

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION



VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1 APRIL 2016

ISSN 2059-0466



The nurture
group network ®
helping children and young people to succeed

IN THIS ISSUE

www.nurturegroups.org

A study of nurture groups as a
window into school relationships

Nurture groups and teacher-child relationships

Investing in student success through
nurturing in universities

A systemic evaluation of a nurture group
in Scotland

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION

Publisher **Kevin Kibble**
Editor **Marianne Coleman**
Associate editor **Edurne Scott Loinaz**
Sub-editor **Penny Stephens**

Editorial Advisory Board

Kath Bevan
Tiffanie Benway
Tony Cline
David Colley
Heather Geddes
Tommy MacKay
Alison Pyle
Tina Rae

Subscriptions

Single copy UK **Institutions/Schools etc £45**

Single copy UK **Individuals** (paid on personal credit card and delivered to home address) **£15**

Single copy International **Institutions/Schools etc £60**

Single copy International **Individuals** (paid on personal credit card and delivered to home address) **£25**

Published by The Nurture Group Network Limited

Charity Registration No. 1115972

OSCR Registration No. SC042703

ISSN 2059-0466 (online)

Cover and text design by Aardvark Design Studio Limited

Printed by Bamford Print Limited

Copyright © 2016 The Nurture Group Network.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, distributed, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without prior written permission of the Publisher.

For permission requests contact the Publisher at info@nurturegroups.org

Abstracts for publishing consideration should be sent via email for the attention of the editor at info@nurturegroups.org

The Nurture Group Network Limited, 18A Victoria Park Square, London E2 9PB UK

CONTENTS

- 5** **Foreword** by Sylvia Lucas
-
- 7** **A study of nurture groups as a window into school relationships**
Restorative justice and punishment in primary school settings.
Dr Jo Warin and Dr Rebecca Hibbin, Lancaster University
-
- 15** **Nurture groups and teacher-child relationships**
Exploring the relationships children in nurture groups establish with their teachers and how these differ from the relationships children in mainstream classrooms develop with their teachers
Dr Claire Balisteri
-
- 29** **Investing in student success through nurturing in universities**
Two case studies in North America.
Tapo Chimbanga, Leeds Trinity University
-
- 37** **A systemic evaluation of a nurture group in Scotland**
Jenny Fraser-Smith and Kirsty Henry

ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Dr Claire Balisteri is a practising educational psychologist and a research PhD UCL graduate. Her area of interest is children with attachment difficulties. She is a mother of two and currently lives in the South West.

Tapo Chimbanga is a psychoanalyst, lecturer and researcher at Leeds Trinity University. Passionate about privileging the voices and experiences of marginalised and disenfranchised communities such as children, LGBTQ, and Black and Minority Ethnic, Tapo examines social justice pedagogy in higher education as well as the psychosocial ramifications of traumatic pedagogy.

Jenny Fraser-Smith is an educational psychologist in Scotland. She has undertaken research in gathering children and young people's views, resulting in a publication in *Support for Learning*. More recently she explored techniques for gathering the child's view for the Child's Plan.

Kirsty Henry is an educational psychologist in Scotland whose research interests lie in wellbeing education. Previous work has included participatory action research with pupils presenting with intermittent patterns of non-attendance. Current research is exploring wellbeing at a whole school community level.

Dr Rebecca Hibbin received her PhD, 'Lip service to speaking and listening skills: Oral storytelling, arts education and the hegemony of literacy', in Educational Research from Lancaster University in 2014. She is currently an associate lecturer in the Law School at Lancaster University, teaching criminology to undergraduate students.

Dr Jo Warin is a senior lecturer in the department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, where she is also co-director of the Centre for Social Justice and Wellbeing in Education. She teaches on the online Doctoral Programme in Education and Social Justice and supervises many PhD students.

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION



VOLUME 2 NUMBER 1

Welcome

On behalf of the Nurture Group Network and as Editor I am delighted to welcome you to the second issue of our peer-reviewed journal, The International Journal of Nurture in Education. In this second issue we are covering a range of topics that have particular implications for whole school or whole institution nurture. In addition many of them report on innovative practice. However the Foreword, written by one of the first nurture group practitioners Sylvia Lucas, recalls the early days of nurture groups and reminds us of the principles on which they were and are based.

Following the Foreword, the first paper in this edition is one of which we are especially proud, as it reports on research commissioned by NGN. The decision to commission research arose from a recommendation following the systematic review on nurture group effectiveness (Bennett 2015). A team from Lancaster University were successful in a competitive process and a full report on their research on aspects of nurture group provision in seven case study schools can be found on the website at <https://nurturegroups.org/what-we-do/research-and-evidence/lancaster-nurture-group-report>. This article written by Jo Warin and Rebecca Hibbin focuses on just one aspect of their research, identifying the similarities of the nurture approach to that of restorative justice in relation to social control and sanctions. This paper is followed by an in-depth study by Claire Balisteri of teacher student relationships within a nurture group, where drawings are used as a particularly interesting and innovative method of evaluation.

The third paper breaks fresh ground in a number of ways. In her paper Investing in Students' Success in Universities Tapo Chimbanga has considered how nurture principles might be applied in higher education, particularly to the benefit of students who might be seen as 'outsiders' in comparison with a white, middle class norm. The originality of this paper is enhanced by the fact that the case studies are North American, emphasising the internationality of nurture principles.

The final paper focuses on the relationship of the nurture group to the whole school in which it is situated, a theme relevant to all the papers in the issue. Taking the case of a primary school nurture group in Scotland, Jenny Fraser-Smith and Kirsty Henry adopted an innovative systemic approach to identify the systems within the school that support the effectiveness of nurture groups.

I know that you will find the papers interesting and stimulating as they indicate new ways in which well-trying nurture principles can be applied and practised.

I would like to thank all those concerned with the writing and production of the Journal, particularly the editorial board for their helpful and thorough review of papers submitted to the Journal in the last year.

The call for papers for Volume 3 has now gone out. Volume 3 will be a practitioner-led special issue and papers of between 3,000 and 5,000 words should be submitted by 31 August 2016. Papers should be research-based and will be peer-reviewed. Any queries should be addressed to Edurne Scott Loinaz via e-mail to edurne@nurturegroups.org and special thanks to Edurne for all her work on furthering research on nurture and nurture groups and particularly for her work on this second issue.

Dr Marianne Coleman

April 2016



Foreword, Sylvia Lucas

The journey from being the teacher of the first non-experimental NG in Hackney in the early 1970s to writing this Foreword has, inevitably, been one of personal as well as professional growth. Nurture, it seems, has become a way of life and one that is set to continue now that this International Journal is a reality. The first edition, concluding with Professor Mackay's proposals for the future directions for nurture in education and a research agenda, brought us to a new place and the papers in this current (2016) edition take us on a stage further.

To have a coherent plan for the future has been the hope of NG practitioners over the past 40 or so years. My own experience has taken me from classic NG teacher through four school headships in the East End of London, into higher education and a necessary but, thankfully, brief time with Ofsted. More happily in terms of nurture, it has finally brought me into consultancy in school leadership and SEN provision, in the UK and currently supporting teachers of the world's most vulnerable children in Africa, Central America and the Philippines. That there might eventually be a continuum of nurture to help in resolving some of our world's difficulties might not after all be an impossible dream.

At this important juncture two thoughts come to mind. The first is the importance of our story and what we can learn from our collective experience and the personal stories beneath the bare facts of dates and time and second, as nurture in education moves into a new future, that we are careful to be true to Marjorie Boxall's founding definitions and the distinction she made between 'nurture' and 'nurturing'. Nurture children were her priority, other children might benefit from 'nurturing' but were not her immediate focus.

