focuses on culture and ethos and creates a shared understanding and vision. In order to achieve a positive culture and ethos with a focus on improving relationships and wellbeing, the findings of this research indicate that local authorities and schools are increasingly turning to a nurturing approach. Both nurture groups and nurturing approaches are widespread in Scotland as stated, with initiatives such as the Scottish Attainment Challenge supporting this focus. The majority of respondents reported that nurturing approaches as a system-wide approach were a priority not just within education but often within wider children's services. It was also noted that psychological services have played a pivotal role in leading this movement but local authorities are also increasingly allocating funding to a dedicated role to support nurturing approaches.

The more detailed interviews revealed that the respondents clearly see the rationale and benefits for applying a nurturing approach and many of these align with those key features of a nurturing approach that are outlined in the evidence, including providing a shared language and vision that support staff understanding of the needs of children and young people. Attachment and children's development lie at the heart of this understanding and provide a theoretical underpinning for a nurturing approach alongside the nurture principles. Respondents clearly recognised the need for whole school implementation of a nurturing approach. The broadening out of nurture to a more universal approach has meant that the key factors supporting the implementation of any universal approach need to be considered, such as

the need to ensure consistency among staff; buy-in and ownership of senior management and the wider school community and ongoing whole staff training. In this respect, nurturing approaches benefit from being developed in line with implementation science to ensure there is some fidelity to the approach. One of the key themes that has emerged throughout is the shared understanding of the importance of relationships as a core aspect of a nurturing approach. Respondents saw this as a vital component of ensuring both staff wellbeing and the wellbeing of children and young people. In the current climate of increasing concerns around the mental health of children and young people and staff wellbeing, the potential impact that nurturing approaches can have on improving wellbeing is an area that may require further research.

Another key aspect of implementation is ensuring that there is evidence of impact. Self-evaluation is a well-established approach to exploring outcomes in Scottish education (see *How good is your school?*, (HGIOS4) and *How good is our early learning and childcare?* (HGIOELC), in Education Scotland, 2015) and this has been further facilitated within nurture by the development of the Applying Nurture as a whole school approach framework. Self-evaluation can be a helpful approach for schools to evaluate the progress they are making in a nurturing approach with regard to positive outcomes for children and young people and the wider school community. However, as self-evaluation is designed to enable schools to take into account their own context, the evidence gathered through this approach does not currently lend itself to developing a national picture of the impact of nurturing approaches on children and young people. This evidence could however be gathered in a more systematic way to provide a more detailed national picture of the impact of nurturing approaches. The tools within the Applying Nurture self-evaluation framework could also be used together with other more quantitative data on wellbeing and attainment to demonstrate the evidence of impact on practitioners' practice alongside the evidence of impact on children and young people.

As Scotland has become more focused on an awareness of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma informed practice – there are many similar themes emerging (Education Scotland, 2018). A nurturing approach relies on increasing staff understanding and empathy with regard to children and young people's behaviour in schools which it is hoped will generate more inclusive and reflective practice. Being ACEs aware and trauma informed also have similar aims. A crucial aspect of this understanding is ensuring that it is rooted in evidence-based and psychologically-informed practice. A nurturing approach is a psychologically informed approach

which makes use of key theoretical concepts such as attachment theory and increasingly trauma informed and neuroscientific evidence. In Scotland, many are also making the links between nurturing approaches and the research which has been generated by the adverse childhood experiences specifically in relation to the impact of early adversity and trauma including the strong connection with poverty. A further factor that links these approaches is the recognition of the importance of resilience factors such as the child having one trusted adult.

In terms of a future direction for nurture, there is a need to consolidate the increased appetite in Scotland for nurturing approaches to ensure that it captures evidence of impact and links to other approaches that have similar aims. While some previous research demonstrates the importance of some of the key themes of nurture in terms of outcomes, eg school connectedness – future research could focus on linking nurturing approaches more explicitly with positive outcomes for children and young people.

The authors would like to thank Professor Paul Cooper for his help and guidance in writing this paper.

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HOW DO NURTURE GROUP PRACTITIONERS MAKE SENSE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NURTURE GROUP CHILD?

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Keywords: Nurture groups, practitioner-child relationship, attachment, psychodynamic

ABSTRACT

Nurture groups aim to meet the developmental needs of vulnerable children identified as having Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Past research has highlighted the need to explore and explain the practitioner-child relationship in nurture groups. In this research, five nurture group practitioners from Key Stage 1 (KS1) nurture groups were interviewed about how they make sense of their relationship with the nurture group child, to identify what makes a successful nurture relationship, and the factors that challenge it. A symbolic interactionist and critical realist position was taken, using a grounded theory analysis. Results revealed a relationship journey that develops into a 'close' relationship. The practitioner becomes attuned to the child's needs and emotional experiences, enabling them to provide containment to the child and put appropriate support in place. The relationship journey contains a number of challenges, which the practitioner tries to overcome. These challenges place an emotional load on the practitioner, and so they seek containment themselves. However, the challenges contribute towards the development of a trusting and 'close' relationship. This relationship journey is discussed in relation to psychodynamic and attachment theories. Implications for nurture group practitioners, stakeholders and educational psychologists are explored.

INTRODUCTION

Research has frequently shown that childhood exposure to abuse, loss, high levels of adversity and risk often leads to poorer outcomes, including low academic achievement, social exclusion, and later unemployment and poorer wellbeing in adulthood (Bellis, et. al. 2014; Green et. al. 2005). Many children and young people across the UK today experience a high level of adversity and risk, which is likely to have a significant impact on their wellbeing, development and learning (Roffey, 2016). The promotion of children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health is high on the UK Government agenda, with schools highlighted as being well-placed to support children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health (Department of Health, 2015; Department of Health and Department for Education, 2017; Public Health England, 2015). The Children and Families Act (2014) places a statutory duty on all Local Authorities (LAs) and schools to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people, especially those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The Government has also recently produced

a green paper outlining the next steps in transforming children and young people's mental health (Department of Health and Department for Education, 2017).

A number of reports suggest evidence-based targeted interventions that aim to support vulnerable children and young people (Cheney, et. al. 2014; Public Health England, 2015; Roffey, 2016). In an evidence-based review of targeted school-based interventions for children and young people with identified emotional wellbeing and mental health needs, nurture groups were identified as holding the strongest evidence base for promoting successful outcomes over other school-based group interventions e.g. social and emotional aspects of learning, cognitive behavioural therapy (Cheney et. al. 2014). The UK Government and large-scale studies have repeatedly reported on the benefits of nurture groups for promoting the social, emotional and academic outcomes of vulnerable young people with SEMH needs, across primary and secondary educational settings (Bennett, 2015; Hughes and Schlösser, 2014; Ofsted, 2008, 2011; Public Health England, 2015; Steer, 2005).

Accepted on 11 March 2019; published on 29 July 2019

Citation: Gibb, A.L., Lewis, R. (2019) How do nurture group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the nurture group child? *International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 5(1) 21–35

Nurture groups

Nurture groups are targeted, school-based interventions, aimed at meeting the developmental needs of vulnerable children with SEMH needs (Boxall and Lucas, 2010). They were first developed in the 1960s by educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall in response to large numbers of young people starting school with significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, who were struggling to access mainstream education. Their difficulties were understood as being a result of disrupted or impoverished early nurturing experiences (Boxall and Lucas, 2010).

Nurture groups are inclusive classes of typically 10-12 children, supported by two consistent nurture practitioners. For a full description of the three main models of nurture groups practice, the reader should refer to Cooper and Whitebread (2007). Nurture groups aim to support children by providing opportunities to develop secure, nurturing relationships. Nurture practitioners offer a safe base (Bowlby, 1988) from which children can explore and learn, and who model trusting, predictable relationships. The relationship between the practitioner and child is frequently cited as vital for the child's development, and success of the nurture groups (e.g. Bennathan and Boxall, 2000; Billington, 2012).

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research looking into the processes operating within nurture groups, or the factors that lead to a successful nurture provision. Several researchers have highlighted that research must begin to identify the processes of change i.e. why nurture groups work, to understand better the outcomes typically seen (Bennett, 2015; Cheney et al. 2014; Garner and Thomas, 2011; Hughes and Schlösser, 2014).

A small amount of research has indicated the importance of the practitioner-child relationship (Chiappella, 2015; Cooper, et al. 2001; Garner and Thomas, 2011; Griffiths, et al. 2014; Kourmoulaki, 2013; Pyle and Rae, 2015). This research has suggested that the practitioner-child relationship is one that is close (Pyle and Rae, 2015), with trust identified as a key process taking place within a nurture group relationship, and vital to the nurture group's success (Chiappella, 2015).

The relationship between the practitioner and child has been linked to an attachment theory framework (Bowlby, 1969), describing the relationship to be a representation of an attachment relationship, where the parent/practitioner provides safety, care, and a base from which the child/young person can venture out and learn (Garner and Thomas, 2011). Kourmoulaki (2013) identified that nurture group practitioners provided feelings of safety and trust, by offering consistency and attention, and being attuned to the young people's needs. Nurture group children report feeling more

accepted by nurture group practitioners (compared to children taught in mainstream classes) and develop a degree of closeness that would reflect a secure attachment relationship (Balisteri, 2016).

AIMS OF CURRENT STUDY

A small number of studies indicate that the relationships within nurture groups play an important role towards enabling the positive outcomes typically seen (Garner and Thomas, 2011; Griffiths, et al. 2014). However, further research was seen as necessary to develop a more thorough understanding of what factors are at play within nurture group practitioner-child relationships.

The purpose of the research was to explore and explain the contexts and in particular the factors that operate within and influence the nature of the nurture group practitioner-child relationship, to identify what makes a successful relationship. It was hoped the research would shed light on how nurture group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the nurture group child, and the factors that enable or challenge the relationship to contribute to the understanding of the relationship, which is so often seen as having central importance to the success of nurture groups (Billington, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The research outlined in this paper is qualitative; seeking out the views, perceptions and explanations held by nurture group practitioners. It explores the interpretations that participants give to the nurture group practitioner-child relationship, and then shifts to an explanatory approach seeking to explain the factors and contexts at play.

Three research questions were posed:

1. How do nurture group practitioners make sense of the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and nurture group child?
2. What enables the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and nurture group child?
3. What challenges the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and nurture group child?

Researcher position

The research was approached from a symbolic interactionist ontological position. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the subjective meanings or interpretations that individuals give to their experiences and the external world, through joint interactions with each other (Blumer, 1969). As this research sought to study the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and child (whereby a relationship exists as a series of interactions), symbolic interactionism was viewed as a well-fitting position to take.

A critical realist epistemological position was adopted for this study. A critical realist approach looks to find explanations for *what works*, in *what context(s)*, and why, by identifying mechanisms, contextual factors and outcomes (Bhaskar, 2008).

Participants

The LA within which this research took place (an Outer London Borough) has a long history of running nurture groups for its most vulnerable children. Thirteen primary or infant schools (all mainstream settings) across the LA offered a KS1 nurture group provision, all operating on a full-time basis (children attended for nine half-day sessions per week). To ensure the research reflected nurture groups that followed a Boxall model (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007), only practitioners who worked in settings which held the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award (QMA, an optional accreditation of high quality nurture group practice, The Nurture Group Network, 2015) and/or were known within the LA to model strong nurture group practice, who followed the Boxall model, and met the LA's own nurture group policies and procedures, were approached. In May 2016 three settings were identified as holding the QMA, and eight were deemed to meet the LA nurture group policies and procedures to a high standard (three of which held the QMA).

Overall, five participants from three settings consented to participate in the research, each having attended nurture group training, either through the Nurture

Group Network or with the LA, and had at least one year's experience. Two were qualified teachers, one was a higher-level teaching assistant, and two were teaching assistants. All participants were female.

Procedure for data collection

Data were generated via semi-structured interviews with the researcher to gain detailed insight into nurture group practitioners' views and perceptions (see **Appendix 1**). Other data sources were considered, but the desire was to stay focused on the practitioners' perceptions of the relationship. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription and analysis.

Analysis

The data were analysed through the Corbin and Strauss (2008) grounded theory approach. Grounded theory enables researchers to describe and find explanations for social processes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory was selected as it best suited the aims, ontological and epistemological orientation of the study, offering a way to describe and explain what makes a successful nurture group practitioner-child relationship.

Figure 1 outlines the analysis approach taken, allowing individual concepts, themes, subthemes and categories to inductively emerge, creating a theory that could explain the nurture group practitioner-child relationship.

Figure 1: Analysis process.

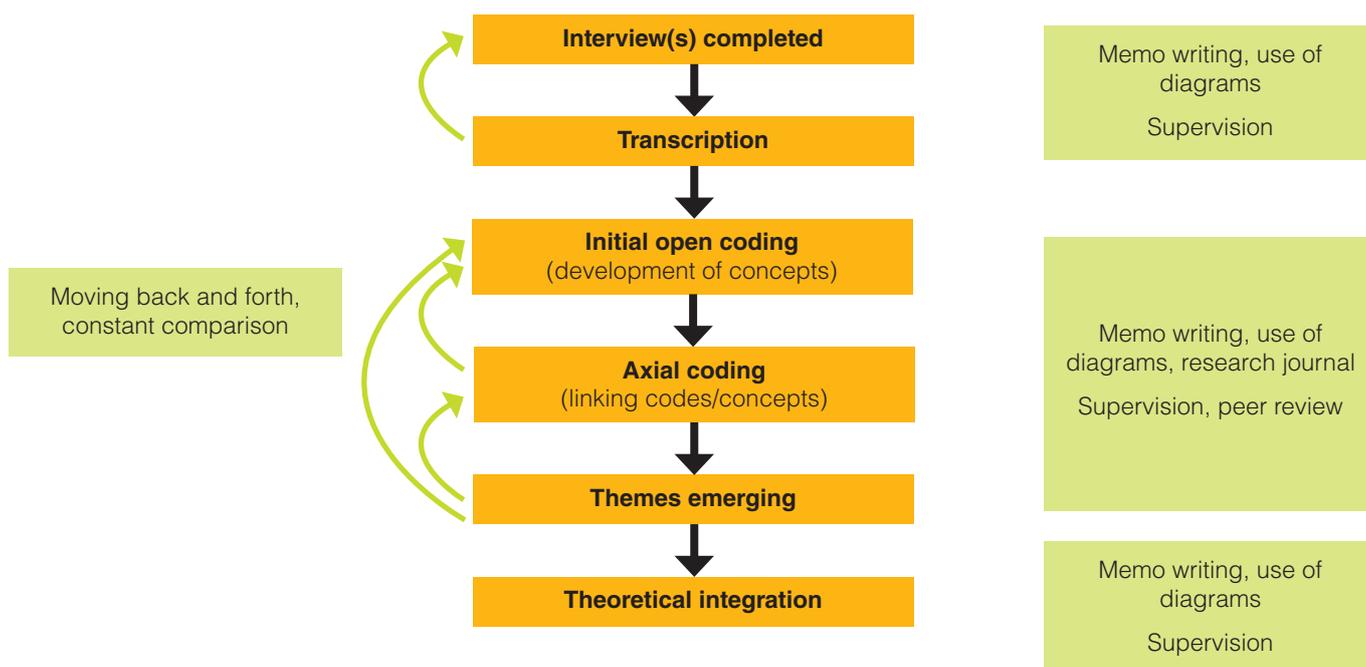


Table 1: Examples from the analysis of the use of analytical tools, open coding and memos.

Data excerpts from transcripts	Memo	Analytical tool used	Open code(s) used
'In the mainstream classroom you have 30 kids, and you haven't really got the time to give them that much attention.' (Antonia)	Here the participant seems to suggest that limited attention can be given to the child in the mainstream classroom. Perhaps the opposite of this is the child receiving much more attention in the nurture group.	Flip-flopping	Attention to the child
'We put a lot of effort into what we do, so you feel like it's part of you, you're doing a lot. Part of you sort of giving it to them, aren't you?' (Claire)	This seems really powerful 'you're giving something of yourself'. It suggests that a lot of effort has been put into the relationship, and that the practitioner feels they are handing over something of themselves for the child to take away and keep.	Asking questions of the data	Internal role model Relationship beyond the nurture group
'It's mentally and physically draining.' (Sofia)	The term 'draining' seems to hold quite a strong message. I have an image of the practitioner's strengths and resources leaking away, as they provide containment for the child.	Notice emotions and the meaning they give to the text.	Emotional load Being a container

Transcriptions were analysed with the support of MaxQDA software. Each transcript was read once to become more familiar with the data before beginning the analysis process.

Transcripts were analysed in turn, beginning with initial open coding. Each transcript was carefully searched and broken down to look for meanings of words or phrases (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The meanings that arose were termed and labelled as code concepts. A range of analytical tools were used to support the coding process (see **Table 1**). Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest the researcher uses analytic tools designed to support the coding process, allowing the researcher to interact with the data, and avoid bringing in prior assumptions or biases.

As various concepts arose from the data, relationships or links between concepts were noticed. This was the basis of the axial coding process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe this as not a separate process to initial open coding; axial and open coding occur alongside each other as more concepts emerge, develop, and change. This follows the iterative back

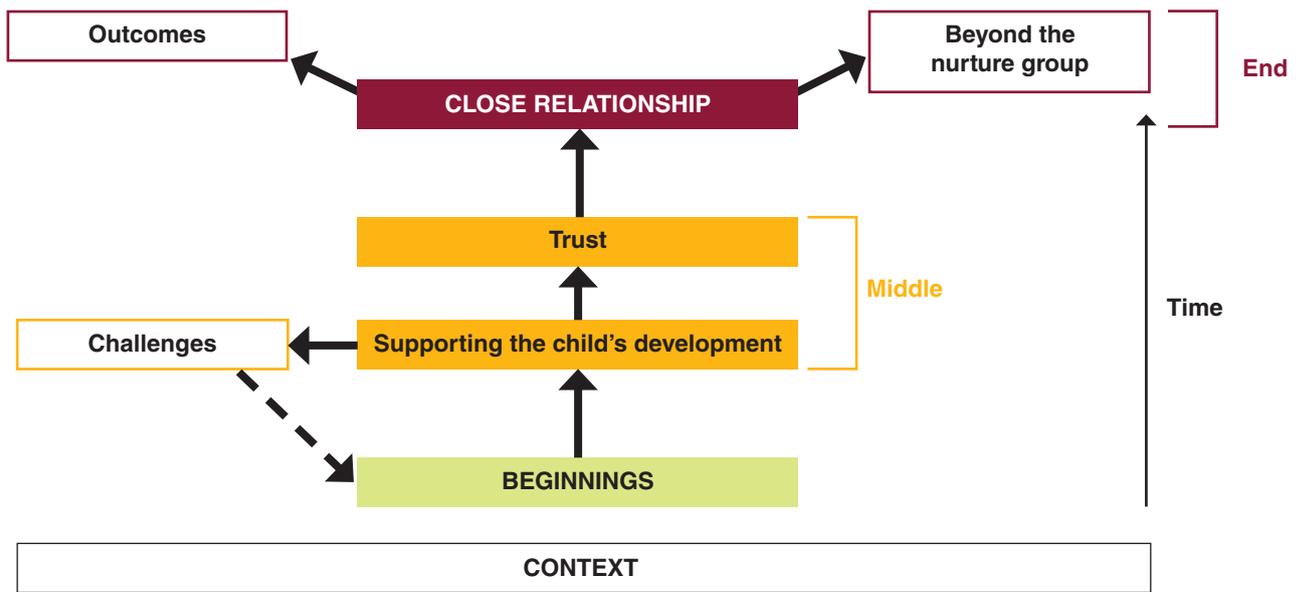
and forth, constant comparison method of grounded theory, as demonstrated in **Figure 1**. As relationships, similarities or links between individual concepts were identified, themes, subthemes and categories emerged and allowed the data to be pulled together in a meaningful way.