The first generation of NG teachers responded to the needs of the most vulnerable young children and their families long before the basic principles were conceptualised and formulated, and the Boxall Profile and the NGN dreamt of. Our sole guide then was Marjorie's maxim – 'be and do for these children as you would your own young children'. Contrary to some

interpretations both at the time and since, this was not a denial of our professional knowledge and expertise or of the value of theory: it was freedom to relate to the children and parents intuitively and with humanity and crucially, through these relationships, to recognise the signs of critically impaired nurture in a child's early life and to recreate the structure and content of the earliest years to enable their healthy development.

This pioneering work was undertaken largely by 'Certificate' teachers like myself, trained in the post war years at innovative Training Colleges of Education where there was an emphasis on child development with Bowlby's 1951 Report to the WHO, Child Care and the Growth of Love as a core text and with his Attachment and Loss Volume 1 to be published in 1969. These Colleges, set up post WW2 to tackle the huge teacher shortage, were re-visioning the 1931 HMSO report on the Primary School that was republished in 1956. This recognised the need to attract, support and nurture students from disadvantaged backgrounds into teaching. University wasn't an option then although later we benefited from the implementation of the James Report (1972) and used our experience to work for in-service degrees and undertake post-graduate studies. Many of the issues the Training Colleges were grappling with during that period were similar to those highlighted in the paper in this edition, Investing in Student Success through Nurturing in Universities by Tapo Chimboganda.

The freedom to re-imagine the teacher role also allowed us to

“ We believe that by raising the standards of achievement of our least able children we will raise them for all children ”

question structures and systems in schools and society and how these might be more person-centred. Links with local child guidance clinics and hospitals, including the nearby Donald Winnicott Centre, brought us in touch with PSWs, paediatricians and academics as well as educational psychologists and we began to learn a new language and develop confidence in communicating with other professionals. We contributed to Consultations and their subsequent Reports, notably the Warnock Report (1978) prior to the passing of the 1981 Education Act that introduced the concept of SEN, and followed in London by the Fish Report (ILEA 1985) Education For All. The report, Good Enough Parenting (CCETSW 1978), published following the death of Maria Colwell, the first high profile child protection case to be investigated, recommended a multi-disciplinary approach, such as was evolving in nurture groups but is still, almost 40 years on, to be fully realised.

All this contributed to the vision and confidence required to take on the leadership of schools. The first 'Nurturing School', Kingsmead Infants in Hackney, later reorganised into Kingsmead Primary, came about organically when as NG teacher I was appointed to the headship. It was an opportunity to begin to articulate and to extend practice more explicitly. That experience, together with requests to give support to other struggling schools, required new leadership and management skills, beyond the scope of the usual INSET providers and which I eventually discovered at the Tavistock Institute.

The new insights into schools as working groups took me to my final headship and a different challenge: a large primary school with a reputation for high standards and the majority of children achieving well. There were high parental expectations and community involvement but an identified tail of underachievement that was considered to be irresolvable i.e. it was the child's problem rather than the school's. Behaviour problems were few as children were excluded very quickly; 'nurture' for these children was seen as rewarding bad behaviour.

After a long struggle with staff and governors and a certain amount of compromise, 'nurture' eventually became a mission statement to the effect: 'We believe that by raising the standards of achievement of our least able children we will raise them for all children'. Gradually attitudes changed and it was possible to create a more inclusive organisation, described in my paper The Nurturing School; the impact of nurture group principles and practice on the whole school (1999). The provision of NG type experiences, i.e. a nurturing relationship along with an appropriate curriculum and resources for the small number of nurture children, was developed with the LA peripatetic SEN support service, negotiated with some difficulty on the school's terms. The LA has since included the nurture group course in its CPD programme.

Organisational, group as well as nurture theory continues to be invaluable in my current voluntary work as a consultant and I would suggest that the interpersonal and organisational issues involved in extending nurture might be an area for future consideration and academic study.

To conclude with my second thought: Marjorie Boxall's criteria for 'nurture children' are described in Nurture Groups in Schools, second edition (2010) p.5 and in more detail on p.200-206. From the beginning we recognised that there were 'nurturing groups' as well as 'nurture groups'. I believe that this distinction is vitally important in making our case to a wider education world and especially when working with older children and adults. As NGN recognises, much in nurture practice has a universal appeal but the essential ingredient that differentiates nurture from other types of provision is the learning. 'Nurture groups are about children's learning; they are not therapy' (op.cit p11). In our eagerness to share nurture more widely, it is essential that we do not lose sight of this rationale; we must not risk failing the very children that NGs were created for.

I am grateful to NGN for the opportunity to share these memories and thoughts. As nurture approaches its half century, this new venture gives me great hope for the future.

A study of nurture groups as a window into school relationships:

restorative justice and punishment in primary school settings.

Dr Jo Warin and Dr Rebecca Hibbin, Lancaster University

ABSTRACT

This narrative account describes approaches to sanctions in primary school settings that also provide nurture groups, and the ways in which different approaches may be viewed as helpful or harmful to children's behaviour and to nurture group provision. It draws from research conducted as part of a larger comparative nurture group study examining whole school aspects of NG provision in seven case study schools. The three most successful settings within the study had relationships at their core, and a de-emphasis on sanction systems. They had an ideological leaning away from any kind of 'will to punish', and a leaning towards social relationships and restorative justice. In contrast the least successful settings tended towards social control and sanction systems that provided a sharp contrast between the contexts of nurture and mainstream. Overall it is concluded that in order to avoid harmful and counter-productive effects, sanctions in schools need to be individualised and they need to make sense. In addition, they need to be proportional, non-confrontational and educational. Under these conditions sanctions do not preclude social engagement or represent a punitive and reactionary response. However, it is the relational ecology of the school that dictates whether a punitive strategy of control or a nurturing strategy of ongoing social engagement is sought overall. Nurture groups can provide us with a useful way to model complementary aspects of restorative justice, as both NG and RJ philosophies are based on a will to develop, maintain, repair and sustain attachments.

Overview of NGs and research

Nurture provision in school has enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years, from the inception of the first nurture group (hereafter NG) in the 1970s by Marjorie Boxall, up to today when it is estimated that there are currently over 2,100 groups across the UK (<https://nurturegroups.org/about-us/faq>). Beneficial effects have been found in relation to children making significant social and emotional gains, improvements in self-management behaviours, social skills, self-awareness and confidence, skills for learning, educational attainment, developing a nurturing environment throughout school, and impacting positively on the parent-child relationship (Sanders, 2007; Doyle, 2001; Cooper & Lovey, 1999; Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2001; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney, 2009). The Steer Report (DCSF, 2009) pointed to the role that nurture provision can play in early intervention, in line with the importance placed upon this aspect in the Children's Plan (2007). Earlier and often-cited research by Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997) found that placing children in NGs promoted the retention of significant numbers of children within the mainstream school system and a reduction in persistent difficulties. Finally, the success of NGs has been found to be related to the length of time a group

has been running. NGs that had been in place for more than two years were found to be significantly more effective than groups that had existed for fewer than two years (Cooper and Whitbread, 2007). Bennett's recent (2015) overview of the impact of nurture has found it to be broadly positive particularly with regard to short term benefits.

This paper is based on a comparative study, commissioned by the Nurture Group Network of seven primary schools in the north west of the UK that included nurture group provision or that were based on nurture group principles. A full report of the study (Warin and Hibbin, 2016) is obtainable from the Nurture Group Network. In this paper we focus on a theme that emerged from the analysis: restorative versus punitive responses to children's challenging behaviour.

School discipline and restorative justice (RJ)

The landscape relating to current policy and legislation for behaviour management in schools strongly upholds the disciplinarian function of all teaching staff (including teaching assistants). In addition, official guidance emphasises the importance of "a strong behaviour policy to support staff in managing

behaviour, including the use of rewards and sanctions" (DfE, 2014; 3). In the UK the 'will to punish' has been explored by Parsons (2012) who has noted that the tendency towards punitive responses to difficult behaviour is 'deeply embedded'. He draws attention to high rates of school exclusion and also to high imprisonment rates for young people in the UK and Wales. He notes that therapeutic and restorative approaches are strongly undermined by both right-wing politics and the populist press, arguing that "goodies for baddies' is hard to sell" (2012; 192). The negative impact of overly punitive disciplinary practices has been noted by Kupchik (2010) who suggests that the will to punish is counterproductive because it represents an overreaction that can result in a worsening of students' behaviour. In addition, the narrow focus on rules and norms in school results in the real reasons for misbehaviour being missed. Kupchik (2010) goes on to suggest that the disciplinary outcome of breaking these narrowly defined rules does not provide students with opportunities to learn. As suggested by Irby (2014):

“Overly punitive (i.e. deep) discipline nets are not good for students. They alienate children from academic curriculum and erode the moral authority of schools. Students pushed into the bottom of the net are more likely to be funnelled into school-to-prison pipelines that will negatively impact their entire lives.”
(529).

RJ stands out as a contrasting approach to the 'will to punish'. It is a concept derived from the criminal justice system that has recently gained popularity in school settings (Hopkins, 2011; Restorative Justice 4 Schools, 2015). The key principles of maintaining relationships, and when necessary working on relationship repair and reintegration, are the hallmarks of RJ. Originating from dissatisfaction with the retributive model of crime and punishment, it has been noted by Reimer (2015) that while "RJ is a diverse, multi-layered concept (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007; Woolford, 2009) it "views harm not primarily as a violation of rules or laws, but as a violation of people and relationships" (Zehr, 2002; (Reimer, 2015; 7).

Behaviour as communication

The intersection between nurture and RJ in school can be understood as the recognition of *behaviour as communication* as we can see more clearly if we compare the stated principles of nurture and restorative justice. The six principles of nurture are: children's learning is understood developmentally; the classroom offers a safe base; nurture is important for the development of wellbeing; language is a vital means of communication; all behaviour is communication; transition is important in children's lives (NGN, 2015). According to Evans and Lester, 2013, the seven principles of RJ in schools are: meeting needs; providing accountability and support; making things right; viewing conflict as a learning opportunity; building healthy learning communities; restoring relationships; and addressing power imbalances. Both sets of principles emphasise the importance of behaviour as communication through meeting needs.

In this conception of 'relational restoration' (McCluskey et al, 2008) student behaviour is viewed as a function of "unmet needs that can result in aggression, violence and perceived misbehaviour" (Evans and Lester, 2012; 58). In contrast to criminal models that view students as 'bad' and emphasise retribution (Vaandering, 2010), RJ and nurture both focus on trying to understand underlying influences on problematic behaviour and responding to meet children's needs.

It has been observed that RJ can be understood in different ways by those implementing it with some teachers viewing it as a way to challenge taken for granted school power structures while for others it is viewed as merely another strategy alongside more usual disciplinary practices (McCluskey et al, 2008). Reimer (2015) expands upon these conflicting interpretations and identifies two types of RJ: affirmative and transformative: "affirmative RJ is underpinned by a desire for social control; transformative RJ is underpinned by a desire for social engagement" (Reimer, 2015; 15). Both forms have their advocates with affirmative RJ being seen as a pragmatic choice that may not dismantle the system but surely improves it, while transformative forms of RJ are seen as addressing the conditions necessary for social change, making opportunities for people to evaluate their lives, make changes and address injustices (Woolford, 2009). Since RJ was a resonant concept throughout this study, we make use of Reimer's typology as a lens for looking more closely at the practices and policies surrounding this concept. First, we present an overview of the context, purposes and methods implicated in our study of seven NG focused primary school settings.

Comparative nurture group research. Study of seven primary school settings in the NW of England

The study aimed to explore what kinds of psychosocial interventions impact beneficially on vulnerable children, with a focus on the principles and practices of nurture groups. We selected seven settings, discriminating between schools that had a serious engagement with NG principles and those settings who perhaps pay lip service to NG provision and for whom 'nurture' is more peripheral. We developed sampling criteria based on Bennett's overview (2015) of influences on NG outcomes: leadership commitment and whole school understanding; size of setting; longevity of provision; level and quality of staff training. In addition, the educational psychologist who acted as a gatekeeper and critical friend to the research was able to offer insights about settings according to these criteria.

Five of the seven settings were primary schools that used a traditional NG format in delivering socio-emotional support to children with attachment difficulties and associated problems. A traditional NG format is characterised by part-time provision over an average two to four terms after which time children are reintegrated back into the mainstream class, with around 10-12 children and two members of NG staff (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2007), located in a 'family' styled room (Boxall, 2002). The Boxall Profile (Boxall, 2002) or similar assessment scales such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) are used by the NG panels to select children for nurture provision and monitor their progress. All five of

our selected NG settings conformed to this description (Settings 1-5). The remaining two settings served as alternative forms of provision: one school (Setting 6) is a primary school that had disbanded its NG in a bid to integrate nurture throughout the whole school, and the second school (Setting 7) was a small residential setting for children (also aged five to 11) from the most disadvantaged backgrounds of neglect and abuse. Our intention behind the selection of these latter two 'alternative provisions' was to identify settings based on nurturing principles and ethos with a clear emphasis on relationships and an acknowledgement of the importance of early attachments. This would enable us to examine provisions that are clearly related to NGs although perhaps not always recognised or acknowledged as such.

Methodology and methods

Our methodology aimed at collaborating closely with senior leaders, NG staff, mainstream staff, parents and pupils in each of the schools. Each setting was visited three times and included various data collection strategies: interviews with Heads; focus groups with a mix of NG/mainstream staff; interviews with NG staff; tours of the school; observations within the NG rooms; collection of Boxall profiles and other relevant data. All interviews were semi-structured and based around the identification of emerging themes. In particular, the interviews with the Heads, which were the first we carried out, focused on questions about staff appointment, training, selection of children for nurture, transitions between the NG and mainstream, communication with parents, whole school aspects of NG provision, and support for NGs in school from senior leadership. RJ came out strongly as an emerging theme from these interviews, and also with other staff members in school. As a result, while we did not explicitly pursue RJ as a focus of our research, its prevalence within the dataset was strongly suggestive of it being an area of significant relevance to nurture provision in school.

We also carried out two child case studies within each school through informal conversations with the child and a parent/carer. In selecting these 14 children we aimed to have a mix of gender, age group, types of social and emotional difficulties and we particularly wanted some children who had the experience of being reintegrated into mainstream classes. The selection was made in consultation with staff and parents.

Overall findings emphasising a need for 'whole school' approaches to nurture

In the discussion that follows we use the terms "most successful" and "least successful" to describe sub groups of the seven settings. These judgements are based on an overview of the value of the NG provision for its targeted group of pupils informed by criteria that were embedded in the five dimensions we scrutinised: The Child; The Nurture Group; The Mainstream Class; The Parents/Carers; and The Whole School. The three "most successful" schools discussed here shared: strong leadership; an emphasis on the importance of relationships to enhance communication and to model positive

and functional ways of relating to children, parents and teachers; training for all staff members to instil an understanding of and value for nurture across the school to promote a vision of whole school as therapeutic community and an understanding of behaviour as communication.