Trustworthiness and ethical approval

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were followed. This included using supervision, memo writing, and use of a reflexive research journal to ensure trustworthiness of the research. The research journal was used to record and reflect on the process and emerging codes/themes during analysis. Peer review with fellow doctoral educational psychology trainees, as well as research supervision enabled the researcher to check for and uncover any biases, explore and clarify interpretations of codes and categories, and sound out the emerging theory.

Ethical approval was gained via the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

Figure 2: Simple diagrammatic representation of the nurture group practitioner-child relationship.



RESULTS

Figure 2 provides a simple diagrammatic overview of the theory which emerged, representing the nurture group practitioner-child relationship. The theory is comprised of five key categories:

- Beginnings
- Supporting the child's development
- Trust
- Challenges
- A close relationship

A more detailed overview of the theory, depicting the smaller concepts within each category, and how the concepts relate to each other, feeding up towards the overarching category of a 'close relationship', can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

Context

The context relates to the setting, structures and boundaries of the nurture group, comprised of four different sub concepts:

- Home and family environment: The nurture group resembles a 'family' and family home
- Fun, enjoyable environment
- Structure of the nurture group: clear routines and boundaries, small child: adult ratio, range of activities
- Presence of reliable adults

Beginnings

The beginning is made up of three sub-categories:

1. The child transitions into the nurture group

At this beginning stage of the practitioner-child relationship there are anxious and wary feelings experienced by the practitioner and especially the child. The child may be scared and anxious at first, withdrawing from the practitioner and other children, or seeming unsettled, communicated through their behaviour.

'She didn't know none of our faces, so that I think was quite a scary feeling for her' (Nikki)

'At the same time, she was scared of coming in here, I was sort of like scared of her reaction [laughs] to me.' (Nikki)

2. Spending time together

The practitioner and child spend time together, interacting and communicating through play, structured activities and conversation. The practitioner and child closely interact with each other on a frequent basis, facilitating the development of a relationship.

'You have to constantly be engaging and interacting with the child at all times. So, through that, you do build a relationship with the child, you get quite close to the child, you know.' (Antonia)

3. Getting to know and understand each other

The third sub-category is the practitioner and child coming to know and understand each other. The child gets to know the practitioner through observing the practitioner from a safe distance and through direct interaction, noticing how the practitioner engages and interacts with other children, as if gathering information

about the practitioner's character, and how they are likely to respond to the child and make them feel.

'I find that they, they are watching you...they look to see how you're interacting with other children, like how the other children are responding to you as well.' (Nikki)

Similarly, the practitioner gets to know and understand the child by observing them, directly spending time with the child, and reflecting on the child's behaviour. The practitioner consequently comes to know the child's strengths and needs, interests, and personality, which helps them to develop an understanding of the child, their internal world, and what they might be communicating through their behaviour.

'Once you get to know them, you sort of get an idea, you have to know their home life, their background, their social skills, like what their strengths, their weaknesses.' (Nikki)

Supporting the child's development

Over time the practitioner facilitates and nourishes the child's development:

- **Child feels noticed:** the child feels valued, held-in-mind, and acknowledged for who they are. The practitioner has set up ways to allow the child to experience feelings of self-worth.
- **Meeting the child's individual needs:** the practitioner sensitively and appropriately responds to and meets the child's individual needs, plans developmentally suitable learning activities, and is attuned to the child's emotional experiences.
- **Containing the child:** the practitioner understands and 'holds' the child's feelings, and helps the child make sense of their emotions.

'If you don't understand how they're feeling, then you can't really help them move away from what they're thinking.' (Sofia)

Trust

Trust is a key aspect of the development of the relationship between the practitioner and child. Trust builds over time, and along with it, the relationship. Without trust, there is no relationship.

'It's building that trusting relationship with the child and the nurture teacher...the group is small... you have that advantage to get to know that child better, and that child gets to know you. So, I, I definitely think it's trusting relationship that will be, that's number one.' (Antonia)

'Trust' is made up of three sub-concepts that feed into each other:

- The child feels comfortable, relaxed, and safe with the practitioner
- The child feels safe to approach the practitioner and share their thoughts
- The child feels understood

'The trust I think...they're just more relaxed with you, they're relaxed with you, they'll say most things, they'll tell you things. And, you know they wanna come and talk to you.' (Claire)

Trust in the relationship is vital for the child to feel comfortable to share aspects of themselves with the practitioner. If trust doesn't exist, the child won't open up.

Challenges

The practitioner and child can face challenges along their relationship journey, which disrupt the relationship, although can be overcome. Three types of challenge were identified:

1. The child's behaviour feels challenging: the practitioner witnesses misbehaviour, arguments between the nurture group children, violent behaviour, and receives hurtful comments from the child. The child's behaviour can feel unsafe and unpredictable.

'His behaviour is extreme, and he's very violent, and very aggressive. He can be very defiant, and unsafe.' (Antonia)

2. There being no connection between the practitioner and child: the child seems to push the practitioner away and shut themselves off to avoid unearthing difficult, overwhelming feelings, as a form of defence.

'Not being able to communicate with them. So, if the child's completely shut down, it's difficult knowing that something is wrong, but they don't want to say. That's quite challenging in itself. Knowing that you want to help, but you're not, you can't do anything else then.' (Sofia)

3. Difficulties facilitating change for the child: the practitioner can find it difficult to facilitate change for the child, to understand, calm, comfort, or reach the child, and therefore meet their needs.

These difficulties can lead to the **relationship being emotionally draining for the practitioner:** the practitioner may worry about the child, feel frustrated, drained and overwhelmed, and question their methods and skills.

'It can be very mentally and physically draining. There's so many things you take in and try to deal with, but at the same time, you can't show certain emotions to the child. You just keep holding things in.' (Sofia)

The practitioner (the container) seeks containment themselves: the practitioner as container needs to find ways of seeking and receiving support and emotional containment themselves in response to the heavy emotional load they are carrying for the child.

'I'm just glad that I've got my colleague, coz we just bounce off each other. You need somebody with the same kind of personality as you. To understand it. Because there's times when things just become so overwhelming, you just, all you have to do is look at each other and you know it's time for the other person to step in while the other just has five minutes out.' (Sofia)

A 'close relationship' develops

Through the processes described, a relationship between the practitioner and child can develop into a 'close relationship', one connected through trust, sharing the same relationship journey, and the practitioner having a strong and personal understanding of the child.

'It's one that's quite special. And because you have that closeness and you see them every day, but you work closely with them...And so for me it's definitely, yeah, special! I would say it's quite a special one.' (Antonia)

Close relationships can be experienced as challenging relationships, while still evoking strong feelings of a bond between the practitioner and child. Many participants talked about challenges, within the context of a strong relationship they had with a child.

'We have a child in our nurture group who is extremely challenging. And he is a lovely boy, a really lovely boy...We have a good bond. A good relationship, a close relationship. I would say close.' (Antonia)

At times, the comforting feelings that a child may feel towards the practitioner can mirror a parent-child relationship. The child sees the practitioner as a safe base, seeking close proximity or physical contact with the practitioner.

'When they are ready, they will come to you, coz they know that's what they can do.' (Sofia)

With the practitioner also taking on a parental role, they feel a great sense of responsibility for protecting, nurturing, containing, safeguarding, and supporting the development of the child.

'We've got to keep them safe.' (Claire)

Perceived outcomes: Positive outcomes are seen to emerge as a result of the practitioner putting appropriate support in place to meet the child's developmental needs, and the presence of trust and

the close bond that develops between the practitioner and child.

'By the end of it they really do come out like different children.' (Nikki)

It is important to note that for some children, positive outcomes aren't as plentiful, particularly when long term challenges have existed, and there has been less of a connection between the practitioner and child.

Relationship beyond the nurture group: Once the child has left the nurture group, the practitioner experiences feelings of loss, knowing that their relationship with the child will inevitably change and dwindle, but maintains hope that a connection will remain.

'It's like your own children going off and you know, leaving home I think. It is to me sometimes. You think 'oh, they've gone'.' (Claire)

DISCUSSION

This research set out to explore and explain the relationship between the nurture groups practitioner and child. Three research questions were posed which are discussed below (questions 1 and 2 will be discussed together). Links to attachment and psychodynamic theory will be made when discussing the results.

Question 1: How do nurture group practitioners make sense of the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and nurture group child?

Question 2: What enables the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and nurture group child?

A *relationship journey* emerges between the nurture group practitioner and child, leading towards the development of a *close relationship*. The beginning of the relationship journey reflects a period of anxiety and getting to know each other. As described by Youell (2006) all beginnings evoke feelings of anxiety of the unknown. This research highlights the importance of the practitioner developing an understanding of what the child may be communicating through their behaviour, their needs, and their internal world, through observing, paying attention to, and reflecting on the child's verbal and non-verbal communications. This attunement to the child fits with the psychodynamic concept of reverie; the capacity for a caregiver or significant adult e.g. a nurture group practitioner, to be sensitive and attuned to the child's emotional experiences and communications (Bion, 1962). Being attuned and sensitive to the child's needs has previously been identified as a key characteristic of the nurture group practitioner (Kourmoulaki, 2013).

Throughout the practitioner-child relationship journey, the practitioner has the capacity to recognise and understand the child's feelings (which are often painful and scary). They help to 'hold' or manage these feelings, before helping the child to understand their emotional experiences. Containment refers to the capacity for a person to notice and understand another's powerful and difficult emotions, and respond to these emotions in a way which helps to reduce that person's pain and distress (Bion, 1962). An adult (such as a nurture group practitioner) can help to contain a child by taking in, processing, and holding a child's difficult feelings, and then helping the child to safely make sense of their feelings (Youell, 2006).

Through the act of containment, a child can begin to develop feelings of trust and safety in the containing adult (Youell, 2006). This research highlights that the containment provided by the nurture group practitioner enables the child to feel understood, and thus begin to open up and share more about themselves. They recognise the support and consistency the practitioner provides, enabling them to feel safe enough to learn from the practitioner. As the child shares more about themselves with the practitioner, the practitioner develops deeper knowledge and understanding of the child. The developing rapport between the practitioner and child leads to a 'close relationship'. Previous studies have also described the practitioner-child relationship as one that is close (Balisteri, 2016; Garner and Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013). The close relationship is one where the practitioner and child experience a shared journey over time, which is unique to each and every relationship. Participants often used the terms special, a connection and close, to describe the relationship they develop with the child. The child experiences feelings of comfort, safety, and being cared for by the practitioner, just as a child may feel towards a parent. The practitioner seeks to protect the child, contain their anxieties and fears, and support their development, as a parent would to their child. The practitioner and child's experience of a parent-child relationship is akin to a secure attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1969), where the practitioner provides reliable and sensitive emotional security, becoming a safe base for the child. As a result of the close relationship positive outcomes emerge (for the most part) for the child.

Previous studies have also made links between the nurture group practitioner-child relationship and the development of positive SEMH outcomes (Garner and Thomas, 2011; Pyle and Rae, 2015). The child also begins to be less reliant on the nurture group practitioner, developing a sense of independence in managing situations and relationships on their own. The child is able to figuratively hold on to the experience of the practitioner being sensitively attuned to their needs, and providing emotional containment.

As the child transitions out of the nurture group, this represents an ending to the practitioner-child relationship journey. Endings are recognised as evoking conflicting emotions, representing growth and development, as well as loss (Salzberger-Wittenberg, et. al. 1999; Youell, 2006). Participants described experiencing painful and difficult feelings e.g. loss, wishing to maintain a protective role.

Question 3: What challenges the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and nurture group child?

The results of this research highlight the challenges that often arise in the relationship journey between the nurture group practitioner and child. The practitioner may struggle to form a connection with the child, and the child may seem to push the practitioner away and emotionally shut themselves off. For other relationships, the child's behaviour can feel challenging. The child may harm others, misbehave, or become involved in arguments, all of which can lead to the relationship feeling unsafe and unpredictable. These differences in the way the child presents and relates to the practitioner could be understood in terms of different forms of attachment patterns and relationships (Ainsworth, et. al. 1978; Bowlby, 1969). For example, an insecure avoidant attachment style (Ainsworth et. al. 1978) mirrors the lack of connection that practitioners experience in some relationships with nurture children.

The challenges experienced by the practitioner impact on their feeling of being able to contain the child, support their development and facilitate change. This can cause the practitioner to feel frustrated and anxious, and full of doubt of not being good enough. These feelings experienced by the practitioner relate to the psychodynamic concept of projection; a form of communication, where a person transfers their unbearable feelings into another as a way of relieving their own emotional load (Burgo, 2012). The practitioners' feelings of anxiety, frustration and not feeling good enough may in fact be the child's own feelings that they have projected into the practitioner.

These challenges contribute to a significant emotionally draining experience for the practitioners. Participants frequently used strong emotion carrying words, such as stressed, worried, frustrated, and overwhelmed. Previous research into nurture groups has also described similar emotionally draining experiences (Birch, 2016, Middleton, 2018). The current research highlights the importance of practitioners (the containers) being contained themselves, to continue providing emotional security to the nurture group child. Bion (1985) discussed the notion of container-contained, whereby for an adult to provide containment to a child, they must themselves feel emotionally

secure. Participants highlighted the necessity of seeking support for themselves, so they could continue to carry the child's emotional load.

Challenges in the relationship between the nurture group practitioner and child can lead to the practitioner feeling unable to facilitate change, and question their approach to supporting the child. However, when faced by this challenge, participants often described taking the time to reflect on what the child may be communicating through their behaviour, helpfully prompting them to seek greater understanding of the child. Therefore, it could be that the challenges faced by the practitioner become part of a shared difficult experience that contributes to the development of a close relationship bond.

Implications

The results of this research have implications for training and development of nurture group practitioners and nurture group practice. The results can be used to inform and guide practitioners in how to develop a close and successful relationship with their nurture groups children, and how to manage the challenges that may be faced along the way. Links to psychodynamic and attachment theory could be used as part of training and supervision for nurture group practitioners to enhance their theoretical understanding of the relationship, and reflect on the possible factors at play when challenges arise.

The research also highlights the emotional challenge that nurture group practitioners face, and the importance of having supportive structures in place to offer emotional containment. Jackson (2002) stresses the importance of school staff having a space to process the emotions they face in their work with children, providing containment and relief from the strains and persecutory feelings they hold. Hulusi and Maggs (2015) argue that these reflective systems enable school staff to break down and make sense of the child and their own experiences, and thus have capacity to continue to work effectively to meet the needs of the child. This has implications for nurture group settings, LAs and professionals such as educational psychologists to ensure that safe, supportive structures are in place to help nurture group practitioners manage the emotional load, respond to challenges when they arise, and help meet the needs of the nurture children. Supportive structures could include monthly individual or group supervision, facilitated by practitioners such as educational psychologists or appropriately trained advisory teachers, network meetings, and termly training opportunities (see Rae et. al. 2017). In addition, structures could be put in place within individual settings to ensure that practitioners have access to support and guidance from colleagues throughout the week.

Finally, the results of the current study could be translated into a storybook to narrate the nurture group practitioner-child relationship journey in a way that is more accessible to nurture group practitioners, stakeholders, parents/carers and professionals. Please see **Appendix 3 and 4** for a copy of a suggested story description and corresponding drawing intended for all those involved in the support, training and supervision of nurture practitioners, e.g. educational psychologists and advisory teachers.

Limitations

We acknowledge that the nurture groups practitioner is just one person within a two-person relationship. The views and experiences of the child could have also offered insight into the practitioner-child relationship. This research could have sought the perspectives of both the practitioner and child, allowing some triangulation of the data and insight from both sides of the relationship. However, seeking the perspective of the child most likely would not have offered the same depth of insight into the relationship due to the developmental ages of the children in KS1 nurture groups.

The small sample is the main limitation of this research. In future, seeking a larger sample, perhaps by expanding the research to nurture groups outside of the LA, would provide a greater volume of data, adding to the power and richness of the analysis.

Future research

To build on the results of this grounded theory study of the nurture group practitioner-child relationship, the next step would be to test the results out to increase the reliability. This could be done by seeking nurture group practitioners' views of the research, and exploring whether the results reflect their own experiences. Focus groups, or a survey using semi-structured interviews or questionnaires could be used to verify the results.

As the current research focused on the practitioner-child relationship from the perspective of the nurture group practitioner, it would be interesting for further research to explore the relationship from the child's perspective. Balisteri (2016) studied this, though the breadth and depth to which the child's views were sought was narrow, with limitations in the quantitative measures used. A qualitative approach to exploring the child's views would add a degree of richness to the current research and the study by Balisteri (2016).

It would also be interesting to explore the nurture group practitioner-child relationship within alternative models of nurture groups or a different age group to identify the similarities and differences in the practitioner-child relationships across those nurture groups where the views of young people may be more easily gathered.

Research could seek to further explore and explain nurture groups in relation to psychodynamic theory. Further exploration and/or application of a psychodynamic perspective could help increase the theoretical understanding of nurture groups, and the practitioner-child relationship, alongside attachment theory, which is already central to the foundation of nurture groups.

CONCLUSIONS

This small-scale research explored and explained how nurture group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the nurture group child. It provides an explanatory insight into the factors that lead to a successful practitioner-child relationship, and the challenges that can arise. Five key categories; *beginnings, supporting the child's development, trust, challenges and a close relationship* were identified. These categories link over time and describe a relationship journey, with the category of 'a close relationship' being the overarching category. The practitioner-child relationship can be understood in relation to attachment and psychodynamic theory, to help describe the processes at play within the relationship journey.

This research has implications for training for practitioners, where attachment and psychodynamic theory can be shared to provide greater understanding of the factors that shape and influence the practitioner-child relationship. The findings also indicate the importance of supportive structures being available for nurture group practitioners to reflect on the nurture child, to develop a greater understanding of their communications and needs, and receive containment from the heavy emotional load of the role.