Overall, the findings from this study suggested that the least successful settings relating to nurture provision were characterised by low levels of whole school training in nurture-based approaches, a lack of communication and value clashes between nurture practitioners and mainstream class teachers. In these settings nurture was sometimes seen as 'a soft option for naughty kids'. An example is Setting 1, where there was a deskilling of the mainstream teaching staff who handed over the more challenging children to the NG trained staff. This was despite the fact that nurture provision had been in place for around five years, during which time the school had not managed to create consistency between school contexts with the overall result that the nurture approach was being undermined. In the case of Setting 1, nurture provided a window into relationships that were highly divided where nurture served as a sticking plaster rather than a way to foster more meaningful forms of social engagement and ongoing relationships within school.

In contrast, the most successful settings were characterised by a high level of whole school training in nurture specifically and in psycho-social approaches more generally. These settings also had an emphasis on recruitment and retention of high quality staff, good communication and bridging activities between the contexts of mainstream and nurture, strong relationships between pupils, nurture staff and teaching staff, and a whole school understanding of *behaviour as communication* (Evans and Lester, 2013).

Whole school understandings and the positive effect of developing a nurturing environment throughout school, is an important aspect of NGs (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd, 2001; Cooper and Whitebread, 2007; Mackay, 2015). In a similar vein, the importance of taking a whole school approach to fostering the mental health and wellbeing of children has been taken up more generally by Spratt et al (2006):

“Unless schools address pupils' experience of the whole school environment, there is little hope that the targeted endeavours of specialists will have much impact... By addressing mental wellbeing as a whole school priority, all pupils benefit, not only those experiencing difficulties.”

(Spratt et al, 2006; 20)

The findings that came out of this study are highly supportive of such assertions. It was found that the contrast between the NG and the mainstream class in relation to behavioural management strategies is a significant factor in determining the success of nurture in school. The schools that had a strong contrast between mainstream and nurture, with a number of different and complex behavioural management strategies including both sanctions and rewards, and a comparatively punitive response overall, were less

successful. In these settings we saw a failure to embed nurture across school, and benefit the targeted NG children. It is this aspect that we wish to highlight specifically in this paper and will now consider in more detail.

In choosing to focus on differences in approaches to rewards and sanctions our purpose is to examine the practices and principles of the schools that were highly successful with regard to their positive impact on the psycho-social wellbeing and development of the vulnerable children in their care. We aim to examine their different approaches to the management and understanding of these children's behaviour on both an ideological and functional basis. Ultimately we hope to uncover the ways in which different approaches may be viewed as helpful or harmful within an educational context.

De-emphasising the punitive in the three most successful settings

The good communication and strong relationships found to be characteristic of the most successful settings was accompanied by a move away from more punitive and rigid forms of school discipline.

We identified three of the settings as being particularly successful in this respect: **Settings 3, 6 and 7**. They had differing ways of managing behaviour that we now explore in detail. Settings 3 and 7 combined varying levels of behavioural management in the form of rewards and sanctions with an approach that was relationship-based but not explicitly focused upon RJ. Setting 6, rather remarkably, described itself as being entirely sanction-free and its approach was based around a very explicitly articulated policy in relation to relations and RJ. We overview their approaches as follows:

Setting 3:

This school took a highly individualised approach to disruptive behaviour where teachers were entrusted to manage behaviour and each situation was dealt with in isolation. Rewards and sanctions were used but there was not a strong emphasis on behavioural management overall and the behaviour policy of the school was simple and very brief. There was no visual behavioural management scheme such as the Traffic Light System (TLS) or Five Steps (see below) as had been seen in many of the less successful settings and points and rewards were not taken away for negative behaviour. This setting also included the use of internal isolations within school, and fixed-term exclusions outside of school, for very extreme cases of disruptive behaviour in school. However, these were rarely utilised with an average of two internal isolations being given per year, and two fixed-term exclusions being given in the summer term of 2015, which had been a "very challenging year" (Head: Setting 3). Prior to that, there had only been two days of fixed term exclusions since 2010.

Setting 7:

An individualised approach was also taken in this setting where each child's behaviour was recognised as distinctive for that

child. There was no TLS, but points and rewards were taken away for bad behaviour, and sanctions such as the loss of 'Golden Time', were linked to classroom jobs such as 'making a cup of tea or doing some laminating' with an adult. This 'sanction' actually had the positive advantage for the child of working with a trusted adult. The behaviour policy was explicitly articulated giving a number of clear examples of appropriate ways to discipline children in a non-punitive manner, with an emphasis on the importance of positive praise, constructive criticism, self-reflection and repair of relationships.

Setting 6: This setting utilised a singular approach across the whole school based on relationships and RJ. It was this overarching ideological vision that had created the conditions for integrated nurture and had led to a decision, taken nearly two years before our visit, to disband the discrete NG rooms. In addition, the 'Rounded and Grounded Framework' was visible on the wall of each classroom. This strategy consisted of a list of words designed to help children within four areas: Having Relationships; Having Insight; Being Robust; and Being Practical. The Framework was consistently used and modelled by teaching staff to give all children a language and understanding of the emotional attributes that the school was trying to develop and instil. Similarly to Setting 7, the behaviour policy was explicitly articulated with an emphasis on the wider ethos of the school and a lengthy discussion of restorative approaches including a script for the restorative questioning of pupils.

A typology of approaches to reward and punishment in settings 3, 6 and 7

Setting 3 de-emphasised rewards and punishments overall within their formal behaviour policy and did not utilise behavioural management strategies such as Five Steps or the Traffic Light System, but still allowed teachers to discipline children according to the sanctions and rewards they felt were most appropriate and effective. In addition, internal exclusions were utilised for particularly challenging behaviour, as suggested by the Head in Setting 3. "I tell them that it's an internal isolation... to protect the other children, give everybody a breathing space..." While the school did not explicitly pursue RJ as a philosophical orientation, the overall ethos within this setting seemed to support the affirmative model of RJ (Woolford, 2009; Reimer, 2015). However, there were also strongly transformative elements of RJ in relation to the extensive pastoral system and the consistently nurturing approach that was taken across school overall. A harmonious combination of nurture principles and RJ strategies had permeated the school since the inception of NG provision some nine years earlier under the leadership of the current Head.

Setting 6, in contrast, explicitly pursued RJ as a central approach and the overall ethos was resonant of more transformative forms of RJ (Woolford, 2009; Reimer, 2015) that challenged taken-for-granted structures and systems in school through four distinctive school policies:

1. A sanction-free approach coupled with an avoidance of extrinsic motivational strategies such as point systems and rewards
2. A bell-free policy where teachers managed break and lunch times according to whether the class was ready to finish an activity. Relatedly the behavioural trigger-point of lunch-times was avoided through the children eating their lunch in the community of their classroom.
3. The integration of nurture throughout school through in-class provision of NG trained staff.
4. The removal of the pre-existing discrete NG in favour of an integrated whole-school approach to nurture.

Setting 6 has a long-standing history of NGs, paralleling Setting 3's track record of around nine years NG experience overall. The training and indeed the recruitment of staff meant that the principles of nurture had become embedded across the whole school.

Consequently, one and a half years before our research visits occurred, the school had taken a significant decision to disband its discrete NGs and attempt to bring its vision of whole school nurture into operation. The behaviour policy was explicitly framed as a 'relationship policy' and there was a significant focus on RJ practices throughout the school. However, the reality of the integrated nurture approach was proving to be extremely difficult, especially with regard to the "acting out" behaviour of some of the more vulnerable children who would previously have been allocated to the NGs. For example, staff had decided to take up training for positive handling strategies and restraint from the organisation Team-Teach (Team-Teach Ltd, 2015), and as a result of these escalating difficulties the decision was taken in this setting to reinstate NGs:

"We were finding that staff were getting hurt...children were feeling unsafe, and we needed that to create that safety, but when the nurture room went, our team teach soared, absolutely soared. So the amount of restraining we had to do...and that's why we put back the nurture room, and it's gone right back down to nearly none."