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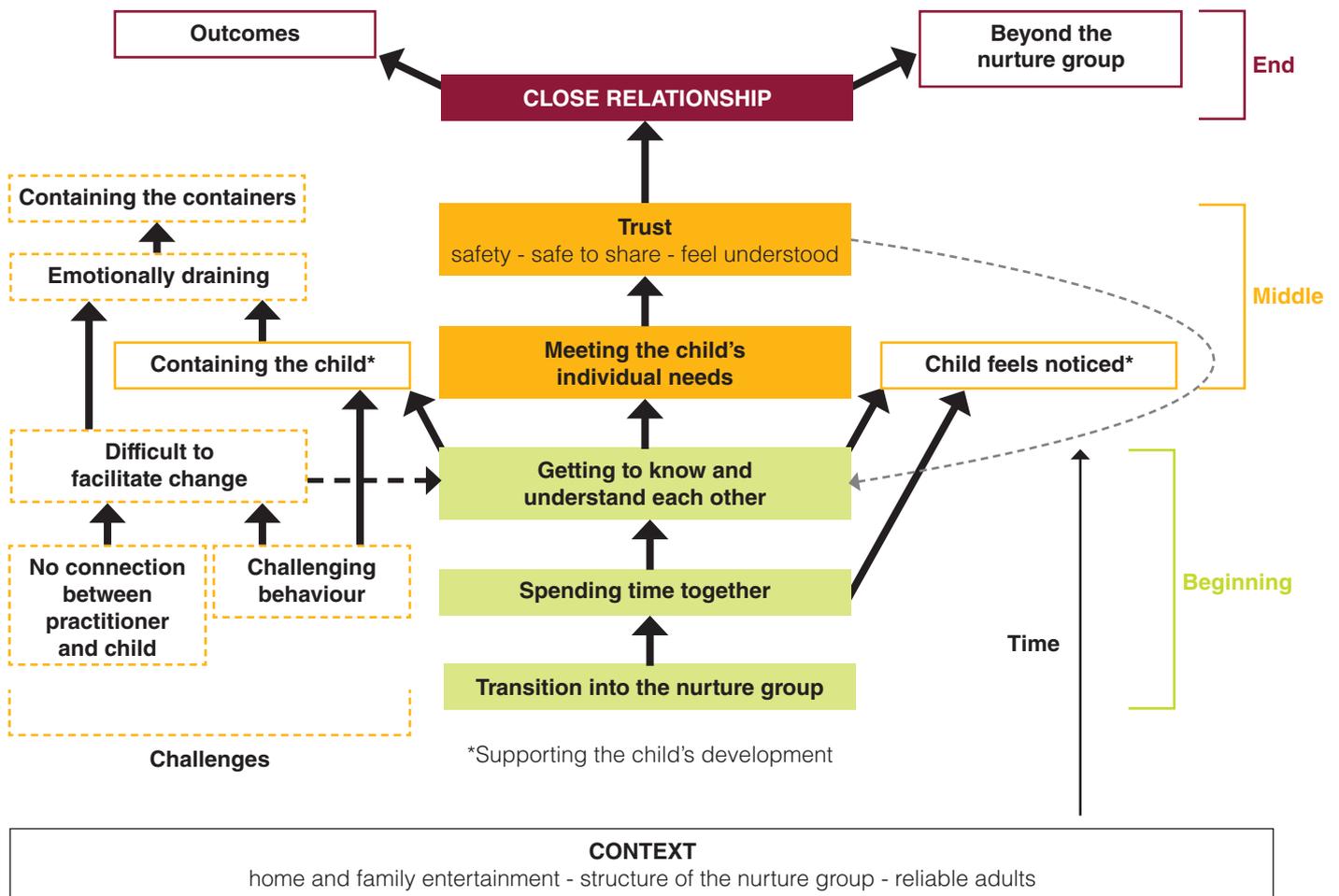
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APPENDIX 1: Interview schedule

1. How would you describe your relationship with the children in your nurture group?
2. Can you tell me about how the relationship between a nurture practitioner and nurture group child develops?
 - How does the relationship change over time?
 - What do you feel influences this change?
3. Can you recall a nurture group child with whom you have held a good relationship?
 - Could you describe that relationship?
 - What enabled that relationship?
4. Can you recall a nurture group child with whom you have held more of a challenging relationship?
 - Could you describe that relationship?
 - What do you feel challenged that relationship?
5. Do you think that the relationship(s) held between the nurture group practitioner and nurture group child is important?
 - If yes, what do you feel is important about the relationship(s)?
6. As you look back over the relationships you have held as a nurture group practitioner, what do you feel has been important about these relationships?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about the relationship?

APPENDIX 2: Detailed map of the emergent theory of the nurture group practitioner-child relationship



APPENDIX 3: Suggested story description and corresponding drawing (Appendix 4)

Intended for all those involved in the support, training and supervision of nurture practitioners, e.g. educational psychologists and advisory teachers.

A STORY ABOUT A JOURNEY BETWEEN A PRACTITIONER AND CHILD

This story begins with a practitioner and a child who venture out on a journey with their nurture family. The child has a heavy backpack full of feelings and experiences that require nurturing. The practitioner has a responsibility of guiding and protecting the child, although the child doesn't yet trust the practitioner to keep them safe. The practitioner and child spend a lot of time together, and slowly begin to get to know and understand each other as they continue further on their journey.

Over time, the practitioner is able to carry some of the weight from the child's backpack, and replace it with experiences that nourish and extend the child's development and wellbeing. While rewarding, this act can be emotionally draining for the practitioner.

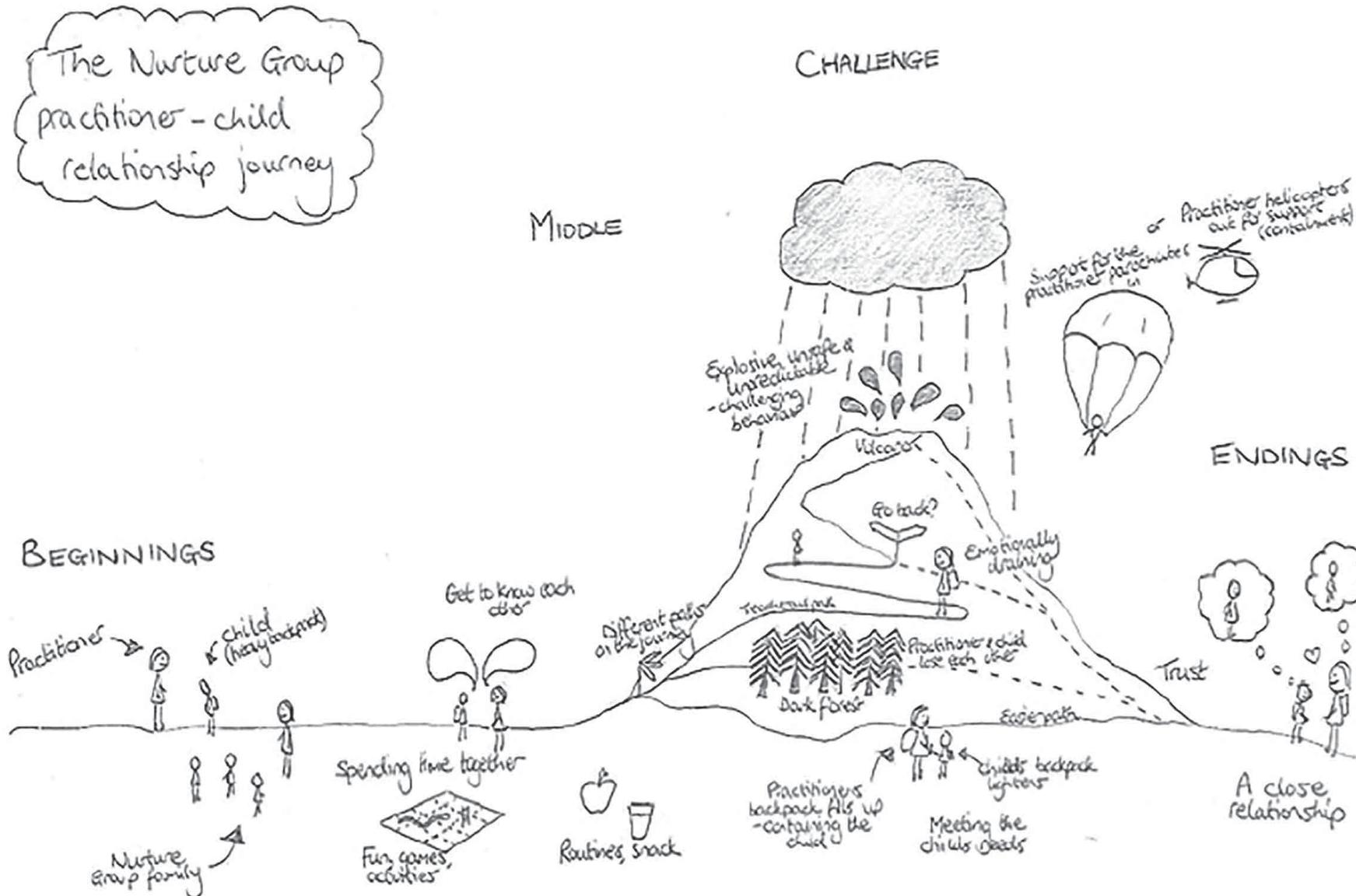
While some journeys are relatively smooth, other journeys may venture along treacherous paths, into a dark forest where the practitioner and child become separated and lose their way, or lead up a steep and rocky volcano, where eruptions are unpredictable and threaten the practitioner and child's safety. These paths are full of fear, worry and doubt, which the practitioner tries hard to carry to protect the child, adding to their emotional load. To ensure the practitioner can survive and continue the journey with the child, they draw on support from others along the way, who help to carry the load or enable the practitioner to leave some of the load behind.

When the journey ventures on to a treacherous path, the practitioner has the tricky task of trying to find a different path, or head back to an earlier point. Treacherous paths can be overcome, but can cause damage and leave scars that never quite go away.

Over time the practitioner and child's journey nears an end, and something very close and special has been built: their relationship. This relationship feels very powerful and emotive, where both practitioner and child have a deep understanding of each other, just like a parent and child. The child feels great trust, comfort and safety in the practitioner, and is nourished enough to continue to develop and become independent. The practitioner feels great fondness and pride in the child's journey, yet begins to mourn the expected loss that the end of the journey brings.

The epilogue to this story tells the reader that for some practitioners and children (although not all), their relationship journey continues in some way. Every so often they visit each other or wave as they pass by, re-experiencing the feelings they previously had towards each other.

APPENDIX 4: Illustration of the story of the practitioner-child journey: A pictorial representation of the results



NURTURING THE NURTURERS: A CASE STUDY EXPLORING THE WELLBEING OF A GROUP OF NURTURE GROUP PRACTITIONERS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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Keywords: nurture groups, practitioner wellbeing, resource capability

ABSTRACT

Previous research exploring the role of nurture group practitioners (NGPs) has highlighted the complexities of the skilled work undertaken by these educators working with some of the most vulnerable pupils in schools, however, little research has been dedicated to investigating the demographics of this workforce and their perceptions of the stressors that affect their wellbeing in the workplace. This case study utilised an adapted version of constructivist grounded theory methodology to analyse data gathered from demographic questionnaires, wellbeing indicator surveys and semi-structured interviews to develop an understanding of NGPs that can be explored in future research. Data analysis resulted in the emergence of some distinctive concepts indicating a preliminary theoretical understanding of the emotional and psychological resources that NGPs employ in their daily work that act as stress moderators, allowing them to cope with the stressors of their roles more effectively, thereby enhancing their wellbeing and ultimately creating better learning environments for the pupils in their nurture groups. Results suggest that NGPs have a unique 'resource capability' and other attributes associated with high levels of emotional intelligence (EI) and that further understanding, development and protection of these attributes in relation to workplace stressors would be beneficial for their wellbeing and work-related outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a growing recognition that the school environment plays a major role in the social and emotional competence and wellbeing of children (Education Support Partnership, 2017a). Extensive developmental research into this area links pupils' mastery of social-emotional competencies with greater wellbeing and better academic performance, and further shows that the failure to achieve competence in these areas can lead to a variety of academic and personal difficulties experienced by pupils throughout their lives (Eisenberg, 2006 and Guerra and Bradshaw, 2008 cited in Durlak et. al., 2011). Yet in the current educational climate where schools are under increasing pressures to enhance their academic performance in the face of time constraints, competing demands and limited financial resources, addressing the social and emotional needs of children adequately through effective intervention presents a difficult challenge (Durlak et. al., 2011). Founded on the principles of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982 and Ainsworth et. al.,

2015) and evidence-based practices (Davies, 2011), nurture groups (NGs) have been found to offer an effective short-term, inclusive and focused psychosocial intervention in schools (Hughes and Schlösser, 2014).

Schools must fulfil their statutory duties towards pupils with special education needs (SEN), including those experiencing any social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) (Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care, 2015). The vital role that educational professionals, such as Nurture Group Practitioners (NGPs), who facilitate specialist learning provision for pupils with SEMH in mainstream schools is widely acknowledged, with evidence demonstrating that it is the skills, energy and commitment of these practitioners that constitutes the most important resource a school has in providing care and education to these vulnerable pupils (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005; Syrnyk, 2012 and Cole, Visser and Upton, 2012). It is further acknowledged that NGPs are often involved in work that is emotionally and physically

Accepted on **22 February 2019**; published on **29 July 2019**

Citation: Middleton, A. J. (2019) Nurturing the nurturers: a case study exploring the wellbeing of a group of nurture group practitioners and implications for practice. *International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 5(1) 36–53.

challenging and that they face a range of stressors dissimilar to mainstream teaching staff (Cole, 2010). A causal relationship between practitioners' emotional wellbeing and pupil outcomes is well documented in the research (Briner and Dewberry, 2007; Roffey 2012 and Paterson and Grantham, 2016), with schools' responsibility towards promoting staff wellbeing and addressing stress levels also clearly established (Weare, 2015).

A study by Boyer and Gillespie (2000) demonstrated that to successfully promote the wellbeing of pupils with SEMH, providing adequate support, training, understanding and monitoring, and the setting of realistic expectations of the practitioners that work with them, is of prime importance. There is currently one NG for every 14.3 schools in England (Nurture Group Network, 2015), yet there is no demographic information available for NGPs and little is known about the training, expertise and experience of the staff immersed in the nurture approach in schools across the country (Davies, 2011; Szyrnok, 2012 and Middleton, 2018).

Drawing from participants representing NGPs in Hampshire where 2.5% of the NGs operating in England (Nurture Group Network, 2015) are located, this study aimed to: gather demographic information towards providing a more detailed picture of NGPs in this region; provide a comprehensive examination of the NGP's perceptions of their own wellbeing; and suggest possible interventions that can be adopted to enhance NGPs wellbeing in the workplace. It is further hoped that the findings of this study may highlight areas that develop understanding of NGPs that can be explored in further research.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In the past two decades numerous studies have been conducted producing a growing body of research evidence linking overall staff wellbeing to their performance in the workplace (Currie, 2001; Cotton and Hart, 2003; MacDonald, 2005; Department for Work and Pensions, 2006; Tehrani et. al. 2007 and Baptiste, 2008). The literature indicates that wellbeing is a key determining factor in workplace quality, performance and productivity (Bryson, et. al. 2014). In the UK, employers are bound by the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) to ensure the health and safety of their employees at work, including physical and mental/emotional aspects (Cousins et. al., 2004). A seminal review commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (Cox, 1993), found evidence to support the assertion that the experience of stress at work was associated with changes in behaviour and physiological function and noted that stressor reduction was the most promising avenue for intervention.

Previous research in this area has shown that to map, quantify or compare any change within a population's wellbeing, it is first necessary to be able to measure it (Bryant, et. al, 2015). Warr (2013) suggests that the effective measurement of subjective wellbeing requires several components including that the instrument of measure is technically sound, and that critically, the individual's own perspective of their mental wellbeing within the scope of the domain of employment, is taken into consideration. Based on previous research and in consultation with stakeholders (Mackay, et. al., 2004), the HSE developed a taxonomy of the most significant work-related stressors affecting the UK working population, called 'Management Standards' (MS). The MS highlight six key areas of work that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence (Kerr, et. al., 2009). The HSE also developed a self-report survey instrument, known as the Management Standards Indicator Tool (HSEMSIT) (HSE, 2018a) as a resource that could be used to investigate employees' exposure to these dimensions. Previous research undertaken by Cousins et. al. (2004) provides a detailed discussion of the development of this tool, including evidence of its validity and reliability.

Increasingly, alarming levels of stress and mental health issues among teachers, including depression, have been reported (Travers and Cooper, 2007). A recently commissioned report presented the key findings from a survey of 1,250 education professionals in the UK (Education Support Partnership, 2017b) and of the sample studied, 75% of the participants reported experiencing behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms where work was a contributing factor. Over half the participants surveyed in the same investigation also stated that they had already, or were considering, leaving education due to factors such as volume of workload, health pressures and the need for a better work-life balance. A key recommendation of this study was that to retain the country's latest generation of talented teachers, leaders and others, making their mental health and wellbeing a priority would be essential (Education Support Partnership, 2017a).

Researchers have also focused their attention on the causal links between teacher wellbeing and pupil performance (Briner and Dewberry, 2007). Published reviews conducted in 2011 (Spilt, et. al., 2011) and in 2014 (Bajorek, et. al., 2014) confirm that teachers are important adults in pupils' scholastic lives and consider the importance of the teacher-pupil dynamic on the wellbeing of teachers. Although both studies acknowledge that considerable research remains to be completed in this area, it was found that teacher wellbeing has effects on both a pupil's socio-emotional adjustment and pupil academic performance.

The literature also acknowledges the complexities and challenges of teachers working with children with SEN, in terms of the high levels of distress and burnout they experience at work (Travers and Cooper, 1993; Morvant, et. al. 1995; Greenglass, et. al. 1997 and Billingsley, 2004). Job burnout is conceptualised as a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors experienced in the workplace (Maslach, et. al. 2001). Research also suggests that pupils experiencing SEN are likely to require more learning support than others and are often co-identified as having additional needs, such as SEMH (Ellis et.al. 2012). Special needs teachers have reported that pupils with SEMH are some of the hardest to serve, and those working in this field have the highest rate of burnout (Garwood, et.al., 2017). Cole (2010) describes this work in more detail – as “emotionally draining, physically exhausting and occasionally dangerous” (p1). Pupils of disengaged or exhausted SEN teachers are reported to be frequently disruptive, struggle socially and emotionally, and attain assessment goals less frequently – all of which impact academic development (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009 and Ruble and McGrew, 2013). These findings would suggest that it may be time to give more attention to the psychosocial components required by specialist education practitioners to effectively serve students experiencing SEN and SEMH.

NURTURE GROUP PRACTITIONERS

NGs have been subject to a wide range of research investigations during the past 50 years, and are described as small, structured teaching groups that play a key role in the mainstream education of pupils with SEN, including SEMH (Cooper and Lovey, 1999; Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005; Sanders, 2007 and Hughes and Schlösser, 2014). As the pupils who attend NGs can present with varying difficulties that may categorise them as unable to thrive in a mainstream class, they are often referred to specialist Pupil Referral Units (Boxall, 2010) and can be at risk of exclusion (Syrnyk, 2012). Typically, a NG is a class in an infant, primary or secondary school where two adults – usually a teacher and learning support assistant (LSA) – work with a small group of pupils (Boxall, 2010). Although there is a need for specific research to provide unique insight into the particular characteristics and experiences of NGPs (Davies, 2011 and Syrnyk, 2012), studies suggest that NGPs have particularly complex and demanding roles that differ from their mainstream colleagues, in that they must cater for a diverse range of learning, social and emotional needs and manage high stress situations in the course of their work (Syrnyk, 2012). In a recent study Middleton (2018) noted there appears to be a lack of recognition of the level and extent of the physically and emotionally challenging behaviours experienced by NGPs, and that the impact this has on them is missing from current research evidence.

As well as highlighting the need to know more about the challenges NGPs face in their work Syrnyk’s study (2012) also drew attention to the issues regarding training pathways and professional qualification of NGPs, concluding that ‘little remains known about the training and experience’ of NGPs (Syrnyk, 2012, p148). Evidence suggests that the training pathway of an NGP is unclear and that qualifications of NGPs varies (Bishop and Swain, 2000; Syrnyk, 2012 and Shaver and McClatchey, 2013). Indeed, the main training specific to the nurture approach, available to qualified teachers and support staff alike, is available in the form of a Certified Level-7 short course, ‘The Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups’, offered in England, Scotland and Wales by nurturuk – a charitable organisation that provides resources and support in the development of NGs (nurturuk, 2018). The research by Middleton (2018) referred to earlier, focused specifically on teaching assistants (also referred to as LSAs) working as NGPs, noting that: ‘accurate data about the staffing composition of nurture groups in the UK is unavailable’ (Middleton, 2018, p23), despite anecdotal evidence showing that a significant number of NGs are staffed solely by LSAs. The most recent school workforce census (Department for Education, 2017) states that TAs/LSAs account for 27.8% of the school workforce, but there is no differentiation of the varying work roles and responsibilities for LSAs detailed in the report.

RESEARCH APPROACH

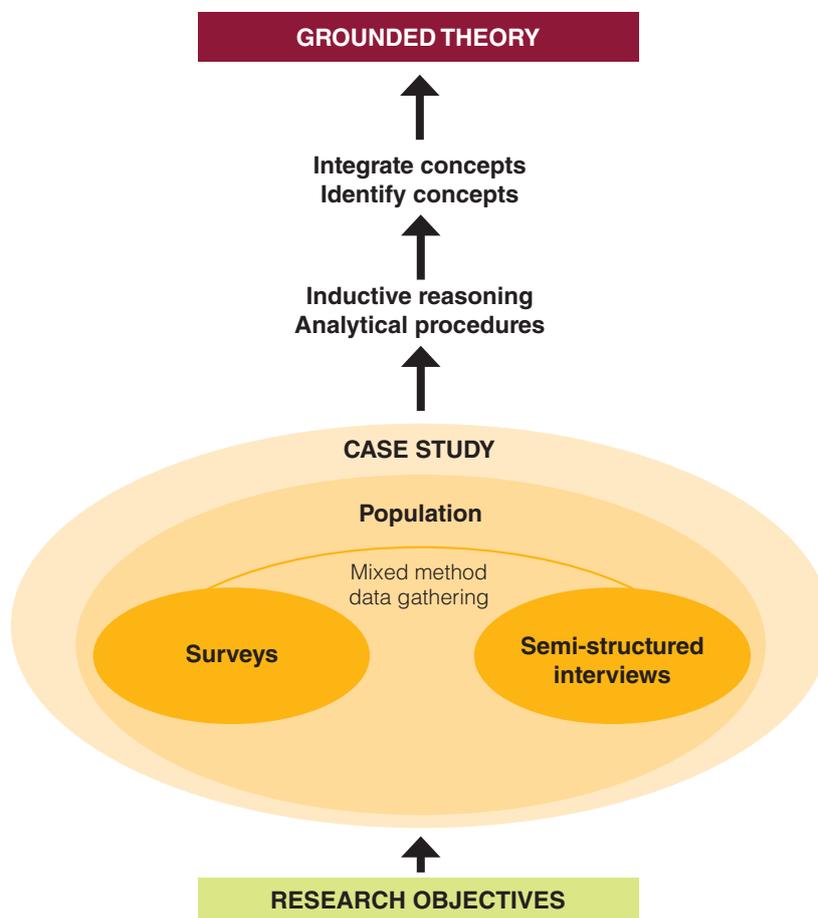
This study was mainly informed by constructivist grounded theory in that data gathering incorporated the multiple views and experiences of participants to identify and explain these conceptually through theory development (Breckenridge, et. al. 2012). There are two types of research activities in grounded theory methodology: data gathering procedures and analytic procedures (Corbin, 2017). Through a process known as inductive reasoning, the methodological process uses actual data gathered through field work to identify, develop, and integrate concepts (Corbin, 2017), making this an appropriate method for an exploratory piece of research to gain understanding of an under-researched area (Charmaz, 2006) that can be useful in practice (Hallberg, 2006). The outcome of a grounded theory study is the development of an empirically grounded theory, ‘both generated and verified in the data’ (Hallberg, 2006, p143), that can be further tested and verified with new data and applied and used in practice.

A case study approach allows the researcher to observe characteristics of an individual unit or population by intensive analysis of the diverse phenomena therein (Cohen et. al. 2000), with a view to using the results and findings to establish hypotheses about the wider population into which the unit belongs in future research (Yin, 1984), making this methodology suited

to the parameters of this study where a relatively small sample population size exists. For the purposes of addressing the research objectives central to this study an identified advantage of case study research is that it can provide a: 'unique example of real people in real situations (Cohen et. al. 2000, p181), thereby enabling the researcher to understand specific contextual factors in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. Case study research is flexible in that it relies on multiple sources of evidence, so can include both qualitative and quantitative evidence during data gathering (Wilson, 2013). This so-called mixed methods approach (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003) was selected for gathering the data to explore the research objectives identified in this study, as each source of data provided different types of information, allowing the researcher to examine a variety of experiences and perceptions of the sample population. This approach further addressed some limitations observed in the literature by facilitating triangulation of data which, in this instance, is understood as: 'the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon' (Denzin, 1978, p291) towards providing a holistic view in illuminating data in context (Jick, 1979).

Combining grounded theory and case study research has been demonstrated in previous research and has become a preferred way of producing grounded theory in research areas such as information technology (Orlikowski, 1993; Mazhevski and Chuboda, 2000; Lehmann, 2001 and Urquhart, 2001 cited in Fernández, 2005). This study has sought to address this observation by employing a case-oriented methodological strategy developed by Yin (1984), combined with the collection and analysis of a category of concepts/themes based on the adapted grounded theory methodology developed by Charmaz (2014) (see **Figure 1**). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), this strategy enables the use of a theoretical framework to study the case in greater depth. By employing a constant comparative method, whereby every part of data – emerging codes, categories, properties, and dimensions as well as different parts of the data – are constantly compared with all other parts of the data, it is possible to explore variations, similarities and differences (Hallberg, 2006).

Figure 1: Combined Yin (1984) case-oriented and Charmaz (2014) grounded theory model used in this study (see also Appendix 13)



DATA GATHERING

Observing the HSE guidelines in deploying and using the HSEMSIT (HSE, 2004a), an adapted version of the survey (HSE, 2018a) was distributed through an anonymous paper version provided to NGPs at a Hampshire Nurture Group Support Group meeting, with an electronic version of the questionnaire emailed to NGPs not present at the meeting. A purposive sample of 60 self-completed demographic questionnaires and 63 self-completed HSEMSIT surveys was obtained. The cross-sectional survey consisted of eleven demographic questions followed by the HSEMSIT scales investigating job-related stressors. The six management standards (MS) were measured by the 35-item HSEMSIT that included seven subscales. Two response scales were used within the tool: a five-point Likert-type scale and a five-point frequency scale. To facilitate analysis, survey responses were compiled into the Excel-based HSE Analysis Tool (HSEMSAT) (HSE, 2018b) according to the published guidelines (HSE, 2004b). This generated a score and a recommendation for action at the item level as well as an aggregate score and recommendation for each of seven sets of working conditions.

Semi-structured interviews were selected to gather qualitative data. This method afforded the use of predetermined, yet flexible and open-ended questions, that allowed the interviewer the opportunity to clarify and explore issues that arose spontaneously during the interview (Berg, 2009; Ryan et. al., 2009 cited in Doody and Noonan, 2013). A convenience sample was drawn from NGPs willing to volunteer to participate in telephonic, semi-structured interviews. Two volunteer participants were identified from this group and written consent to take part in the study was obtained from each of the individuals. Participants were interviewed telephonically at a pre-arranged time by the researcher. The interview schedule contained eight questions of a demographic nature, thereafter participants were asked to consider particular aspects of their roles and how these affected both their physical and emotional wellbeing. Each interview was recorded and saved as an audio file and subsequently transcribed as a MS Word document. Transcripts were read and analysed, and in accordance with the grounded theory approach, several cycles of coding analysis were conducted.

Employing an In Vivo coding approach the words and concepts of the participants themselves were used as an open code for the purpose of capturing the meaning inherent in NGPs' unique experience (Wilson, 2013 and Saldaña, 2016). Axial coding was used as a second cycle analytic process, to develop categories wherein similarly coded data was clustered together and reviewed before the assignment of tentative category names (Saldaña, 2016). The resulting analytic categories and subcategories from the axial coding were recorded in the form of code maps. A code map was produced after the first interview to show the emerging categories that were then used to adapt the interview questions through theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014), so that the developing theory could be expanded to gather new insights and refine concepts already gained (Kolb, 2012), before being tested further with the second participant. Analytic data identified in the axial coding cycle was extended through focused coding by synthesising, analysing and conceptualising the data, with the purpose of advancing the theoretical direction of the work (Charmaz, 2014). This coding method then continued until full saturation of the data was achieved, to establish the core conceptual category (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). **Figures 2, 3 and 4** show examples of the coding process described above, and **Figure 5** shows a workflow diagram of the Charmaz (2014) model of adapted grounded theory applied in this study.

This study was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011), and in adherence to the researcher's own university ethics committee guidelines. Voluntary participants gave their written informed consent agreeing to their participation and confidentiality was maintained by the anonymisation of all participant data and interview scripts. In compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 and to ensure safeguarding for participants, all raw data collected in the form of survey questionnaires, research project notes and transcripts of interviews were stored securely for the duration of the study.

Figure 2: Example of In Vivo coding

Transcript	Initial In Vivo coding	Memos
<p>Do you think you would have benefited from individual counselling or support if that had been possible? I do actually – I do. I think they say that even counsellors have to go for their own counselling, don't they? I think I would certainly have appreciated that.</p>	<p>"I do"¹⁹² "Counsellors go for counselling"¹⁹⁶ "I would certainly"¹⁹⁴ "Appreciated that"^{195d}</p>	<p>Participant identifies that individual counselling would have certainly benefited her as it recognised as beneficial in other therapeutic professions.</p>

Figure 3: Example of semi-structured Interview Axial Code Map



Figure 4: Example of focused coding code map

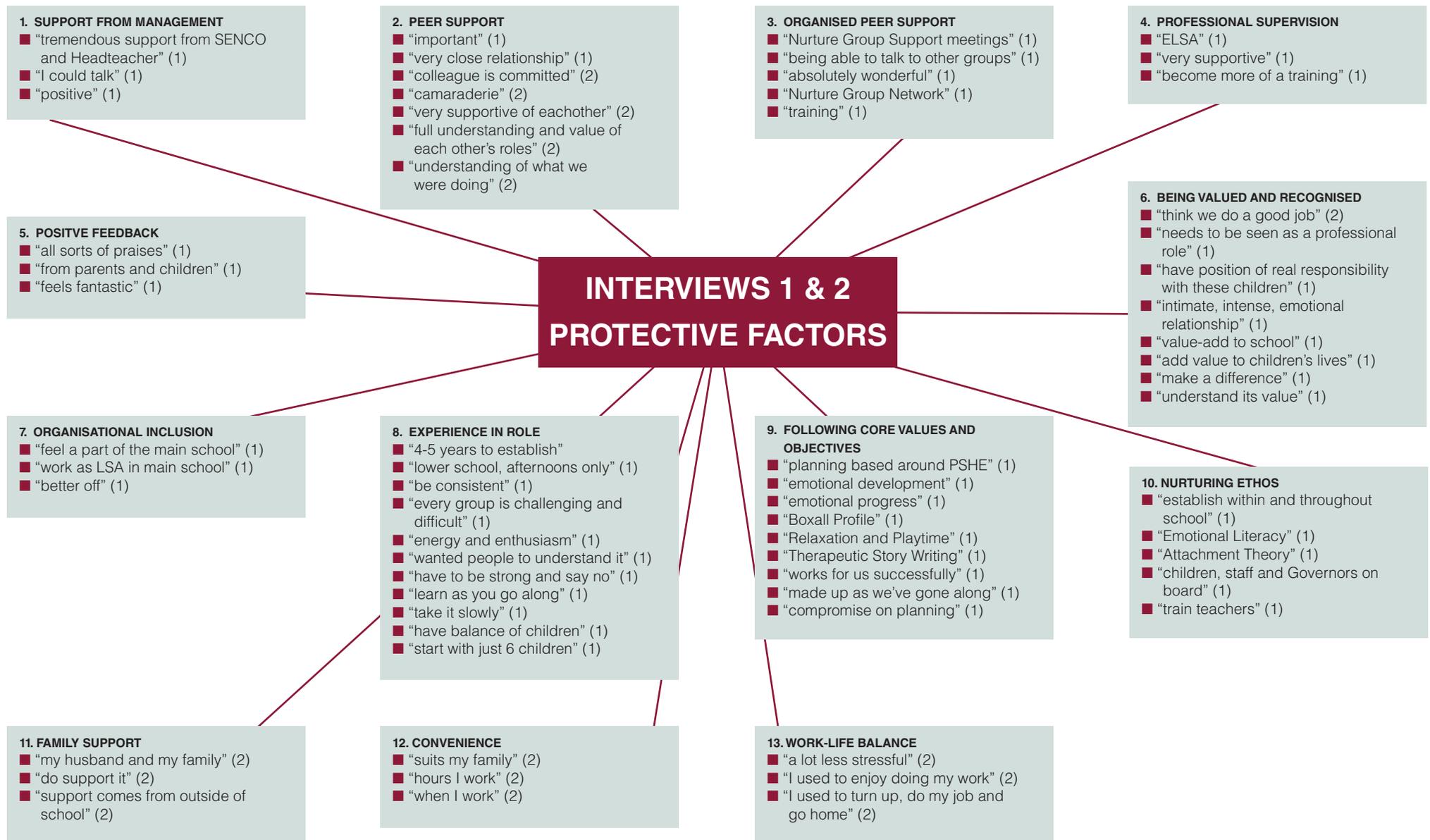
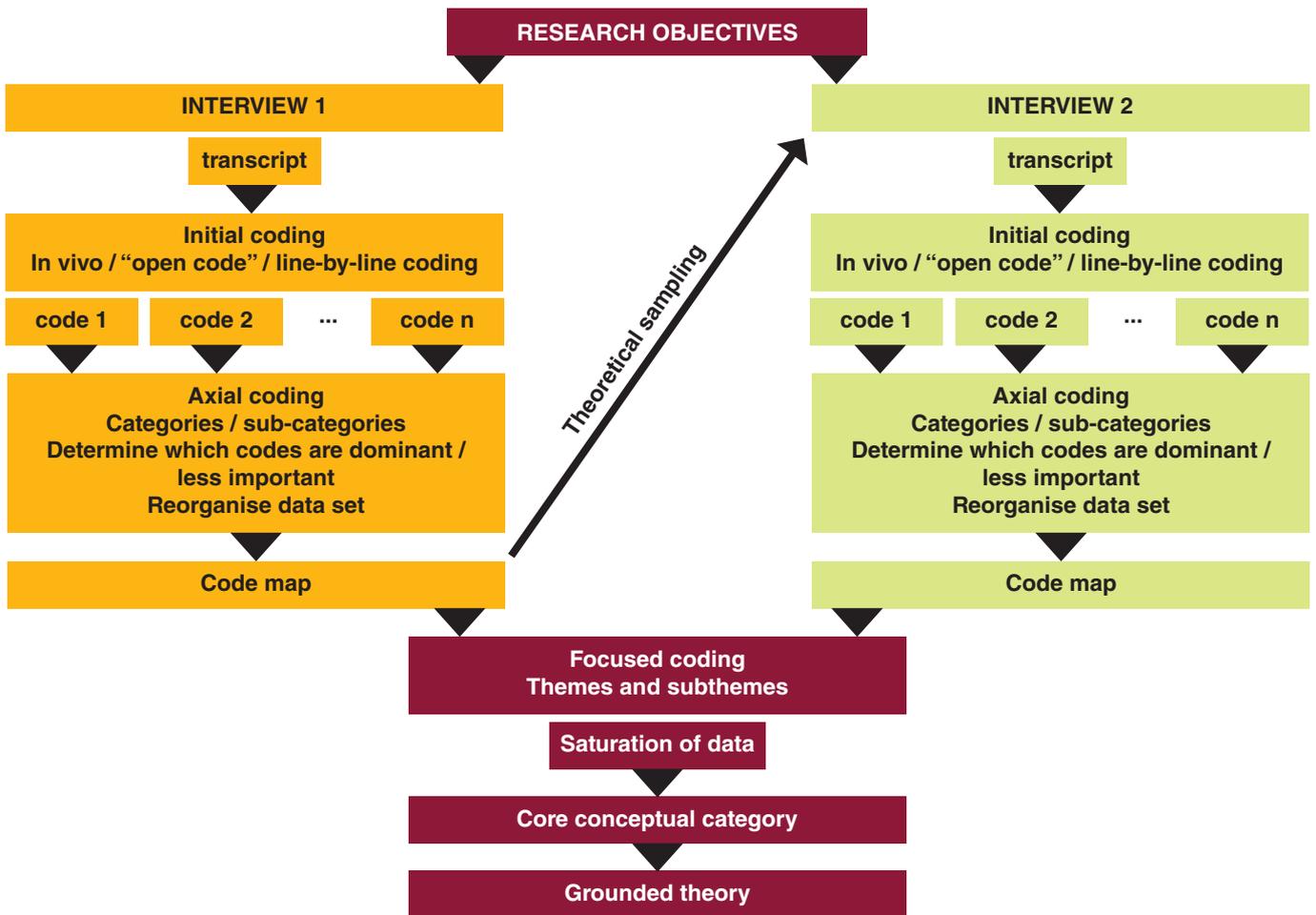


Figure 5: Workflow of the Charmaz (2014) model of adapted grounded theory applied in this study



FINDINGS

The research objectives of this study have been explored through the analysis of data arising from quantitative and qualitative study strands that can provide the level of detail and comprehensiveness needed to understand the complex social phenomena being investigated (Kawamura et. al. 2009). The integration of the data and analytical procedures form the basis for the generation of emerging grounded theory (Creamer, 2008).

The demographic data gathered from questionnaire responses (Table 1) allowed for the generation of a representation of the NGP population in this study based on aggregate scores (see Figure 6).

The results of the HSEMSAT (Table 2 and Table 3) shows that scores on seven items distributed across three of the seven analysis categories were identified as being below the 20th percentile in comparison to benchmark data gathered by HSE from 136 organisations and were 'red lighted' with the recommendation, 'Urgent action needed'. At the aggregate level, one of the MS

categories (Demands) was identified as being below the 20th percentile. In addition, a small number (N=6) of the participants reported that they are always, often or sometimes bullied.

Scores on several items (N=6) were identified as being between the 20th and 40th percentile in comparison to benchmark data and were 'yellow lighted' with the recommendation 'clear need for improvement'. At the aggregate level one of the categories (Control) was identified as being in this group. Scores on several (N=9) items were identified as being between the 50th and 79th percentile and were 'blue lighted' with the recommendation, 'good, but need for improvement'. At the aggregate level, three of the analysis categories were identified as being in this group. Scores on several (N=13) items were identified as being above the 80% percentile in comparison to benchmark data and were 'green lighted' with the recommendation 'doing very well – need to maintain performance'. These items were dispersed across six of the analysis categories. At the aggregate level, two of the analysis categories were identified as being in this group.