Safety and Behaviour Team Leader: Setting 6

In Setting 7, RJ was not part of the explicitly articulated school policy and a more affirmative approach was pursued through sanctions and rewards being used as "a useful crutch" that gave children a "reference point of what is ok and what is not ok behaviour" (Head: Setting 7). However, their behaviour policy was also resonant of highly transformative elements of RJ through its strongly individualised and relationship-based character and also their sanction system that pursued a best practice procedure where the children were asked to what extent a consequence had worked for them, and what might work better in the future, in an ongoing and individualised assessment of behavioural management:

"Every child reacts different[ly] to everything, you put a boundary in place for one child and it's not going to work for another, you have to nurture that individual child to their specific needs. So every time a child walks through these doors the first thing we do is read up on a ridiculously huge history of everything that has happened for this child from day one, and you can get a good guideline of 'well that consequence isn't going to work, so it's pointless, get rid of it'. You nurture the actual child and not the behaviours."

Care worker: Setting 7

Therefore overall, and echoing Reimer (2015), a mix of transformative and affirmative approaches to managing behaviour, were in evidence to varying degrees in the three most successful settings. While Setting 6 was most obviously transformative in character, both Settings 3 and 7 also had strongly transformative elements of RJ tending towards social engagement over social control, despite their limited use of behavioural management strategies to regulate disruptive behaviour in school.

'The will to punish'

The less successful settings that formed part of this study were characterised by a much stronger emphasis on extrinsic motivation through the use of rewards and sanctions for good and bad behaviour together with visual behaviour management schemes such as the Traffic Light System, Five Steps and Class Dojos. TLS and Five Steps are popular schemes in UK schools that emphasise external motivation through negative reinforcement. With the TLS every child commences with green, can be moved to amber when behaviour is deemed to merit a warning, and finally to red for more serious and persistent misdemeanours. Similarly, Five Steps involves children progressing from step to step according to the severity of their misdemeanour, with each step having associated behaviours. Class Dojos utilise positive reinforcement through an interactive online system of rewards and sanctions where points are added or subtracted in real-time according to judgements about the children's behaviour.

In one of the least successful schools both an isolation room and a behaviour unit had recently been established, and were in frequent use, to manage increasingly problematic behaviour. These strategies had been introduced in this setting despite the fact that a NG had been established four years previously as a means of confronting the same kinds of problems. As has been noted by a number of authors, "despite evidence that punishment leads to negative outcomes for the most at-risk students, zero tolerance discipline policies continue to be the most popular response to students who act out in school" (Sharkey and Fenning, 2014; 99-100).

The contrast between the contexts of nurture and mainstream can be best understood by comparing the plethora of complex methods for behaviour management utilised within the mainstream class with the more simplistic and restorative approach taken in the NG, both approaches co-existing, in tension, within the same setting:

“In terms of the behaviour policy as a whole...we're working with both rewards and sanctions...we have lots of rewards...stickers...a whole class reward system...star charts, the winner of the stars every week in the infants get extra time on the outdoor equipment, in the juniors I think it's half termly...they get taken say, bowling, if they're the winning class...team points, class dojos...but we also have sanctions as well, so they get time out...In severe cases they get isolations... We also have timeout where they're sent to another class which gives the teacher breathing space...And within that we've also got meetings with parents..It can be individualised, but it's not supposed to be individualised, there is supposed to be set procedures.”

Class Teacher: Setting 1

“In here we don't have rules, because we know that if we drew up a list of rules as soon as our children walked through that door, they'd break them anyway. So it's setting them up to fail and we don't do that here, we don't set our children up to fail. I never shout at them, I never go on... And I talk it through with them, and they need to understand why these triggers are happening.”

Nurture Teacher: Setting 1

In direct contrast to the expression of a 'will to punish', the three most successful schools that form the focus of this paper shared a strong value for maintaining an ongoing attachment to each child, often in the face of very challenging behaviour. In addition to the commonalities already identified in relation to training and whole school consistency, these settings were also characterised by a strong desire to avoid the ultimate form of punishment: school exclusion. For example in Setting 3 the Head had taken the decision not to terminally exclude during her leadership of the school. She reflected back on this transformation:

“It [exclusion] just wasn't right... it felt unintelligent, it felt clumsy... All the things you were telling the child off for doing in terms of reacting rather than thinking, in terms of showing a lack of understanding, was exactly what we were doing in response to the child. It just didn't feel right on any level at all.”

Head: Setting 3

Similarly, Setting 7 – a small residential school that worked with children from the most serious backgrounds of neglect and abuse – emphasised the counter-intuitive quality of exclusion where the will to punish stands in direct opposition to emotional security. The Head's leadership emphasised the ongoing nature of attachment that is the theoretical underpinning of NGs:

“We will never exclude them, we will never send them anywhere else. I've worked in places they do exclude and the kids get the message, punch a teacher, scratch a number of cars, break enough windows and you go out of here... that doesn't feel to me like the right place to get the children through feeling really emotionally secure and safe.”

Head: Setting 7

In Setting 6, presented as 'sanction free', there was an understanding that a narrow focus on rules and behaviour management through rewards and sanctions was seen as a dead-end street:

“I think it's often easier to do rewards and sanctions...you've got certain procedures and you do something wrong, you do it three times and you go into internal exclusions and after that you get an exclusion, but where do you go after that – and that's what rewards and sanctions do, they lead you into an area...if it works it's great, if it doesn't, what do you do?”

Social Worker: Setting 6

The importance of relationships in school

The transformative potential of RJ was understood best, and fulfilled most effectively, in the settings where there was a very strong whole school emphasis on social relationships, especially the formation of attachments. In this respect the principles of RJ harmonised with the principles of nurture. Underpinning both philosophies is recognition of behaviour as communication, a commitment to building, repairing and maintaining an ongoing relationship with the child, rather than excluding, and an attempt to enlist the support of the whole school through strong leadership. In the settings with the most developed understandings of *behaviour as communication* staff were encouraged to respond to students in a non-reactive manner that was supportive of children's needs, and not to 'take it personally'. For example this idea was presented by a member of the 'Emotional Wellbeing Team' in Setting 6:

“And we have quite a lot of tricky children, and some of the staff, particularly the TAs, take it personally...and you find that they don't think a child should speak to them that way and it's their issue really...”

A similar point was articulated by the Head in Setting 3:

“Once you stop reacting to the behaviour and looking at behaviour instead as 'what is that telling me about the child' - it's distress so often that is causing that behaviour... The point where we really turned a corner is when staff really understood that this isn't personal, that that behaviour isn't personal...”

This restorative approach was most clearly articulated by the Head in Setting 7:

“It's part of the whole approach... After something negative has happened it's the adult's responsibility to get that relationship repaired... it's not a 'shouty shouty'; 'pointy pointy'; it's just a matter of fact... and [the apologies] come from them and that means they own it and that means it has a chance for repairing the relationship.”