Figure 6: Graphic representation of a NGP in this population (aggregate scores)

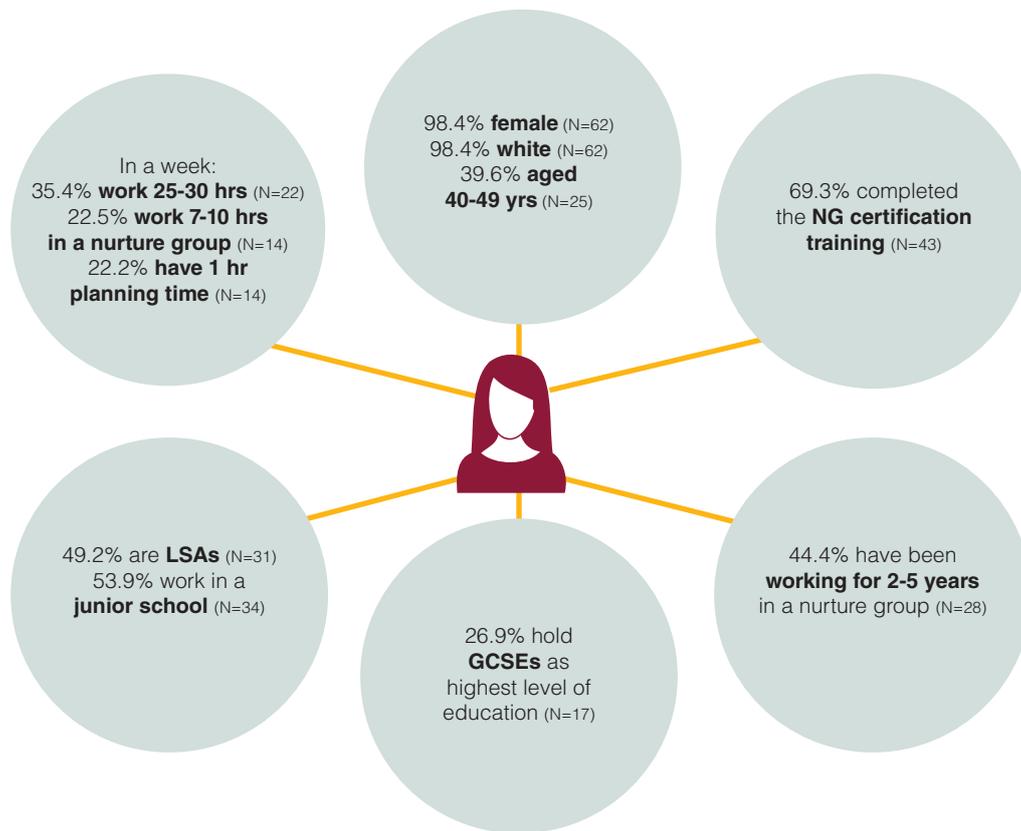


Table 1: Participant demographics

Variables	Number	%
GENDER		
Female	62	98.4
Male	1	1.5
ETHNICITY		
White	62	98.4
Asian	1	1.5
AGE		
21–29	6	9.5
31–39	7	11.1
40–49	25	39.6
50–59	23	36.5
60+	2	3.1
LEVEL OF EDUCATION		
GCSE	17	26.9
A-Level	11	17.4
Foundation Degree	2	3.1
Bachelor Degree	12	19
Graduate Degree	11	17.4
NVQ Level 3	2	3.1
Other (CSE/HNC/LACHEL3 Diploma/O-Level/PACE/Registered Nurse)	8	12.6
TEACHING QUALIFICATION STATUS		
LSA/TA	31	49.2
ELSA	23	36.5
HLTA	6	9.5
QTS	10	15.8
SENCO	3	4.7
Other (Child & Family Support Worker/Home-School Link Worker/Mental Health Lead/Nurture Group Leader/Pastoral Support Worker/Senior Inclusion Tutor)	9	14.2
COMPLETED 3-DAY NURTURE GROUP CERTIFICATION COURSE?		
Yes	43	69.3
No	19	30.6

LENGTH OF TIME WORKING AS A NURTURE GROUP PRACTITIONER		
0–1 year	21	33.3
2–5 years	28	44.4
2–10 years	14	22.2
10+ years	0	0
TYPE OF SCHOOL CURRENTLY EMPLOYED IN		
Infant	21	33.3
Junior	34	53.9
Secondary	8	12.7
Specialist Provision Unit	0	0
Independent	0	0
WEEKLY CONTRACTED WORKING HOURS		
15–20	11	17.7
20–23	7	11.2
25–30	22	35.4
30–35	8	12.9
35–38	13	20.9
38+	1	1.6
WEEKLY HOURS WORKING IN A NURTURE GROUP		
1–2	9	14.5
2–3	3	4.8
3–4	4	6.4
4–5	6	9.6
6–7	13	20.9
7–10	14	22.58
10+	13	20.9
PLANNING HOURS ALLOCATED PER WEEK		
None	12	19
30 minutes	2	3.1
1 hour	14	22.2
1.5 hours	7	11.1
2 hours	13	20.6
3 hours	4	6.3
Other (As required/if time allows at end of session/'Snatch-time'/varies/none necessary/4–6 hours termly)	11	17.4

Table 2: Summary of HSEMSAT results

	Your results	Suggested interim target	Suggested longer term target
Demands	2.80	3.00	3.29
Control	3.23	3.38	3.72
Managers' support	3.69	3.69	3.69
Peer support	4.12	4.12	4.12
Relationships	4.02	4.04	4.04
Role	4.29	4.31	4.31
Change	3.21	3.24	3.24

Data set: Organisational averages

KEY

- Doing very well – need to maintain performance**
Represents those at, above or close to the 80th percentile
- Good, but need for improvement**
Represents those better than average but not yet at, above or close to the 80th percentile
- Clear need for improvement**
Represents those likely to be below average but not below the 20th percentile
- Urgent action needed**
Represents those below the 20th percentile

Table 3: Results of HSEMSAT questions grouped by stressor (aggregate scores)

DEMANDS

Question	Average
03 Different groups at work demand things	2.73
06 I have unachievable deadlines	2.28
09 I have to work very intensively	2.03
12 I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do	2.83
16 I am unable to take sufficient breaks	3.15
18 I am pressured to work long hours	3.64
20 I have to work very fast	3.51
22 I have unrealistic time pressures	3.21
Overall	2.80

CONTROL

Question	Average
02 I can decide when to take a break	2.70
10 I have say in my own work speed	3.38
15 I have a choice in deciding how I do my work	3.78
19 I have a choice in deciding what I do at work	3.39
25 I have some say over the way I work	3.85
30 My working time can be flexible	2.28
Overall	3.23

MANAGERS' SUPPORT

Question	Average
08 I am given supportive feedback on the work I do	3.45
23 I can rely on my line manager to help me out with a work problem	3.83
29 I can talk to my line manager about something that has upset or annoyed me about work	4.02
33 I am supported through emotionally demanding work	3.38
35 My line manager encourages me at work	3.80
Overall	3.69

SUPPORT

Question	Average
07 If work gets difficult, my colleagues will help me	4.33
24 I get help and support I need from colleagues	4.10
27 I receive the respect at work I deserve from my colleagues	3.87
31 My colleagues are willing to listen to my work-related problems	4.17
Overall	4.12

RELATIONSHIPS

Question	Average
05 I am subject to personal harassment in the form of unkind words or behaviour	4.22
14 There is friction or anger between colleagues	3.70
21 I am subject to bullying at work	4.66*
34 Relationships at work are strained	3.50
Overall	4.02

*6 (10%) of the staff who responded report that they are always, often or sometimes bullied.

ROLE

Question	Average
01 I am clear what is expected of me at work	4.35
04 I know how to go about getting my job done	4.37
11 I am clear what my duties and responsibilities are	4.33
13 I am clear about the goals and objectives for my department	4.14
17 I understand how my work fits into the overall aim of the organisation	4.26
Overall	4.29

CHANGE

Question	Average
26 I have sufficient opportunities to question managers about change at work	3.20
28 Staff are always consulted about change at work	3.10
32 When changes are made at work, I am clear how they will work out in practice	3.32
Overall	3.21

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Demographic data collected from interview participants are summarised in **Table 4** below.

Table 4: Demographic data of the interview participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Job title	School type	Teacher status	Level of education	Nurture Training Certification	Work experience in NGs	Hours p/w worked in NG
1	Female	51 years	Nurture Group Leader	Junior	LSA/ELSA	BA(Hons)	Yes	10 yrs	15 hrs
2	Female	43 years	Nurture Group Leader	Infant	LSA/ELSA	BA	Yes	5 yrs	8 hrs

The following themes were identified through data analysis: demands; support and relationships; role; personal attributes and physical and emotional effects of stress. **Table 5** presents a thematic map of the key themes and sub-themes.

Table 4: Demographic data of the interview participants

Themes	Sub-themes	
1. DEMANDS	Risk factor	Protective factor
	Planning	Timetabling
	Skills range	Following nurture curriculum
	Behaviour of children	Experience in role
		Work-life balance
		Convenience
2. SUPPORT & RELATIONSHIPS	Risk factor	Protective factor
	Lack of support form management	Support from management
	Lack of value	Being values and recognised
	Negative feedback	Support from peers
	Isolation	Support from family
	Lack of communication	Organised peer support
3. ROLE	Risk factor	
	Lack of understanding of role	
	Lack of understanding of nurture practice	
	Conflicting values and objectives	
	Lack of vision	
	Conflict with teachers	
4. PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES		
5. PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF STRESS		

Demands

The participants identified a range of risk and protective factors that related to their workload, work patterns, work environment and the choice they had in the way they worked. Within this theme, several sub-themes emerged.

Planning demands, including differentiation of curriculum subjects, associated with running NGs was identified as one of the major stressors affecting both participants in their work, with both reporting that planning the lessons was not within their range of skills or expertise and this factor had led to sustained stress:

I'm not a qualified teacher and I have not had to prepare planning like a teacher before nurture group. We were trying to include maths and English and it was well, how do we differentiate the work for the nurture group children? (Interview 1)

Another major risk factor identified was assuming responsibility for a large number of children with behavioural difficulties which was deemed a common issue in many schools:

...the biggest thing was that they chucked the 12 worst-behaved children in the school all into the nurture group as a 'sin bin', it felt. (Interview 1)

Experience in the role was cited as a protective factor in that when confidence in the role increased, the physical and emotional demands reduced. Additionally, experience allowed effective compartmentalisation, creating a balance between work and homelife. Additionally, the convenience and suitability of the participant's work structure was described as protective.

Support and relationships

The participants identified a range of risk and protective factors affecting their wellbeing related to the relationships within the work environment and the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided to them, both professionally and personally. Support received from school leadership was cited as an important protective factor. In contrast a lack of understanding and interest from management was cited as a major stressor:

I would say the other massive, massive deal is the [lack of] support from the top, so support from the headteacher... the lack of interest that comes from the top is very much indicative of how they view nurture group. (Interview 2)

Recognition and value of their work, in the form of positive feedback from the school leadership, parents, and the pupils was identified as protective. Conversely, when negative feedback was received, the impact on wellbeing was negative:

... positive is the value that you feel that you add to the school when you have real support from your headteacher; and the feedback you get from parents and children that make you feel that you do add value to children's lives and that you are making a difference. (Interview 1)

A significant protective factor identified by participants was support they received from their fellow nurture group colleagues:

We both had full understanding of each other's roles and the value of what we were doing, so the relationship really supported me. (Interview 2)

Additionally, the support and understanding received from family helped to mitigate some of the stressors experienced at work:

Outside of work, my husband, my family – they do support [the work] and understand its value. (Interview 2)

External support organisations were cited as protective factors in the form of nurtureuk, and the termly Hampshire Nurture Group Support Group meetings. Additionally, the professional supervision received by participants in their roles as ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) was reported as being supportive in their NG work.

Feelings of isolation were cited as being significantly affective and this concept was expanded to incorporate physical isolation due to location of the NG away from the main school building:

I think that feeling a little bit isolated from the main school – that can be physical isolation because we are out in the hut. Also the kind of not being involved in the main school because I just run the nurture group in the afternoons only, so I don't really have that much input into the whole school. (Interview 1)

Isolation was also described in terms of the NG not being part of the main school staffing structure, which affected communication between NGPs, staff and school leadership:

[We] weren't part of any other team within in the school – so you have your year group teams or stuff and the camaraderie and the support and the understanding that you get with that was definitely not there. (Interview 2)

Job insecurity was cited as a notable risk factor affecting wellbeing:

It causes a lot of stress, a lot of pressure, a lot of looking over your shoulder permanently not quite sure if somebody's going to suddenly swoop in and take the role away because they don't see the true value of it. (Interview 2)

Role

The participants identified significant risk factors affecting their wellbeing with regards to their roles within their respective schools; in terms of the clarity and definition of their roles; their understanding of their roles; and how the school staff and leaders understood their roles as nurture group practitioners. Both participants cited a lack of understanding of the principles and objectives of NGs on the part of the staff and leadership as significant stressors:

I think they like it. They think it's nice and they think it's fun, but I don't think they understand the depth and the scientific knowledge there is behind it and all that it encompasses. (Interview 2)

The conflicting aims of academic attainment and progress versus improved emotional outcomes were described as notable stressors as they sometimes led to conflict between staff members:

Nurture groups aren't about academic progress, it's about getting the basics right first and it's more about the emotional development and it's very hard even to put a marker on emotional progress... and so yes, there certainly was conflict with some teachers. (Interview 1)

Role confusion and unfair expectations on the part of school leadership were described as risk factors:

My SENCO, my line manager, really has always thought of me as a class teacher. She always says that she forgets that I'm not a class teacher and I think that is how we need to be valued. Because we are teaching and taking a real class. (Interview 2)

Personal attributes and stress factors

Participants described themselves as possessing certain emotional characteristics that had allowed them to navigate some of the more challenging aspects of their roles. One of the protective factors cited by both participants was their total conviction that the work they did had value for their pupils. The conviction and resolution of participants allowed them to continue even when the required support was not available:

I guess that my inner belief of the system of nurture groups and what they can do for these children and the need that these children have, makes me quite stubborn and makes me quite determined to do it, regardless of the support that's there. (Interview 2)

Participants described the physical and emotional toll of NG work over time. Medical diagnoses, as well as more general conditions such as exhaustion and fatigue, were also attributed to the physical effects of NG work:

But it did tire me out and I do wonder if that's why I ended up having like an early menopause and hysterectomy. (Interview 1)

Both participants also describe the work as having notable effects on their emotional wellbeing, with one participant ascribing her use of anti-depressant medication to the effects of the stressors experienced during the course of her work. The physical and emotional demands of their roles resulted in them considering leaving their jobs, with one participant having decided to resign:

I think that it has drained me and now it's just I realise it's time for me a bit more how, yeah, it's time to walk away from the emotional side of things. (Interview 1)

Professional supervision that incorporated an adapted form of one-to-one counselling was suggested by participants as intervention that would possibly have mitigated some of the stressors and the ensuing physical and emotional effects experienced in NG work.

DISCUSSION

Demographic variables

Evident in the survey data was the anecdotal evidence observed in previous studies (Syrnyk, 2012 and

Middleton, 2018) that the majority of NGPs in this population are indeed LSAs. Given that NGPs work with pupils described as having complex social and emotional needs and often displaying challenging behaviour, it is striking to note that the educators charged with meeting the specialist emotional and learning needs of these pupils have limited educational qualifications themselves. While the majority of NGPs within this population are not formally educated beyond secondary school level, many of them are experienced in their field and hold specialist qualifications in emotional literacy and attachment theory, with some having attained bachelor and graduate degrees. Given these insights, the demographic variables are significant and warrant further scrutiny in future studies of NGPs.

Overall wellbeing

The results of the HSEMSAT analysis show that NGPs are satisfied that five of the possible seven MS for psychosocial work environment are within acceptable levels, indicating that their sense of wellbeing is generally good. This finding would seem contradictory given that the NGPs identified several workplace stressors deemed to be well below (20th percentile) the benchmark standards set for organisations. These findings were mirrored somewhat in the interview participants' accounts where they identified several risk factors affecting their wellbeing similar to the stressors seen in the HSEMSAT. The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to expand, describe and detail stressors not necessarily highlighted in the HSEMSAT. A possible explanation for these differences may be that the small sample size of interview participants limited the coverage of stressors experienced by the wider population as observed in the HSEMAT.

Workplace stress

The MS provide a taxonomy of chronic workplace stressors based on a normative view of stress (Elliot and Eisdorfer, 1982) which outlines those continued stressors in the workplace that would likely lead to psychological distress or physical deterioration. This concept has been expanded to the most commonly adapted model of stress employed today – the homeostatic model of stress (McGrath, 1970 and Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) – where stress is viewed as a relationship between a person, their resources (personal characteristics or energies valued by the person) and the environment. According to this model, stress is experienced when the person perceives an imbalance between the environmental demand and their resource capability that endangers their wellbeing. In the context of NG work, the findings observed in this study correlate with the conceptual understanding of stress described earlier. NGPs have identified the environmental risks associated with their work and have described the physical and

mental consequences they have suffered as a result of prolonged job stress, including emotional exhaustion, which is a key dimension of burnout (Klusmann, et. al., 2008). Participants' views in this study also reflect the existing literature describing teachers' experiences, where teachers report having to cope with a wide diversity of stressors including workload, role ambiguity, lack of workplace social support or classroom management difficulties (Alarcon, 2011; Chang, 2009; Montgomery and Rupp, 2005 cited in Mérida-López and Extremera, 2017). Consistent with the literature on the links between teachers' perceptions of stress and attrition, participants in this study cited similar stressors as influencing their thoughts about and/or decisions to leave their jobs, eg conflicting goals and directives and the range of pupils needs (Morvant et. al. 1995 and Billingsley, 2004).

In accordance with the findings in this study, previous research (Kyriacou, 2010) has identified the need for school leaders to identify the environmental stressors affecting staff wellbeing and to incorporate organisational practices of: 'healthy schools' (p31) to resolve the source(s) of stress. Several characteristics of good practice observed in Kyriacou's (2010) review of teacher stress were reflected in the views of participants in this study where it was suggested that in order for NGPs to work in safe and healthy conditions, school leaders should: promote good communication between all staff; make management decisions based on consultation; establish consensus regarding key values and objectives; clearly define roles and expectations; ensure that NGPs receive positive feedback and praise; provide a good level of resources and facilities; make support available to help solve problems, and ensure that duties are matched to NGPs' skills and training.

Work engagement

Klusman et. al. (2008) suggested a theoretical framework wherein successful teaching professionals are described as those who experience high levels of occupational wellbeing and succeed in creating: 'optimal learning environments' (p704) for their pupils. The current findings suggest that NGPs have high levels of work engagement which is described in the literature as: 'the willingness to invest energy and resources in one's job' (Klusmann et. al. 2008) and is associated with teacher retention and high-performance levels (Hakanen, et. al. 2006). In terms of this definition, and based on the findings in this study, NGPs can be considered successful in their work, despite the multiple stressors that their daily work entails. Why is this the case when the evidence in the literature confirms that when teaching professionals are exposed to prolonged and diverse occupational stress, it leads to burnout? (Garrick et. al. 2014, Johnson et. al. 2005; Maslach, et. al. 2001, cited in Mérida-López and Extremera, 2017).