Head: Setting 7

The recent popularity of RJ includes a desire to pursue a more relational approach within a “socially responsible community” (Reimer, 2015; 9). All three settings were distinctive in emphasising the school as a community and the school's existence within its wider community. For example in both Settings 3 and 6 there were pastoral policies that extended to work with parents including a cookery school, in-school parent and toddler groups, debt counselling, a food bank, and access to therapeutic counselling

services. As a residential school there was less contact with parents in Setting 7, but the organisation of the school was based on the idea of 'whole school as therapeutic community'. Everyone was responsible for the psycho-social wellbeing of the child, from welfare staff to Head teacher, catering and grounds staff, and they were all trained to a high level, through the school's own in-house diploma, to reflect this need for a consistent and socially responsible community. We discussed with the Head how far the school's training approach could be replicated in state primary schools:

“If they could involve their welfare staff, their cleaners and caterers and midday supervisors and do as much training as possible... because it's really important that every single person who the children come in contact with has got the same approach. It's no good if the cleaner goes and shouts at them...”

Head: Setting 7

The relationship-driven approach was seen most clearly in Setting 7 where attachments with key workers were critical and sanctions involved the input of a trusted adult. In this setting sanctions and rewards were a superficial means of addressing behaviour and a nurturing and relationship-based approach was needed to make “long lasting life changing difference” (Head: Setting 7), especially with children for whom a sanction-based punitive approach was the norm:

“One of the indicators we use that we're doing a good job is that the child has a healthy attachment with at least one of us and that's our responsibility to create, not the child's... The children here – they've been abused. Talk about punitive – they have had the worst possible... the most unbelievable sanction and control that you can possibly imagine, so it's not going to damage them if somebody wants to give them a detention... We're pussy cats compared to the abusers.”

Head: Setting 7

This is a striking testament to the damage that can be done through perpetuating and entrenching the vulnerable child's experience of punishment. While Setting 7 was focused on responding to a group of very vulnerable abused children, the philosophy described here by the Head can be extended to children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in all schools.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this paper we stated that our goal was to describe approaches to sanctions in primary school settings that provide nurture groups or that operate according to nurturing principles and to shed some light on the ways in which different approaches may be viewed as helpful or harmful to children's behaviour and to NG provision as a whole.

Our conclusions emphasise the idea that sanctions in mainstream schools need to be individualised and they need to make sense. They need to be proportional, non-confrontational and educational to “turn disciplinary violations into learning experiences” (Suvall, 2009; 547). For example, a child that shouts in class after repeated warnings is better served by a sanction where they are able to practise using a quiet voice under the supervision of a teacher, than a more punitive lunchtime detention. The aim of avoiding sanctions altogether, while being admirable, is perhaps less than achievable in practice for many schools struggling with complex and challenging behaviours and socio-cultural constraints.

The most successful settings within this research study had relationships at their core, and a de-emphasis on sanction systems. They had an ideological leaning away from any kind of 'will to punish', and a leaning towards social relationships and RJ.

“The praxis of RJ engages the rich ecologies of individuals' lives, at the social and emotional level of a community of care, be it the classroom, playground, school, or neighbourhood. This is a significant paradigm change that can be characterised as a shift away from being a rule-based institution to a relationship-based institution, or from being an institution whose purpose is social control to being an institution that nurtures social engagement...”

(Morrison and Vaandering, 2014; 145).

In contrast the least successful settings tended towards social control and sanction systems that provided a sharp contrast between the contexts of nurture and mainstream. An overly punitive approach to punishment and exclusionary practices reinforce the 'school to prison pipeline' noted by Irby (2014), and needs to be more meaningfully addressed.

It is the relational ecology of the school that dictates whether a punitive strategy of control, or a nurturing strategy of ongoing social engagement is sought overall. NGs can provide us with a useful way to model complementary and reinforcing aspects of RJ. Both philosophies have much in common and are based on a will to develop, maintain, repair and sustain relationships and both use strategies for managing behaviour that reflect an underlying value for attachments.

REFERENCES

- Bennett, H** (2015) Results of the systematic review on nurture groups' effectiveness, *The International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 1(1) 3-7.
- Boxall, M** (2002). *Nurture groups in school – principles and practice*. Gateshead: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Cooper, P, Arnold, R, and Boyd, E** (2001). The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(4), 160-166.
- Cooper, P, and Lovey, J** (1999). Early intervention in emotional and behavioural difficulties: the role of Nurture Groups. *European journal of special needs education*, 14(2), 122-131.
- Cooper, P, and Tikhaz, Y** (2007). *Nurture groups in school and at home: Connecting with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties* (Vol. 1). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Cooper, P, and Whitebread, D** (2007). The effectiveness of nurture groups on student progress: Evidence from a national research study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 12(3), 171-190.
- DfCSF** (2007). The children's plan: Building brighter futures.
- DfE** (2014). Behaviour and discipline in schools: Advice for headteachers and school staff. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/behaviour-and-discipline-in-schools> (site visited 10.12.2015)
- Doyle, R** (2001). Focus on Practice: Using a readiness scale for reintegrating pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties from a Nurture Group into their mainstream classroom – a pilot study. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(3), 126-132.
- Evans, KR, and Lester, JN** (2012). Zero tolerance: Moving the conversation forward. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 48(2), 108-114.
- Evans, KR, and Lester, JN** (2013). Restorative justice in education: What we know so far. *Middle School Journal*, 44(5), 57.
- Goodman, R** (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: a research note. *Journal of child psychology and psychiatry*, 38(5), 581-586.
- Hopkins, B** (2011) *Restorative Classroom Practice*, Transforming Conflict, Optimus Publishing.
- Irby, DJ** (2014). Trouble at school: Understanding school discipline systems as nets of social control. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 47(4), 513-530.
- Iszatt, J, and Wasilewska, T** (1997). Nurture groups: an early intervention model enabling vulnerable children with emotional and behavioural difficulties to integrate successfully into school. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 14(3), 121-139.
- Johnstone, G, and Van Ness, DW** (2007). The meaning of restorative justice. In G Johnstone and DW Van Ness (Eds.), *Handbook of restorative justice* (pp. 5-23). Portland, OR: Willan Publishing.
- Kupchik, A** (2010). *Homeroom security: School discipline in an age of fear*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Mackay, T** (2015) Future directions for nurture in education. Developing a model and a research agenda. *The International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 1(1) 3 – 7.
- McCluskey, G, Lloyd, G, Kane, J, Riddell, S, Stead, J, and Weedon, E** (2008b). Can restorative practices in schools make a difference? *Educational Review*, 60(4), 405-417.
- Morrison, BE, and Vaandering, D** (2012). *Restorative justice: Pedagogy, praxis, and discipline*. *Journal of School Violence*, 11(2), 138-155.
Nurture Group Network (NGN) <https://nurturegroups.org/about-us/faq> (site visited: 05.12.15)
- Parsons, C** (2005). School Exclusion: The Will to Punish 1. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 53(2), 187-211.
- Reimer, KE** (2015). *Restorative Justice as a Window into Relationships: Student Experiences of Social Control and Social Engagement in Scotland and Canada* (Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa).
Restorative Justice 4 Schools (2015) Research Justice Council. www.restorativejustice4schools.co.uk (site visited on 10.12.2015)
- Reynolds, S, MacKay, T & Kearney, M** (2009). Nurture groups: a large-scale, controlled study of effects on development and academic attainment. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36, 4, 204-212.
- Sanders, T** (2007) Helping Children Thrive at School: The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23 (1): 45-61.
- Sharkey, JD, and Fenning, PA** (2012). Rationale for designing school contexts in support of proactive discipline. *Journal of School Violence*, 11(2), 95-104.
- Spratt, J, Shucksmith, J, Philip, K, and Watson, C** (2006). 'Part of who we are as a school should include responsibility for well-being': links between the school environment, mental health and behaviour. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 24(3), 14-21.
- Steer, A** (2009). The Steer Report. Learning Behaviour: *Lessons Learned, a Review of Behaviour Standards and Practices in our Schools*, Nottingham: DCSF Publications.
- Suwall, C** (2009). Restorative Justice in Schools: Learning from Jena High School. *Harv. CR-CLL Rev.*, 44, 547.
Team-Teach Ltd. www.team-teach.co.uk (site visited on 05.12.2015)
- Vaandering, D** (2010). The significance of critical theory for restorative justice in education. *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 32(1) 45-176.
- Warin, J and Hibbin, R** (2016) *Comparative Nurture Group Study. Final Report*. NGN <http://nurturegroups.org/what-we-do/research-and-evidence/lancaster-nurture-group-report>
- Woolford, A** (2009). *The politics of restorative justice: A critical introduction*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.
- Zehr, H.** (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books