Resource capability

Implied in the homeostatic model is that stress is not merely the product of imbalance between objective demands and response capacity, but of the person's perception of these factors (Hobfoll, 1989). Hobfoll's resource-oriented model of conservation of resources is based on the supposition that people strive to retain, protect and build resources, and stress is produced when there is either a perceived or actual loss of resources or when there is a lack of gain following the investment of resources. Thus, resources are the: 'single unit necessary for understanding stress' (Hobfoll, 1989). What remains to be explored is NGPs' 'resource capability' (p56) – what these resources are and how they appear to be a protective factor in keeping these practitioners in their jobs despite the constant challenges and demands of their work. Hobfoll (1989) states that personal attributes can be characterised as resources to the extent that they generally aid stress resistance. The emergent findings in this study further reflect evidence observed in previous research of NGPs (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005; Syrnyk, 2012 and Middleton, 2018) that suggest these individuals are distinguishable for possessing specific personal attributes that help them face the challenges of their roles. These 'resources' include resilience, empathy, self-awareness and emotional regulation (Syrnyk, 2012); their strong belief in the nurture approach (Middleton, 2018) and the motivation from intrinsic rewards gained from witnessing the positive impact on pupil progress (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005). This range of attributes has been associated with the concepts of emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional resilience found in practitioners engaged in helping professions such as social work, nursing and teaching (Grant and Kinman, 2013).

Emotional intelligence and resilience

Mayer and Salovey's (1997) construct of EI has been found to be a major personal resource in the workplace, with four emotional abilities interactively involved in EI: perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions and regulating one's own and others' emotions. The important role played by EI in enhancing the resilience and psychological wellbeing of teachers and the protection it offers them against burnout and compassion fatigue has been highlighted in the literature (Mérida-López and Extremera, 2017). Strong links have also been found between EI and positive job performance (Carmeli and Josman, 2006), in that emotionally intelligent people tend to be more psychologically flexible, optimistic, socially confident and cooperative, and possess superior problem-solving and decision-making skills (George, 2000 and Bonnano et. al. 2004 cited in Grant and Kinman, 2013). The identification and development of EI and resilience as moderators in the stress process of NGPs might

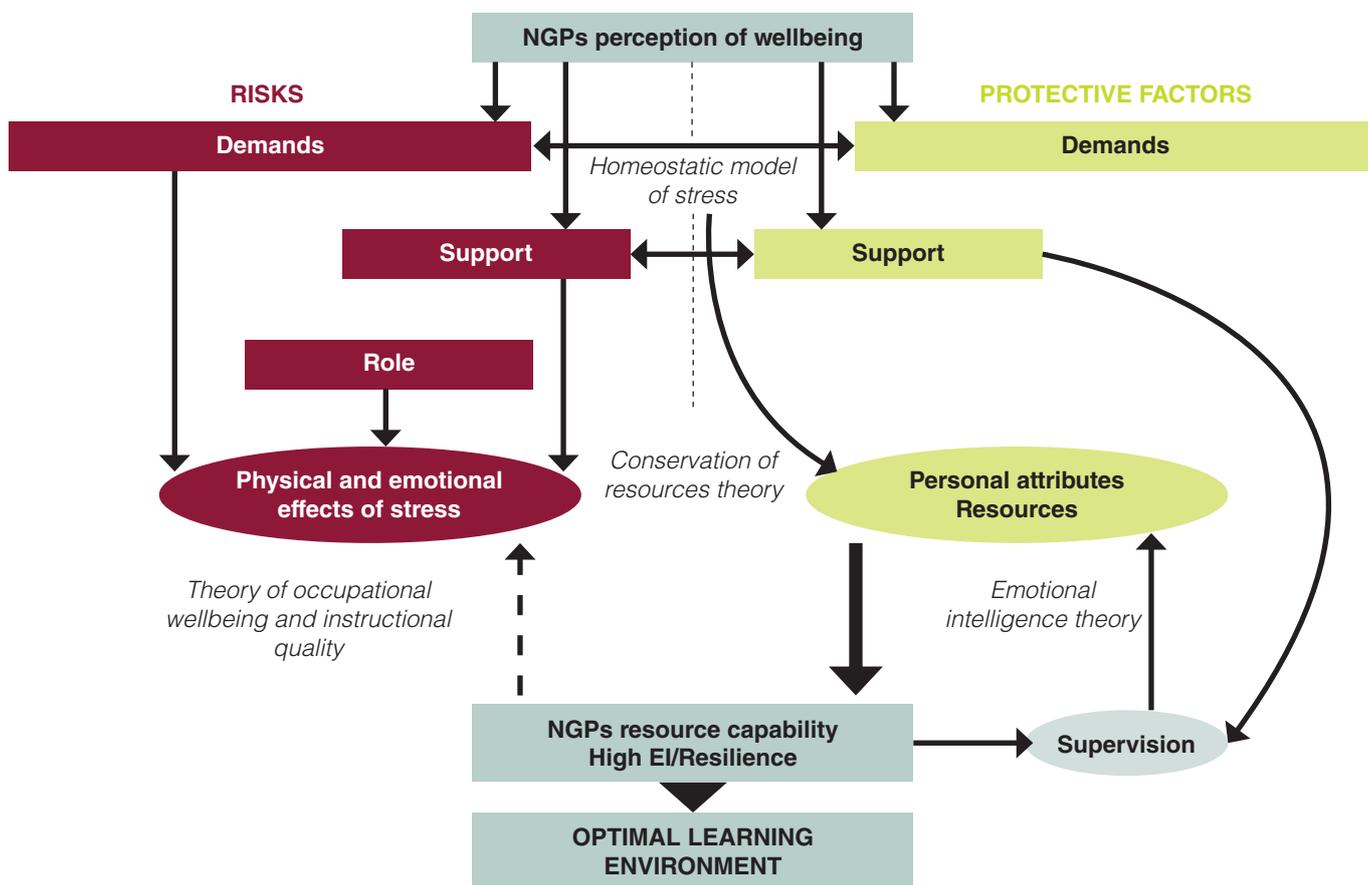
have significant potential for intervention (Nikolaou and Tsaousis, 2002). Schools that offer education and in-service training that includes aspects of NGPs EI, resilience and coping behaviour might enhance not only NGPs occupational wellbeing but also their effectiveness in their roles, thereby 'creating optimal learning environments' for the pupils in their NGs (Klusmann et. al. 2008: 704).

Supervision

Many helping professionals develop their EI and reflective learning through the process of supervision (Grant and Kinman, 2013). According to Hawkins and Shohet (2007), supervision provides a safe environment in which professionals can reflect on their practice and disclose and discuss their emotional reactions. In a recent report for the British

Psychological Society, Faulconbridge et. al. (2017) recommended that ongoing systems of consultation, advice and professional supervision be provided for educators undertaking a more formal therapeutic role in schools. Participants in this study have identified the need for the type of nurturing supervision environment described above wherein they could further develop their EI, resilience and manage practice-related stress. Rae et. al. (2017) have proposed a model of supervision that encompasses a combination of group supervision and individual supervision: 'based on the principles of nurture and narrative practice' (p214), aimed at improving practitioner wellbeing that might be beneficial to NGPs if embraced by school leaders. **Figure 7** shows a complex representation of NGP resource capability theory as described above.

Figure 7: Complex representation of NGP resource capability theory



LIMITATIONS

Due to limited size and context of the study sample, it was not possible to draw final conclusions about the causal relationships between the study variables. Similarly, the findings are limited in their generalisability. To address concerns regarding credibility and the management of data of qualitative studies utilising the grounded theory methodology observed in the literature (Charmaz, 2014), measures were employed in this study including multi-method data collection for triangulation of data, careful documentation and the thorough checking of interpretation and analysis throughout the research process (Kolb, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Despite limitations that small-scale research such as this presents, this study offers a novel exploration of both the risk and protective factors affecting NGPs' wellbeing and the emergent findings, if supported by larger scale research, could have implications for NGPs, schools and pupils in a wider context. The emergent theory derived from participant interviews, which would benefit from further investigation and research, suggests that NGPs have a unique resource capability that is a protective factor in aiding stress resistance. This study further highlights the need for school leaders to engage with NGPs in using tools, such as the one utilised in this investigation, to identify specific environmental stressors affecting wellbeing, and to raise efforts to reduce stress by incorporating practices aimed at the reduction of job demands and creating healthier and happier work environments. Additionally, by adopting supportive practices that increase the emotional and psychological resources of NGPs, such as professional supervision, school leaders could facilitate more positive outcomes for practitioners. These outcomes include lower levels of burnout and attrition and higher levels of staff wellbeing, engagement and commitment. This study has provided a glimpse into the types of people engaged in NG practice in terms of their training, qualifications and experience, thereby highlighting additional areas that could benefit from further exploration in future research.

In a climate of limited resources in schools, where stress is high, wellbeing is low (George, 2018) and demands for support for pupils experiencing SEMH is increasing (Faulconbridge et. al. 2017), protecting the valuable skills and resources of NGPs is essential for the sector. It is further hoped that this study has highlighted the valuable work of NGPs and shown the vital contribution they make in supporting vulnerable pupils in schools and made a case for the protection of this crucial resource.

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A PSYCHO-DYNAMIC ANALYSIS OF NURTURE AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICE: POSITIVE LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH RELATIONAL APPROACHES IN SCHOOL

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Keywords: language; behaviour; nurture; restorative practice; psycho-analytic theory

ABSTRACT

The importance of positive language and communication is often noted by researchers and theorists as being central to the success of approaches to behavioural management that have relationships at their core. However, what is practically meant by the taken-for-granted precept of positive language and communication is less well developed in the literature. This paper attempts to unpack the preconditions for positive language and communication in the context of nurture groups and restorative practice in school; to identify what it looks like in practice and how it has been evidenced in the research. Overall, a psycho-analytic stance is taken to link positive language and communication to well-developed theoretical principles, that help to unpack challenging behaviour and give practitioners a language with which to both understand and respond. In particular the notions of projection, reverie and the container-contained (Bion, 1963, 1965), and also the facilitating environment created by emotional 'holding' (Winnicott, 1945, 1956), have been examined in the context of practitioners' responses to children's often unconscious behaviours. The range of theoretical stances from both psychological and educational research have proved helpful in conceptualising the way positive language and communication can be understood in practice. It is concluded that more research is needed to further unpack this core and taken-for-granted element of helping children to manage their emotional lives in school.

INTRODUCTION

Proponents of nurture groups (NGs) and restorative practice (RP) in school agree that language is paramount to both approaches. In particular, they suggest that restorative approaches should 'develop a common language', that moves 'away from using, blaming, stigmatising, excusing, rescuing, helpless language...towards more relational language' (Blood and Thosborne, 2005; p10). But what exactly do we mean when we talk about 'relational language'? Outlining what it is not (i.e. blaming, stigmatising, excusing, rescuing, helpless) does not help us to fully understand and implement exactly what it is. Similarly, Doyle (2003) suggests that the use of circle time 'offers many opportunities for adults to adopt the NG practices of modelling positive behaviour and body language' (p264), but she fails to describe what such

body language actually looks like. Few studies/authors set out in explicit terms what positive language and communication entails, and if language is mentioned, it is often only in the most generic and vague terms. For example, Binnie and Allen (2008) in their evaluation of whole-school support through part-time NGs suggest that effective NGs should: 'place an emphasis on communication and language development through intensive interaction with an adult and other children' (p202), which gives us little to go on in terms of specific language-based aims and goals.

An emphasis on language and communication ensuring understanding by the child has been positioned as one of the defining features of children's experience in an NG (Lucas, et. al. 2006). This may be relatively straightforward in the setting of 'child-friendly' educational targets (Cooper and Tiknaz,

Accepted on 13 March 2019; published on 29 July 2019

Citation: Hibbin, R. (2019) A psycho-dynamic analysis of nurture and restorative practice: positive language and communication through relational approaches in schools. *International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 5(1) 54-65.

2007), and developing the language skills of the child more generally as advocated by Lucas et. al. (2006). However, it is less obvious when considering children's emotional lives that can be messy, personally threatening, and less than easy to make any kind of simple 'sense' of – for practitioner or child (Jackson, 2002). This is particularly the case for children from complex backgrounds where emotions and behaviours can arise that are as difficult to comprehend as they are to control.

In relation to RP scripted restorative questions that are open-ended and give everyone involved an equal voice are positioned as ways that social connections and mutual responsibility can be strengthened, and harms repaired (Zehr, 2002, 2005). Opportunities to air feelings about both good and bad events through the 'expression of affect' are emphasised through a restorative approach (Wachtel, 2013). However, exactly how inquiring language and self-expression provides teachers, practitioners and pupils with the tools to develop social connections and repair harm is less well-developed in the literature; it is simply – and uncritically asserted that it can.

In light of the lack of specificity about positive language and communication that is apparent in the research, it becomes necessary to clarify how this important cornerstone to both nurture and RP is understood and supported. This paper makes a tentative step towards trying to unpack and understand some of the elements that make up positive language and communication, asking:

- Which aspects of positive language and communication should be present in effective practice within NGs, RP and indeed any educational context where a desire to sustain a positive social dynamic is present?
- Which aspects of positive language and communication are primary and which ones are more peripheral?

This list will not be exhaustive; due to the constraints of time and space, a focus on four specific antecedents and outcomes to positive language and communication will be emphasised:

1. An understanding of behaviour as communication
2. Verbal and non-verbal language and communication
3. Inquiring language
4. Self-expression and active listening

These core precepts have been selectively drawn from a review of the literature on NGs and RP that empirically examine how language is positioned, examined and evidenced. The most salient aspects of this list will be drawn together towards the end, to provide a clear guide to best practice. Empirical evidence to highlight

these antecedents and outcomes will be drawn from the Comparative Nurture Group Study (CNG Study hereafter) where available, and a closer understanding of the methodology for this research can be found there (Warin and Hibbin, 2016a, 2016b). Methodologically therefore, this paper combines both a theoretical and conceptual attempt at unpacking some of the ideas surrounding what constitutes positive language and communication, with an examination of ways that the author encountered positive language and communication in the research field.

In terms of the academic literature, the necessary ingredients to positive language and communication will be examined in light of psychoanalytic psychology that emphasises processes of projection, containment, and reverie (Bion, 1963, 1965; Klein, 1932), and object relations theory highlighting the facilitating 'holding' environment (Winnicott, 1945, 1956), alongside more practice-based educational research where nurture provision, RP and theories of learning are emphasised. The rationale for choosing psychoanalytic psychology to frame this discussion lies in the usefulness of psychodynamic approaches that see human functioning as being based on the interaction of internal drives and forces; particularly unconscious drives that are prevalent in early childhood where the psychic apparatus of the 'id' (Freud, 1923) predominates. Other scripted language-based approaches such as Social Stories (Gray, 1995) that teach children with autism to 'read' social situations will not be part of this analysis. This is due to a desire to focus on how positive language and communication functions on a more generalised basis, rather than in relation to specific developmental disorders.

The initial interest in this exploration stems from the CNG Study that examined the use of NGs in seven schools in the north west of England (Warin and Hibbin, 2016a, 2016b). This study provided the author with the initial exposure to RP where the NG settings that were most successful in nurture also had a leaning towards a restorative approach through avoiding punitive sanction systems and sustaining positive relationships. The CNG Study (Warin and Hibbin, 2016a, 2016b) served as a springboard for RP research exploring the use of a restorative approach in a range of educational settings. This has provided further insight into closely associated principles that focus on the importance of relationships, and also the concept of behaviour as communication. The rationale in parcelling NGs and RP together lies in the fact that these two concepts – the importance of relationships and behaviour as communication – underpin both NG and RP provision, where both '... philosophies are based on a will to develop, maintain, repair and sustain attachments' (Warin and Hibbin, 2016b; p7). Indeed, in the course of the NG and RP

research, it has become clear that practitioners with considerable and ongoing experience tend towards a difficulty differentiating between the two approaches that they view as stemming from the same ideological base of developing secure and trusting interpersonal relationships. In this respect, the second principle of nurture where the NG offers a safe base (Lucas et. al. 2006), and the fourth principle of RP where 'processes and practice aim to ensure the safety of all participants and create a safe space for the expression of feelings and views about harm that has been caused' (RJC, 2015), can be understood as an unambiguous point of alignment between the two approaches.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF BEHAVIOUR AS COMMUNICATION: REVERIE, PROJECTION AND CONTAINMENT

Behaviour as communication is one of the six principles of nurture, as originally proposed by Marjorie Boxall (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998, 2000; Boxall, 2002) and upheld by nurtureuk as a leading organisation in the support and training of NG practitioners. On a philosophical level, communication and language is linked to children's inner emotional worlds, where it becomes easier to enact their emotions in the absence of an ability to verbally express what they may be feeling inside. Certainly, there is strong support in the literature for the co-occurrence of behavioural/psychosocial problems with language difficulties (Gualtieri et. al. 1983; Beitchman et. al. 1989; Lindsay et. al. 2007) with children and young people frequently 'externalising' their verbally repressed emotions. Similarly, Evans and Lester suggest that student behaviour should be viewed as a function of: 'unmet needs that can result in aggression, violence and perceived misbehaviour' (2012; p58), highlighting the link between punitive disciplinary regimes in school and the challenging behaviour that RP tries to ameliorate. Therefore, a central principle on which positive language and communication lies relates to a deep understanding by educationalists of behaviour as communication; without such an understanding, any attempts at positive language and communication will ultimately fail.

Challenging behaviour has been theorised by proponents of the psychoanalytic tradition, as the means by which inner conflict can be observed, understood and ameliorated. In particular the work of Wilfred Bion (1994) that built on and expanded Melanie Klein's (1946) concept of projective identification whereby unconscious thoughts and feelings are defensively projected on to another person, is of particular interest. Bion's (1994) theory of Container-Contained describes the process of 'reverie' as the ontogenesis – the development from inception to maturity – of the psyche. The capacity for maternal reverie (understanding of and emotional attunement to the inner world of the

child) is developed through a process of projection from the infant/child into the caregiver, of unwanted, overwhelming and archaic emotional states. These negative emotions then become transformed by the caregiver to be returned to the infant/child in a more palatable and less emotionally threatening form. Here then, the mother/caregiver acts as a 'container' for the infant/child's feelings and emotions, and through the sense of being 'contained' the infant/child is helped to develop a capacity for self-regulation:

Melanie Klein described an aspect of projective identification concerned with the modification of infantile fears; the infant projects part of its psyche, namely its bad feelings, into a good breast. Thence in due course they are removed and re-introjected... in such a way that the object that is re-introjected has become tolerable to the infant's psyche.... the latter I shall designate the term contained. (Bion, 1994; p90)

This process of containment can be seen in the following exchange taken from the CNG Study (Warin and Hibbin, 2016a). Here Josi, a child who had accessed both nurture and also one-to-one integrated arts therapy as a result of early trauma, described her nurture journey and her sessions with Sarah, her integrated arts therapist (IAT). Sarah was able to act as the container for Josi's negative emotions, helping her to manage anger thereby feeding back and reframing Josi's negative emotions in less destructive and threatening forms:

Interviewer: Can you remember why you needed to go in the nurture room in the first place?

Josi: Because mummy had some not very nice people in her life.

Interviewer: And how do you feel about all of that now?

Josi: It's in the past now.

Interviewer: So, what's good about talking to Sarah [IAT] then?

Josi: I get quite angry and she gives me different ways of making me not be angry.