Nurture groups and teacher-child relationships

Exploring the relationships children in nurture groups establish with their teachers and how these differ from the relationships children in mainstream classrooms develop with their teachers

Dr Claire Balisteri

ABSTRACT

Exploring social and cognitive gains as measured by the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998) has been the focus of research on nurture group intervention. More research is needed to learn about the psychological states of individual children and examine the role of attachment in the work that is carried out. This study provides an innovative contribution to the evaluation of part time nurture groups by examining how children and teachers perceive their relationship with each other and if this improves over time.

A total of 63 pupils aged 7-11 years attending five part-time nurture groups and five mainstream classroom in matched schools participated in the study. Two self-report questionnaires, the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1992) and the Teacher Acceptance Scale (Harrison, Clarke & Ungerer, 2007) were used to assess teacher and pupil views of child-teacher relationship quality.

Fury's (1996) development of a quantitative child-family drawing method was also used to assess pupil views of child-teacher relationship quality. Although difficulties with reliability and validity remain with using drawings, findings from Fury's (1996) drawing method indicate that feelings of emotional uncertainty (vulnerability) on the part of the child may be improved by attending a nurture group. Stronger feelings of closeness and teacher acceptance were also reported by teachers and students attending nurture groups.

INTRODUCTION

Nurture groups (NGs) are an early intervention resource aimed at meeting the needs of pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties within mainstream schools. Ascertaining the impact NGs have as an intervention appears to be the focus of the majority of studies in the nurture group (NG) literature. This has been achieved by either using quantitative data, assessing children's progress using the Boxall Profile and the Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (1997), (Mackay, Reynolds & Kearney, 2010) or by using qualitative data, interviewing parents and pupils (Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2001). Evidence from research has indicated a range of positive outcomes but has not conclusively identified the specific practices or processes in NGs that have produced these positive effects.

The importance of pupil-teacher relationships in supporting academic attainment and social progress

Positive results within this research have been found supporting the notion that initial relationship quality between mother and child influences the quality of relationship established between teacher and pupil (Jerome, Hamre & Pianta, 2009). As children spend a significant proportion of their time at school they are provided with vital opportunities to build secure and trusting relationships with adults that can help them improve their self-esteem and confidence. Indeed a large body of literature exists that indicates the quality of child-teacher relationships is an important predictor of school adjustment and social progress (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). O'Connor and Colwell (2002), who attempted to look at the long term improvements for children who had attended NGs, believe Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory is at the heart of the work carried out. They echo Boxall's (2002) work stating that:

“The focus is on developing a secure and trusting relationship with the teacher as a substitute attachment figure, while meeting the needs of each child at the developmental level they have reached”
(p.97).

Research on pupil-teacher relationships in nurture groups

To date, there have been no direct studies that have attempted to measure the quality of pupil-teacher relationships within NGs. Only a small number of studies have attempted to seek children's perceptions of NGs (Cooper et al, 2001; Pyle and Rae, 2015; Sanders, 2007) and the focus of these studies has not been directly on understanding the quality of relationships between the student

and teacher. For example, in Pyle and Rae's (2015) study the focus was on seeking children's perceptions of NGs and the ways in which they impact upon parent-child relationships. Cooper et al (2001) accessed pupil perceptions in an interview where pupils were asked open questions about their experience of attending a full time NG. Particular issues to emerge repeatedly were positive references to the quality of interpersonal relationships in the NG between staff and pupils. While Cooper et al (2001) had a large number of participants, difficulties were still reported in accessing pupils' perceptions in a reliable manner and it is not clear how many participants were interviewed. Sander's (2007) study, which measured the progress of pupils who attended three part-time NGs in Hampshire, did not directly refer to the quality of child-teacher relationships either.

Measures used for assessing attachment in school-aged children

The majority of attachment measures that have been proposed for use with school-age children have been projective measures. Projective measures allow children to project their understanding of relationships based on their own life experiences. One popular approach has been the use of story stem narratives such as the Manchester Child Attachment Story Task (Del Giudice, 2008).

However, developmental variables such as cognitive and linguistic maturity affect children's responses (Green, Stanley & Peters, 2007), and narrative story stem methods have not been developed to look beyond child and care-giver relationships to other significant relationships children may develop, for example, relationships formed with their teachers in school.

Using Fury et al's (1997) Child-Family Drawing Global Rating Scale

The research on child-family drawings has grown out of clinical practice and case studies, rather than controlled empirical research (Veltman & Browne, 2001). However, evidence is beginning to mount that children's drawings can reliably reflect their internal representations of themselves and others and can be used to measure attachment with school age children (Fury, Carlson & Sroufe, 1997; Harrison et al, 2007).

In 1996 Fury adapted Kaplan and Main's (1986) system of evaluating children's drawings of their families and the drawings were scored on eight theoretically-derived rating scales where eight dimensions of relationship quality were scored. These were the following: vitality/creativity, pride/happiness, vulnerability, emotional distance/isolation, tension/anger, role reversal, bizarreness/dissociation and global pathology. These scales were intended to permit the researchers to examine the drawings in a global fashion. Validity was established through a large-scale, prospective longitudinal study in which a number of measures were obtained including early attachment history and life stress measures.

There has been one study that has directly attempted to measure the dynamics of child-teacher relationship through the

medium of children's drawings and applied Fury et al's (1997) child-family drawing method to achieve this. Harrison et al (2007) sought to examine through direct (self-reported feelings) and indirect (representations through drawings) procedures the relationship quality between children and their teachers and how this is linked to school adjustment. This study was carried out in Australia and, as yet, there are no published reports of this method being used in UK schools. Using a tool of this kind, then it may be possible to gain an insight into how children view their relationship with their teacher. Moreover, it could help to address a number of unanswered questions within the UK NG literature. For example, what is the quality of the relationship children develop with their teacher in NGs? How is this different from the relationships children develop with their teachers who have a similar pattern of difficulties in mainstream classrooms? In the study that is reported here those questions were investigated, the perceptions of teacher-child relationship quality in a sample of primary school pupils attending either part-time NGs or mainstream classes in matched schools.

METHOD

Participants

The sample comprised 63 pupils aged seven to 11 years (42 boys, 21 girls) attending 10 primary schools in the Birmingham, Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Somerset areas. Of these, 31 attended nurture groups in five schools and 32 attended five matched schools without NGs. Pupils were only selected for the study if they were new to attending the NG at the beginning of the academic year.

The selected NGs all ran on a part-time basis and were only selected if they had achieved the 'Boxall Quality Mark' Profile Award. This award was introduced by the Nurture Group Network (www.nurturegroups.org) as a means to identify good practice and ensure there is consistency in practice. To ensure consistency with this model all the nurture groups had to run for half a day, five days a week.