How these processes of reverie, projection and containment work in the context of education has been examined by Gibb (2017) in her doctoral thesis examining how NG teachers make sense of the relationship with the NG child. In particular, the psychodynamic concept of projection has been positioned as one way to make sense of and understand both the powerful feelings within the child that manifest in challenging behaviour, and the often knee-jerk and punitive reactions that such behaviour can elicit in the teachers and staff members who have been the receiving party for such projections. Reflections by

Jackson (2002) and McLoughlin (2010) on the use of the therapeutic working group in school as a means of exploring – and also containing – teachers' feelings towards such behaviour, has been useful in establishing how an understanding of behaviour as communication is essential to psychological containment (Bion, 1994). This is particularly for children from the most complex backgrounds of neglect and abuse where in a 'chaotic mixture' of 'rage, fear and distress...tend to be acted out through the body' (McLoughlin, 2010; 234):

'Some children will desperately cling to particular members of staff and become extremely dependent on them. Others project their intolerable feelings into staff and quickly become seen as unmanageable... Thus, they are experienced as entirely unpredictable and wild – 'feral', as the tabloid newspapers have termed it.' (McLoughlin, 2010; 234)

In his discussion of therapeutic working groups with teachers in school, Jackson (2002) describes how focusing directly on the projections – the negative feelings and emotions within the teacher/practitioner that are elicited by such 'feral' behaviour – can provide insight into what the child is actually communicating. This form of group supervision that focuses very directly on behaviour as communication, enables teacher/practitioners to move beyond the difficult feelings and knee-jerk responses that such challenging behaviour can often evoke, to gain insight into behaviour as communication in very practical and pragmatic terms:

'Teachers initially felt both puzzled and disturbed by the description of Mark pointing at his genitals....When invited then to think about what Mark might be 'communicating' through his behaviour, a number of different ideas were raised....This process of airing and sharing these possibilities together enabled teachers to make important links between what Mark was doing, how it made his teacher feel and how Mark himself might actually have been feeling underneath the surface.' (Jackson, 2002; 138)

Similarly Hanko (1999) suggests that without an understanding of behaviour as communication, the emotional expression of defiance that is often a signature of insecurely attached children can be misconstrued as 'mere attention seeking', rather than seeing in it a possible longing for gaining control" (in Greenwood, 2002; 307). Psychoanalytic theory provides us with a blueprint for understanding behaviour as communication on a very fundamental basis. Punitive responses to challenging behaviour fail because: 'creating more shame and harm in people whose behaviours most likely stem from the fact that they've already been harmed (Kelly, 2014; p52: in Thorsborne, 2014) is as counterintuitive as it is perpetuating. As a result, the ability to recognize

and prevent shame is an essential element of effective restorative interventions (Kelly, 2014).

Relatedly, the language and communication of teachers and practitioners needs to take into account these effects and projections so that children's challenging behaviour can be effectively contained. As succinctly described by a head teacher that contributed to the CNG Study (Warin and Hibbin, 2016a) '...once you stop reacting to the behaviour and [start] looking at behaviour instead as "what is that telling me about the child" – it's distress so often that's causing that' (in Warin and Hibbin, 2016; p32). Therefore, reconfiguring reactions to challenging behaviour is at the heart of interventions that aim to understand the child rather than merely manage and control their outbursts.

POSITIVE VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Once an understanding of behaviour as communication on a very functional and pragmatic basis has been gained by teachers and practitioners, the next question to be addressed relates to what positive language and communication actually looks like when it is being practically used. There is a deficit of research examining the taken for granted precept of positive language and communication; in a systemic review of 13 papers examining the effectiveness of NGs (Hughes and Schlosser, 2014), only two looked more closely at the particular strategies or styles of communication used.

Colwell and O'Connor (2003) compared the use of language strategies likely to enhance or harm self-esteem in NGs and normal classrooms. They found that teachers used significantly more positive language and communication in the NG classroom, characterised by four types of interpersonal contexts where corresponding language use could be either positive or negative, namely: lesson instruction; feedback; praise; and behaviour management. A fifth category of non-verbal communication was similarly classed as being either positive or negative:

- **Lesson instruction:** positive language use characterised by explanation, encouragement and hints where teacher questions are thought-provoking and attention-gaining. In contrast, lesson instruction based upon negative language use is in the form of directions, orders and solutions, and comments that are sarcastic and patronising.
- **Feedback:** positive language use characterised by teacher responses that accept and clarify, and pupil comments, ideas and questions are responded to with warmth and interest. In contrast, feedback based on negative language use disallows, ignores or criticises pupil ideas, comments and questions.

■ **Praise:** positive language use characterised by spontaneous praise of pupil's behaviour or work. In contrast, praise based on negative language use is uninformative and bland (eg describing something as 'good') or given with an added negative comment.

■ **Behaviour management:** positive language use characterised by behaviour management focusing on the inappropriate behaviour. In contrast, behaviour management based on negative language use contains depreciating remarks that criticise or reject the child.

■ **Non-verbal communication:** positive non-verbal communication characterised by the use of eye contact, smiling, or using a soft voice/touch. In contrast, negative non-verbal communication is characterised by shouting, scowling or adopting an angry posture.

What is of particular interest in Colwell and O'Connor's (2003) findings is the role of affect in mediating language use, where it is not just the content of what is said but the way language is emotionally imbued; the 'warmth' with which feedback is given is as important as the way the feedback is structured. Similarly, the avoidance of sarcastic and patronising language use in relation to lesson instruction reminds us of research that has been conducted on shame (Nathanson, 1992) where a range of defensive behaviours can be triggered by perceived humiliation. This is particularly the case in the comparative and value-laden context of academic learning where the risk of feeling 'shamed' on an intellectual basis is ever present.

More recently, verbal and non-verbal praise in the NG has been more closely examined by Bani (2011), who found that staff in NGs tended to use a higher frequency of specific praise compared to non-verbal praise, despite the fact that non-verbal praise tended to be just as effective in managing children's learning and behaviour. The affective quality of non-verbal praise was highlighted where Bani (2011) suggests that: 'non-verbal praise is known to convey feelings of acceptance and warmth' (p62). Indeed as Bani (2011) goes on to suggest, self-esteem is a basic human need (Maslow, 1970) and its rejuvenation is likely to occur in environments where children feel safe and valued (Quale and Holsworth, 1997). The kinds of non-verbal communications that Bani (2011) highlights as being beneficial to positive inter-personal exchange, include some of the ones mentioned by Colwell and O'Connor (2003) – eye contact, smiling, using a soft voice and touch – plus some additional non-verbal behaviours that denote the acceptance and warmth that is characteristic of safe and trusting environments.

Non-verbal praise/behaviour

- Eye contact
- Facial expressions – including smiling/laughing/winking
- Use of soft voice
- Nodding
- Clapping
- Touching the child – eg patting/holding hand/hugging
- Proximity to child
- Thumbs up/other signs of approval
- One-to-one attention
- Giving stickers/other rewards

Results from Bani's (2011) study suggested that the kind of verbal praise most likely to offer children this rejuvenation in self-esteem, was praise that was 'personal, genuine, contingent and descriptive (mentioning desired behaviour), and provided specific information, where the pupil understood why they are being praised' (p62). In contrast, verbal praise that was less effective at boosting self-esteem and controlling behaviour, tended to be: 'directed as an evaluation of the person and/or delivered in an unpopular and artificial manner' (p62).

This perspective on the importance of specific praise has been supported in educational research by Dweck (2000, 2006) who, through her work on positive growth mindsets, has asserted that praise needs to be specific and related to the learning task being undertaken. Dweck (2000, 2006) found that students with fixed beliefs in the permanence of ability tended to struggle with academic success. This manifested itself in relation to three different domains: learning, effort and response to failure, where students with fixed mindsets tend to believe in natural ability, that they shouldn't need to 'try' and correspondingly, if they fail, they are 'dumb' and would consider cheating in future. Dweck (2008) goes on to suggest that reassuring children they are 'smart' when they get things wrong rather than focusing on process-based concerns in terms of effort, work strategies, concentration, perseverance and improvement, merely serves to reinforce children's fixed mindsets. A similar caveat on the way we praise children has been provided by Baumeister et. al. (2003) who suggest that the indiscriminate praise typifying many of the programmes forwarded by the self-esteem movement of last few decades, is more likely to contribute to 'inflated self-esteem':

'Praising all the children just for being themselves, in contrast, simply devalues praise and confuses

the young people as to what the legitimate standards are.' (Baumeister et. al. 2003, p39)

Rather than, using praise judiciously by linking it 'to learning and improvement... in recognition of good performance (Baumeister et. al. 2003; p29) is as important as avoiding praise that is uninformative and 'bland' or given with an added negative comment (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003). In terms of the latter caveat, while the authors offer no explanation as to why 'an added negative comment' is detrimental to the perception of praise, it is suggested that this may be because even if praise is specific and informative, if it is packaged alongside a criticism, it is this negative information that will be most strongly attended to. Thus, the positive effect of praise on self-esteem is cancelled out by co-occurring critique.

There is tentative support for this idea in the literature on attentional bias, where Cardi et. al. (2013) have shown through their study of people with eating disorders that the attentional bias to rejection is correlated with adverse childhood experiences and that such individuals show vigilance to rejection and avoidance of social reward. In addition, Derryberry and Reed (1996) have hypothesised that motivational systems regulate attention, so that anxious children will be 'attentive to environmental threats' and 'would be likely to attend to the negative components of the self, including failures in achievement and moral domains, and to worry about a variety of environmental events, such as criticism from others...'. (p222). Derryberry and Reed (1996) go on to suggest that these attentional biases in anxious children are likely to result in such children forming very different representations than might be expected, adding weight to the idea that praise paired with critique will only be selectively perceived.

More research on positive language and communication is needed to uncover the links between the way we talk to children, and the effects of this on resulting behaviour. In particular, research that closely examines post-conflict mediation practices within the context of different behavioural management approaches, would provide a welcome starting point for understanding how positive language and communication is best fostered, or alternatively constrained, when dealing with challenging behaviour. RP conferences that provide structured opportunities for conflict resolution, would make an ideal locus for the observation of positive language and communication in this respect.

INQUIRING LANGUAGE

The effective use of inquiring language is central to the psychoanalytic process of containment in relation to children's challenging behaviour. As pointed out by Greenwood (2002, p303):

'Teachers frequently manage milder versions of these behaviours with understanding, firmness and skill, but, when they manifest in the extreme forms typical of such very troubled children, they can stretch us all to the limit. We can feel hurt, anxious, helpless, de-skilled, frustrated, angry, abused and even frightened.'

When teachers and practitioners are on the receiving end of behaviour that results in discomforting projections, understanding the affect and feelings that have motivated the challenging behaviour, and then figuring out how to best contain – to feed back in a more palatable, understandable, and less destructive form (Bion, 1994) – the negative feelings that have arisen can be a daunting task. As already suggested, negative affect triggered in the child is often the result of children's inner unconscious conflicts, and as such children need help in trying to understand why they may have, seemingly irrationally, acted the way they have. Greenwood (2002) goes on to suggest that: 'developing our own capacities to be empathetically available, while remaining detached to be able to *stop and think before acting*' (my emphasis, p307) is a fundamental aspect of working with damaged children. But how can teachers and practitioners remain empathetically available when they are themselves feeling hurt, anxious, helpless, deskilled, frustrated, angry and abused? This kind of 'secondary abuse' (Cairns, 1999) of professionals working with very damaged children, is unlikely to facilitate clear thinking and responses that are helpful to the child (Greenwood, 2002). In such instances, the use of questions and inquiring language enable time and space to be bought, to take a breath and step back from the behaviour and resulting projections that can often arise.

RP is the obvious home for inquiring language that builds scripted questions into the post conflict milieu. Restorative language is described as being open-ended, giving everyone an equal voice, including the person who has done harm. It is generally based around a very scripted response with varying levels of formality, from an informal 'corridor conversation', to more formal restorative meetings between various people that have been affected, in an effort to repair the harm, asking:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have your thoughts been since?
- How do you feel about what's happened?
- Who has been affected by what you did?
- In what ways have they been affected?

- What do you think should be done to repair the harm? (IIRP, 2006; online)

Such questions that focus on who has been harmed, thought processes surrounding the harm, and ways to make reparation, contrast with more adversarial and punitive questioning that is concerned with who is to blame and the kind of punishment required (O'Connell, 2004). In addition, a caveat about non-verbal communication needs to be made here. While questions and inquiring language are essential to a restorative approach, and indeed any approach that puts positive relationships and attachments at its heart, the tone and emotional affect connected to such questions is essential to their effective delivery: questioning can easily adopt a stance that is confrontational and inquisitorial, resulting in defensive behaviour from those being questioned. As suggested by an integrated arts therapist working in a school that was particularly effective in their NG provision, responses to children that emphasised reassurance and 'staying calm' (Warin and Hibbin, 2016a) were essential to effective practice when dealing with challenging behaviour. Clearly then, asking restorative questions in the absence of a calm and reassuring manner is insufficient in adopting a non-adversarial stance, in much the same way as criticism paired with critique is less likely to boost children's self-esteem (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003).

In contrast, a more reactive style based on trying to shut down the behaviour and punitively discipline the child, often leads to incorrect assumptions as to the actual cause of the disruptive behaviour; as the old adage goes, act in haste repent at leisure. Furthermore, such 'business as usual' models of discipline provide children – particularly disruptive children with complex needs – with the kind of authoritarian discipline that they are often very used to, and therefore something familiar, concrete and tangible to react back against; as suggested by Greenwood (2002) 'from a practical point of view, direct confrontation may just lead to escalation' (p303). Greenwood (2002) goes on to describe the necessary preconditions for enabling a child to feel safe, grow and develop autonomy in the context of their challenging behaviour:

'If boundaries and expectations can be stated and restated "while maintaining empathy for the child's dilemma" (Greenhalgh 1994: 112), and if children can be confronted in an emotionally non-threatening way – and without retaliation – it can be a way of demonstrating to the child that her difficult feelings can be 'emotionally held...' (p303).

Clearly then, the use of questioning language that seeks to find out who was hurt rather than who is to blame and allows everyone an equal voice rather than silencing the apparent offender, enables teachers to

confront the problematic behaviour while avoiding the damaging impact of emotional threat.

Finally, the value of silence as a space for reflection is another useful aspect of inquiring language that is worthy of consideration. Silence in an educational context has been explored by Ollin (2008), who calls for a reconceptualisation of silence away from an 'absence of talk', towards a silent pedagogy of reflection that is: 'free from intrusion or the demand for an immediate response or interaction with others' (p276). This links to theoretical conceptions first proposed by Vygotsky in his description of the way inner speech contributes to the development of children's higher mental functions. Fernyhough (2008) has extended Vygotsky's (1978, 1987, 1997) ideas on inner speech and the internalisation of dialogue to develop a model of dialogic thinking that depicts the development of social understanding and children's 'theory of mind' whereby 'the individual imputes mental states to himself and others' (Premack and Woodruff, 1978; p515). This model emphasises a 'progression from social dialogue, through the intermediate stage of private speech, towards fully internalised inner dialogue' (Fernyhough, 2008; p255). Opportunities to be silent, reflect, and speak inwardly, can therefore be understood as other important aspects of inquiring language that should be viewed as active opportunities for growth, learning and development rather than passive voids to be filled with verbal exchange (Ollin, 2008).

SELF-EXPRESSION AND ACTIVE LISTENING: THE 'HOLDING' ENVIRONMENT

As noted by Ogden (2004) 'Winnicott's concept of "holding" and Bion's idea of the "Container-Contained"... are ...often used interchangeably in the psychoanalytic literature' (p1349). However, the notion of Container-Contained (Bion, 1994) where destructive thoughts and feelings are actively transformed and passed back to the child in a more palatable form, can be contrasted with the more passive notion of 'holding' (Winnicott, 1945, 1956) that Ogden (2004) describes as 'the provision of a place' (a psychological state) in which the infant (or patient) may gather himself together' (p1352). Such a 'facilitating environment' (Winnicott, 1956) that simply allows the child to flip out, act out or just 'be known in all his bits and pieces' (Winnicott, 1945; p150) until they have recovered a degree of composure, is what enables a child to feel safe and 'emotionally held': as noted by Greenwood (2002) 'thinking rationally at such times is just impossible' (p305). In this way anxiety is managed in a manner that does not try to halt the experience or question what is taking place, but rather allows the child to move through the anxiety in whatever way is required, while simultaneously ensuring that the experience does not result in overwhelm or harm. Holding in this respect

is as much a physical (and physiological) experience as it is a psychological one (Ogden, 2004). In terms of positive language and communication however, holding has more in common with the process of active listening. This concept was first forwarded by the eminent counsellor and humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, who advocated a model of listening that probed for the concealed emotions behind the words:

'The question or challenge frequently is a masked expression of feelings or needs which the speaker is far more anxious to communicate than he is to have the surface questions answered. Because he cannot speak these feelings openly, the speaker must disguise them to himself and others in an acceptable form.' (Rogers and Farson, 1957; p4-7)

Listening as a means by which children are simply given the space to talk and the agency to seek help should they need it (Maliphant and Horner, 2016), links to the concept of resilience that describes the protective factors (Garemzy, 1985; Rutter, 1987) that enable children to overcome adversity and stress. One key protective factor that has been established through research on stress resistant children includes: 'the availability of external support systems that encourage and reinforce a child's coping efforts' (Gramezy, 1985; In Rutter, 1987; p316). The idea that just being listened to is sometimes enough to incur resilience, even if no solid answers or strategies are found to deal with problems and inner conflicts, has been discussed by Maliphant and Horner (2016) in their description of an intervention to create 'opportunities to be heard' through the use of listening posts:

'Bright red post boxes were strategically placed on each floor of the school ensuring access for all children. Attached to these post boxes were self-referral forms that the children could fill in requesting to talk to one of the listening mentors. Our aim was to empower children to be solution focused in their thinking, amplify their voice in the school community and to help them access further support where appropriate.' (p28)

These listening posts formed part of a whole school drive to improve emotional literacy. They were manned by a combination of therapists, wellbeing team members and teaching assistants, who had been trained by the school therapists to become listening mentors. The impact over time was striking, where children were able to cope with, and overcome, emotional conflicts they were struggling with. Maliphant and Horner (2016) were able to form a picture of the emotional lives of children at school that was used to inform the senior leadership team of issues that were arising, leading to the establishment of pupils being trained as listening mentors in the playground which

had become evidenced as 'a place where children felt under-stimulated and uncontained' (p30).

Within the CNG Study (Warin and Hibbin, 2016a) active listening was a central part of the way that teachers and practitioners helped children to overcome their concerns and deal with complex emotions and events within their lives. Active listening is also an essential hallmark of the therapeutic relationship, where listening for emotional meaning is key. As such, in the second example below, the role of a trusted adult who was also a trained therapist that Josi could talk to in an exclusive manner was as important to Josi as the opportunity to generally 'off-load':

'My teachers have helped me understand my mum's depression, and they listen to my worries and it's helped me not to worry about her...' Nicole: Setting 6

'...over Christmas she [Josi] was on a bus with her grandmother, and she looked out of the window and suddenly said 'I need to talk to Sarah' and her grandmother said 'you can talk to me' and she said 'no, I need to talk to Sarah', so she bracketed me off...and as soon as she came back after Christmas she was bursting to see me...and it was like a torrent, so much had happened in her life...and she just really needed to off-load...'. IAT: Setting 3

Here then, listening – particularly active listening that attends to the emotional pattern behind the words – can be understood as the receptive side of positive language and communication; a half without which the more actively language-focused nature of communication could not effectively operate. To respond effectively to children's difficult emotions, we must first actively listen for those emotions that need to be contained (Bion, 1994). This gives children the emotional security of feeling heard, and the mental security of being quite literally 'held in mind' (Maliphant and Horner, 2016).

ANTECEDENTS TO AND OUTCOMES OF POSITIVE LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

A primary aim of this analysis includes identifying which elements are most central to positive language and communication. It is suggested that an understanding of behaviour as communication is a foundational keystone that is an essential antecedent to nurturing and restorative language practice. Active listening is then positioned as the next most central element as we are clearly unable to understand children's inner worlds if we are unable to hear what they have communicated to us through their attempts at self-expression. The interpersonal strategy of containment is an antecedent that is bracketed by, and provisional on,

an understanding of behaviour as communication and active listening: we are unable to feedback children's damaging emotions to them in less threatening forms if we do not firstly understand that all behaviour is communication, and secondly ensure that we actively and attentively listen for concealed emotional patterns behind behaviours and words. In addition, institutional strategies such as reflection in supervised working groups, the provision of a facilitating environment that allows children to feel emotionally safe and 'held', and opportunities for children to talk to trusted others can be understood as antecedents that are supportive of behaviour as communication, containment and active listening, as well as positive language and communication as a whole.

Antecedents:

- An understanding of behaviour as communication, attunement to the inner world of the child (Reverie) and of the difficult feelings that children's behaviour can elicit in the adult (Projection).
- The importance of reflection as a means of understanding behaviour as communication.

- The value of a facilitating environment that allows children to feel emotionally safe (Holding).
- An ability to transform children's difficult and threatening emotions into more comprehensible forms (Container-Contained).
- Providing children with opportunities to talk with trusted adults in the promotion of resilience.
- Active forms of listening that attend to the emotional pattern behind the words.

Inquiring language and other interpersonal strategies such as specific praise, explanation and feedback, behaviour management strategies, non-verbal language use and silence, can be understood as the positive language-based outcomes that spring from the primary antecedents of an understanding of behaviour as communication and active forms of listening.

Figure 1: *Antecedents to positive language and communication*

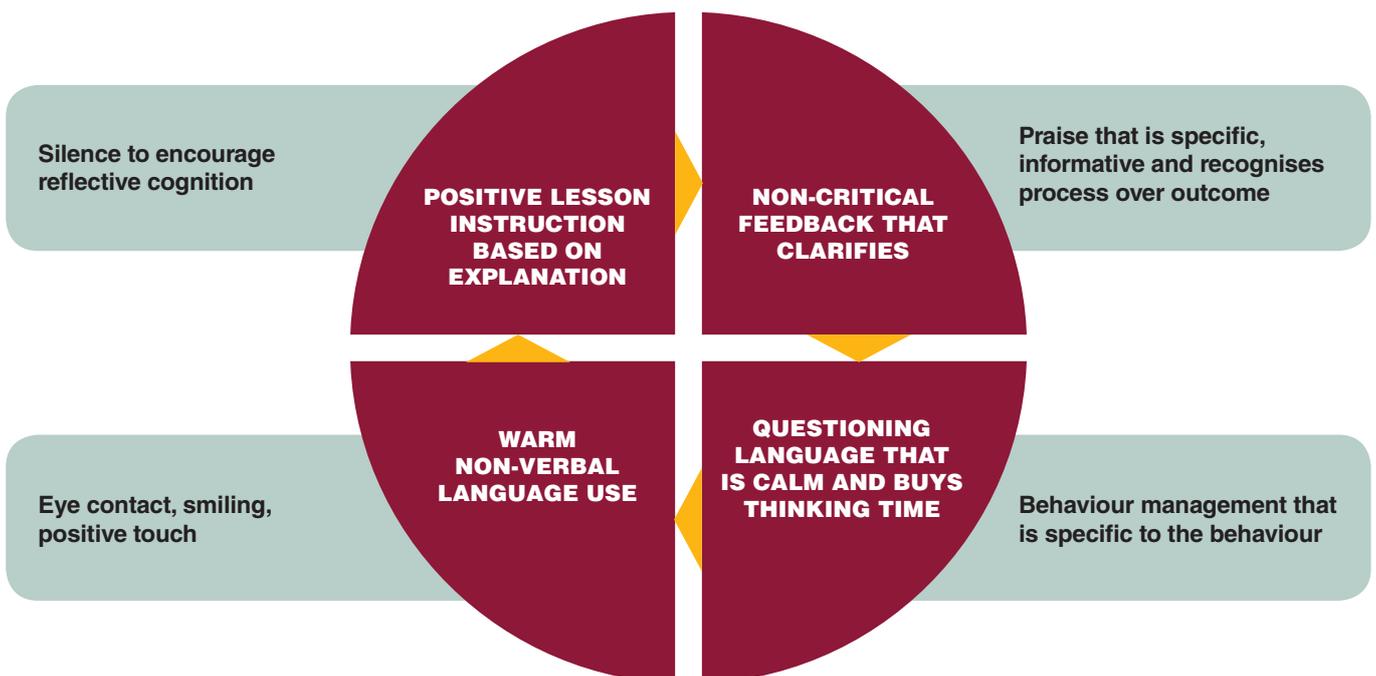


Outcomes:

- Lesson instruction based on explanation, encouragement and hints rather than directions, orders and solutions.
- The avoidance of sarcastic and patronising language use during lesson instruction that can create feelings of shame.
- Silence as a form of reflective language use that promotes the development of children’s thinking, cognition and inner speech.
- Feedback that is accepting and clarifies rather than disallowing, ignoring or criticising pupils’ ideas.
- Praise that is informative and specific to the effort put in rather than the end result and given without added negative comments.
- Questioning language that buys time to think and reflect before acting.
- A questioning style that is calm rather than confrontational and seeks to understand rather than blame.
- Behaviour management that is focused on the specific behaviour rather than criticising the child.
- Non-verbal language use that focuses on indicators of personal warmth such as eye-contact, smiling and touch.

At different times both antecedents and outcomes will lie on a continuum from preventive skills and language at one end, to a more reactive desire to respond to conflict, repair harm and instil a sense of belonging at the other (McCluskey et. al. 2008). However, it is clear that further research is needed (particularly in relation to post conflict mediation practices) to explicate even more clearly how positive language and communication looks – and feels – in practice. A take-home message from this analysis, and the thread that draws both antecedents and outcomes together, is that taking the time to understand the child and then respond in appropriate ways is central to positive language and communication. A large degree of mindfulness (Langer, 1989) where teachers and practitioners are present in the moment rather than reacting to the many different stressors and distractions that are part and parcel of the classroom context, is necessary to avoid language and communication that is negative, combative and counterproductive. Once time, reflection and mental space have been positioned as indispensable educational tools, the rest comes with practice where the skills of positive language and communication become second nature with continued use and engagement.

Figure 2: *Positive language and communication outcomes*



CONCLUSION

This analysis has provided a thumbnail sketch of positive language and communication in relation to theoretical ideas within the psychoanalytic literature concerning projective identification (Klein, 1946) and the notion of Container-Contained (Bion, 1994), to forward an understanding of the way behaviour as communication forms the basis of effective language-based interactions. The rationale for the inclusion of a psychoanalytic framework centres on the idea that these theories are principally concerned with the explication of challenging behaviour and ways to ameliorate the complexity of affect and associated feelings that can arise from psychological discord.

It has also attempted to practically describe the content of positive language and (non-verbal) communication through research on classroom strategies likely to enhance self-esteem (Colwell and O'Connor, 2003), and the use of specific and process-based praise to impact on children's growth mindsets (Dweck, 2008; Bani, 2011). The use of inquiring language to create non-reactive and non-threatening psychological space (Greenwood, 2002) when dealing with emotionally complex behaviour has been discussed in relation to RP in school, with consideration being given to the reflective value of silence (Ollin, 2008) and the cognitive value of inner speech (Ferryhough, 2008). Finally, the psychoanalytic notion of the 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1956) as a way to passively respond to children's externalising behaviour while actively listening (Rogers and Farson, 1956) to their expressed concerns, has been positioned as an essential element of positive language and communication that allows children to develop resilience (Rutter, 1985) through being emotionally held in school.

Other more preventive (McCluskey et. al. 2008) aspects of positive language and communication that, for example, aim to develop children's emotional literacy in school giving them an emotional language on which to draw, have been beyond the scope of this analysis. Despite such limitations, it is clear that positive language and communication is an essential and multifaceted aspect of helping children and young people to grow and navigate their inner and outer lives. To support children who struggle, and who don't have the language to explain, we need to understand, listen and respond in ways that help them to develop a positive language of their own. In addition, it is important to take on board the lessons from both the NG and RP in relation to the core principles of safety, behaviour as communication and meeting needs (Lucas et. al. 2006; Evans and Lester, 2012; RJC, 2015). Children with high levels of need and emotional disturbance are not capable of coping with punitive sanctions that merely reinforce and perpetuate the unmet needs and emotional disturbance that already exists.

In this respect further research that focuses on the psychological impact of zero tolerance policies and/or restorative approaches on children with high levels of need, would be welcome. Finding an alternative way of being with such children that is strongly based in the antecedents to, and outcomes of, positive language and communication, is as essential to addressing the challenging behaviour of emotionally damaged children, as it is to asking why we would want to cause them more harm in the first place.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO B.A.S.E.[®] BABYWATCHING AS A WHOLE-CLASS NURTURE INTERVENTION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, CONTRIBUTING TO A THERAPEUTIC SCHOOL CULTURE

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Keywords: empathy, attachment, primary education, language

ABSTRACT

With the aim of promoting empathy in children, Brisch (2012), drawing on his extensive work on attachment and the skills of Parens' (2008) work on aggression theory, developed the programme: Babywatching. This programme is designed as a whole class nurture intervention to reduce Anxiety and Aggression and promote Sensitivity and Empathy (B.A.S.E.). This short exemplar paper explains how the idea is being translated into working practice in the UK; reports on primary teachers' experiences, and gives examples that suggest the potential impact on children's self-awareness, emotional expression and social skills, as attachment is embedded through sensitive, attuned relationships that may be seen as part of becoming a therapeutic and nurturing school.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s psychoanalyst and aggression researcher Henri Parens was working in Philadelphia, USA, studying how to prevent aggressive behaviour disorders in very young children. Karl Heinz Brisch was working as an attachment researcher in Munich, Germany. They met and discussed their related research. From their discussions, Brisch devised the B.A.S.E.[®] Babywatching programme and started groups in the 1990s, with the objectives of fostering sensitivity and empathy and reducing aggression and fear in children, building on Parens' previous preventative programmes. The B.A.S.E.[®] Babywatching programme has been operating in UK primary schools since 2012, and some anecdotal evidence has been collected on the impact of the programme.

Numerous studies have concluded that a positive relationship exists between the development of secure attachment in the early years of life (Bowlby 1969, 1979) and later social competence (eg Coleman, 2003; Lieberman, et. al. 1999). Preschool children who are secure demonstrate better social skills and school adjustment than do their insecure peers (Sroufe et. al. 1993). Elementary school children who are secure are significantly more accepted by their peers, have more friendships and are less lonely than less secure

children (Kerns, et. al. 1996). The attachment security a child feels throughout his or her early years has been associated with their later ability to pay attention, focus, and possess increased confidence as learners. Children with secure attachment histories earn higher grades and are more goal oriented and cooperative than are students with insecure attachment histories (Crittenden, 1992; Jacobsen and Hofmann, 1997).

This body of evidence supports the link between attachment and learning and attachment and improved pro-social skills. Babywatching is an experiential programme facilitating felt understanding of the value of secure attachment relationships.

HOW THE PROGRAMME WORKS

Once a week a parent brings their very young baby to a school classroom, for 20-30 minutes. Parent and baby do whatever comes naturally: playing, sleeping, feeding, changing, crying, soothing, enjoying being together, on a mat within the circle of seated children. The children watch. A trained group leader (often the class teacher) asks the children guided questions that encourage careful attention and noticing of how parent and baby signal to each other and attune to each other's needs, motivation and feelings. They discover together how a secure attachment relationship develops.

Accepted on 13 March 2019; published on 29 July 2019

Citation: Crooks, M., Kellie-Smith, G., Perry, A. (2019) An introduction to B.A.S.E.[®] Babywatching as a whole-class nurture intervention in primary schools, contributing to a therapeutic school culture. *International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 5(1) 66–69.

Post-session there are opportunities for class discussions or for drawing and writing. During the week, the teacher is often presented with opportunities to help the children reflect on what they noticed during Babywatching, and to integrate the empathic responses they felt when watching parent and baby in their classroom, particularly in naming, identifying and managing feelings.

The class visits continue until the baby is too adventurous to be contained in the circle and becomes more interested in the children, therefore removing the focus from the parent/baby relationship. Children's responses often show a depth of insight and connection, demonstrating empathic responses that provide positive modelling and powerful reflections to others, with both genders engaging equally. The parent and baby become an important part of the school community.

The group leader uses a series of questions to help children explore the parent/baby relationship. All the children's contributions are valued. The group leader demonstrates unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951) and reflects back to each child how they have answered a question to encourage deeper thinking.

The guided questioning is in five layers and explores the behaviours, motivations and feelings of the baby and the parent:

1. 'What do you see/hear?' Simply observational, about behaviour.
2. 'Why did parent...?' or 'Why did baby...?' exploring and encouraging children to describe the effect of the person's behaviour on the other.
3. 'How does it feel for...?', exploring emotions. At first, children can only relate to how they think they would feel themselves. However, as empathy develops, they are more able to recognise how the 'other' reacted and reflect this feeling back more accurately. This approach is a blame-free one, there are no right or wrong answers, we imagine and we explore. This is a motivational question and requires an analytic depth of thinking (Bloom, 1956).
4. Identification level on 'activity' – 'What would I do if I were...?' This is a synthesis and evaluation style of question in Bloom's taxonomy.
5. Identification level on 'emotions' – 'What would it feel like if I were...?'

Layers 4 and 5 are questions that begin to deeply explore our own emotional world in connection to those around us, thus developing our empathic responses.

The layered use of questions helps children to recognise and respond to the emotions of others, explore motivation and consider their behaviour in reaction to others. In this approach, children are enabled to *feel alongside* the couple in an embodied fashion: observers often note that the children unconsciously mimic what the baby is doing, for example moving their mouths in synchrony with the baby feeding, or rocking, when the mother is cradling the baby. They are also developing *mind-mindedness* (projecting themselves into the minds of the parent and baby), by the exploration of possible motivation, rather than jumping to conclusions. Both of these skills are implicit in empathy.

Often sessions provide a rich opportunity to explore emotions. For example, one group leader working with reception children said that the baby (about eight weeks old) was frowning. The group leader encouraged children to mimic the baby's face to give them a similar, embodied experience. She asked the children to see what that felt like and to wonder at what a frown might mean. 'Frown' was also a new word for the reception children. This exploration is a helpful way to develop self-awareness, a healthy precursor to 'other' awareness, that will help children self-regulate.

EXAMPLE: A VOLUNTEER MUM'S EXPERIENCE

My eldest son absolutely loved Babywatching classes when he was in year 1. He wondered about this little girl and her mother, reported all the stages of development that he witnessed, and took in all the minutiae of babyhood, wide-eyed with wonder. So, when I was pregnant with our third baby, I called the school to volunteer.

H started the classes when he was six weeks old with reception children. The class sat round on the carpet and watched as I held H, fed him, played and sang with him. A couple of times he slept through the whole session, sometimes he screamed his head off (because babies do!) and once – possibly the highlight for the class – he did a poo, and I had to change his nappy.

The group leader included all the children in the class, gently drawing out their understanding of these very normal day-to-day emotions. Labelling them, working through from 'holding a hand and smiling' to concepts of 'happiness and security'.

I found the sessions incredibly valuable to me as a mother. This regular time gave me the chance to stop and reflect on my baby, his development and our relationship. The analysis of a reception class constantly surprised and delighted me, and I noticed how quickly they developed from the basic observation 'He has opened his eye' comments to the 'He is looking at all the children because we are really interesting'.

We finished the sessions when H was around seven months old because he was way too active a subject! Babywatching has already carved out a role for him in our community and school. We have all benefited from it: our baby, his parents and the whole class of children'.

IMPACT

Impact on behaviour and relationships

Many teachers have observed better self-regulation, an awareness of other people's needs and feelings, resulting in kinder behaviour.

- *'I didn't expect the impact. For example, one boy who started this year constantly calling out, interrupting the whole class and unable to cooperate with his peers has changed significantly. The baby's development fascinated him, and he was able to watch in an unexpectedly calm way. He was also able to share with us changes in his baby brother at home and amazingly he is a changed boy. His friendships are more secure and he is calmer throughout the day.'*
- *'It creates such a warm, supportive and permission giving atmosphere.'*
- *'Boys who originally pushed and shoved one another are helping each other out.'*
- *A school's family support worker reported that a child with difficulties in relating positively to others started to change his behavior. He began to notice if children were alone in the playground, ask how other children felt, checking if they were OK and whether they wanted to play, accepting a variety of responses, even if they weren't what he had hoped for. As a result of his changes, children are now involving him, whereas before they would avoid him.*

The ability to accept an alternative view than his own represented a huge risk for this particular boy, and thus his new approaches to other children are likely to have come from a greater point of security and resilience (Winnicott, 1964).

Impact on language and writing

Teachers have reported children's increased confidence in sharing ideas and improved emotional vocabulary. Another teacher commented on how the sessions have 'fed into' their guided writing – 'What voice would that character use, what would they be like?'. Some instances have been noted where children who had problems speaking in school have begun contributing, and this effect has transferred to the classroom.

Children's comments following

Babywatch sessions

A sample of children's comments in Year 3/4

- **Boy:** We see how D develops in her heart.
- **Girl:** I enjoy Babywatching because I observed how babies and mothers communicate and react to other people.
- **Boy:** I have learnt to write about L. My writing has improved.
- **Boy:** In Babywatching L makes me feel happy. He makes me know how to be a big brother; it makes me know if I smile my brother smiles.

Sometimes the range of children's comments provides an opportunity to share more complex and difficult feelings. The challenge for the group leader is to hold and work with these feelings, for example: jealousy; anger; resentment; disappointment and anxiety. Where difficulties arise, the group leader is supported by a mentor.

CONCLUSION

Nurture practitioners are fully aware of the link between the importance of empathy and secure attachment and healthy, curious children who are now ready to learn. Babywatching appears to offer a practical way of teaching these fundamental social learning blocks in a gentle, transformative way and fits within a values-based education, whole school, therapeutic and nurturing school culture. The evaluation of practical activities such as Babywatching presents rich opportunities for further research, ranging from randomised controlled trials to classroom-based practitioner research.

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ABOUT NURTUREUK

Nurture**uk** is a registered charity working tirelessly to promote access to education for all. With rising levels of mental health problems and increasing numbers of children and young people affected by social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that inhibit their progress and limit their life chances, nurtur**eu**k is at the forefront of combatting barriers to learning and development.

Our charity has developed a range of evidence-based interventions and support, delivered in schools and other educational settings, that give disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people the opportunity to be the best they can be.

Whether it is delivering certified training for professionals, supporting whole-school nurturing approaches, providing accurate assessments of need, or promoting rigorous research-based evidence, nurtur**eu**k is providing the quality support and resources that make impactful, nurturing, education provisions a reality for children and young people throughout the UK and beyond.

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UK registered charity number: 1115972.

Scottish registered charity number: SC042703.