Schools selected for the control group had a comparable intake to the NG schools within a 10% range in terms of proportions of children who were eligible for free school meals and children who had a minority ethnic background. Once the five control group schools had been identified, the control pupils were selected if they showed similar patterns of difficulty in school to those in the NGs. The Goodman's Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) was used for this purpose and pupils were matched in terms of the 'total difficulties' score ranges.

Procedure and measures

During individual interviews with the author each child was asked to respond to a set of five questions using rating scales and to draw a picture of themselves and their teacher at school.

Participants were asked to complete the same activities in October/November 2010 and in June/July 2011. Prior to visiting each school in 2010 and then in 2011 the control group class teachers and NG teachers were asked to complete Pianta's (1992) 28 item Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) standardised questionnaire.

Teacher measure of child-teacher relationship quality

The STRS was used to assess a teacher's perception of his or her relationship with a particular student, specifically in terms of three dimensions – conflict, closeness and dependency. Conceptually, these three dimensions are intended to relate to the dimensions found in parent-child relationships. The STRS has been shown to be psychometrically reliable and valid (Pianta, 1992) and is appropriate for use with students aged four to 11. As the development of the STRS was prompted by interest in applications of attachment theory in school settings it has particular relevance to this study. Teachers responded to 28 items and indicated the extent to which each statement currently applied to their relationship with the child on a five point Likert scale in which 1 = definitely does not apply and 5 = definitely applies. The conflict subscale measured the degree to which a teacher perceived his or her relationship with a particular student as negative and conflictual. The closeness subscale measured the degree to which a teacher experienced affection, warmth and open communication. The dependency subscale measured the degree to which a teacher perceived a particular student as being overly dependent. A teacher endorsing higher dependency indicated problems with the child's over reliance on him or her. By combining raw scores from these three subscales, a total scale score was obtained which assessed the overall quality of the relationship.

Child measures of child-teacher relationship quality

Teacher Acceptance Scale

As the drawing task described below is a relatively new assessment tool it was felt important to include a direct self-report pupil measure of pupil-teacher relationships. Harrison et al (2007) developed a set of five questions based on items used in the maternal acceptance subscale of the 'Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Kindergarten Children' (Harter & Pike, 1984) to assess children's feelings about their teacher. This 'Teacher Acceptance Scale' was used to assess the children's feelings about their teachers. The children responded on a three-point scale, indicating that an item applied to them, sometimes applied to them or did not apply to them.

Child-teacher drawing task

Each participant was provided with a blank A4 piece of paper and 12 colouring pencils. He/she was then given the following instruction: "Draw a picture of yourself and your teacher at school". No further instructions were provided. If necessary they were reminded that they should include the teacher in the drawing. At

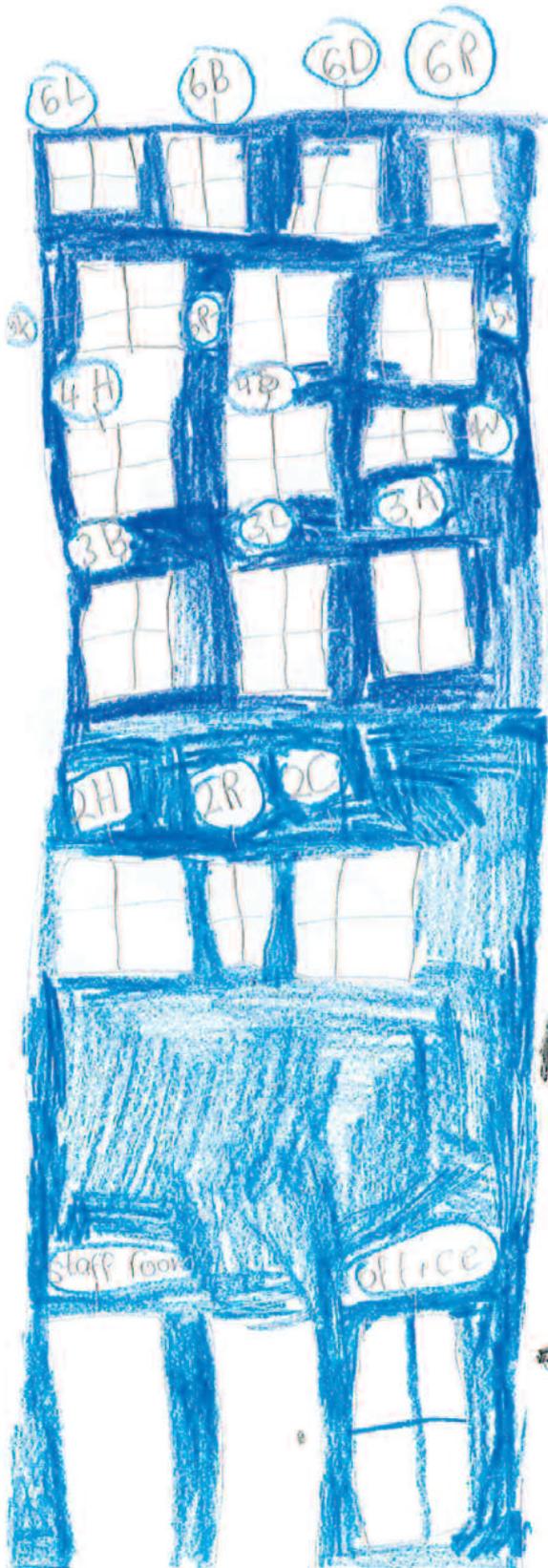
the end of the task the child was asked to point out who the teacher was and to identify any objects that they had included and to comment on what they were doing in the picture. Although there was no stated time limit, each drawing session took no longer than 30 minutes.

Using Fury's scoring manual (1996) the drawings were scored on eight different dimensions. Each dimension was rated on a seven-point scale from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high) as outlined by Fury (1996). A high score in the happiness and vitality scale indicates positive feelings. A high score in all the other scales indicates negative feelings.

The same two coders scored all the drawings independently of each other. Training was provided for the second coder by working through a number of drawings that had been used in the pilot study. When discrepancies were found in the scoring, detailed discussion took place between the two coders and the drawing was re-marked.

Descriptions for each of the scales are as follows:

1. **Vitality/Creativity:** this scale is designed to capture the child's emotional investment in completing the task of drawing, as indicated by going beyond the task to add embellishments and lively elements.
2. **Pride/Happiness:** this scale is designed to capture the child's sense of pride, belongingness and general feelings of happiness. Higher scores may show the child holding hands with the teacher or something that would be considered fun with the teacher.
3. **Vulnerability:** this scale aims to capture feelings of vulnerability and emotional ambivalence as expressed in the child's drawing. Drawings rated high on this scale may not appear centred or grounded and may be very small or bunched together.
4. **Emotional Distance/Isolation:** this scale is intended to assess feelings of emotional distance and/or loneliness on the part of the child. This may be seen in disguised expressions of anger, physical distance from the teacher.
5. **Tension/Anger:** this scale is concerned with the degree of tension/anger that is aroused in the child as result of being asked to draw to complete the task. Figures may appear very rigid, without colour or clear positive facial affect.
6. **Role-reversal:** this scale attempts to capture feelings on the part of the child that suggest a role-reversing kind of relationship with the teacher. More specifically, the teacher is perceived as weak or unreliable by the child.



7. Bizarreness/Dissociation: this scale address a particular form of anger expressed by the child in his/her drawing. The underlying aim is to tap the unconscious processing of anger and resentment that may include unusual signs and symbols (e.g. black clouds) or fantasy themes in which the child is empowered in some way.

8. Global Pathology: this final scale captures the overall degree of pathology reflected in the child's drawing. This scale focuses on global aspects of the drawing as a whole such as the size of the figures, use of colour etc.

An example of some of the drawings and how they were scored

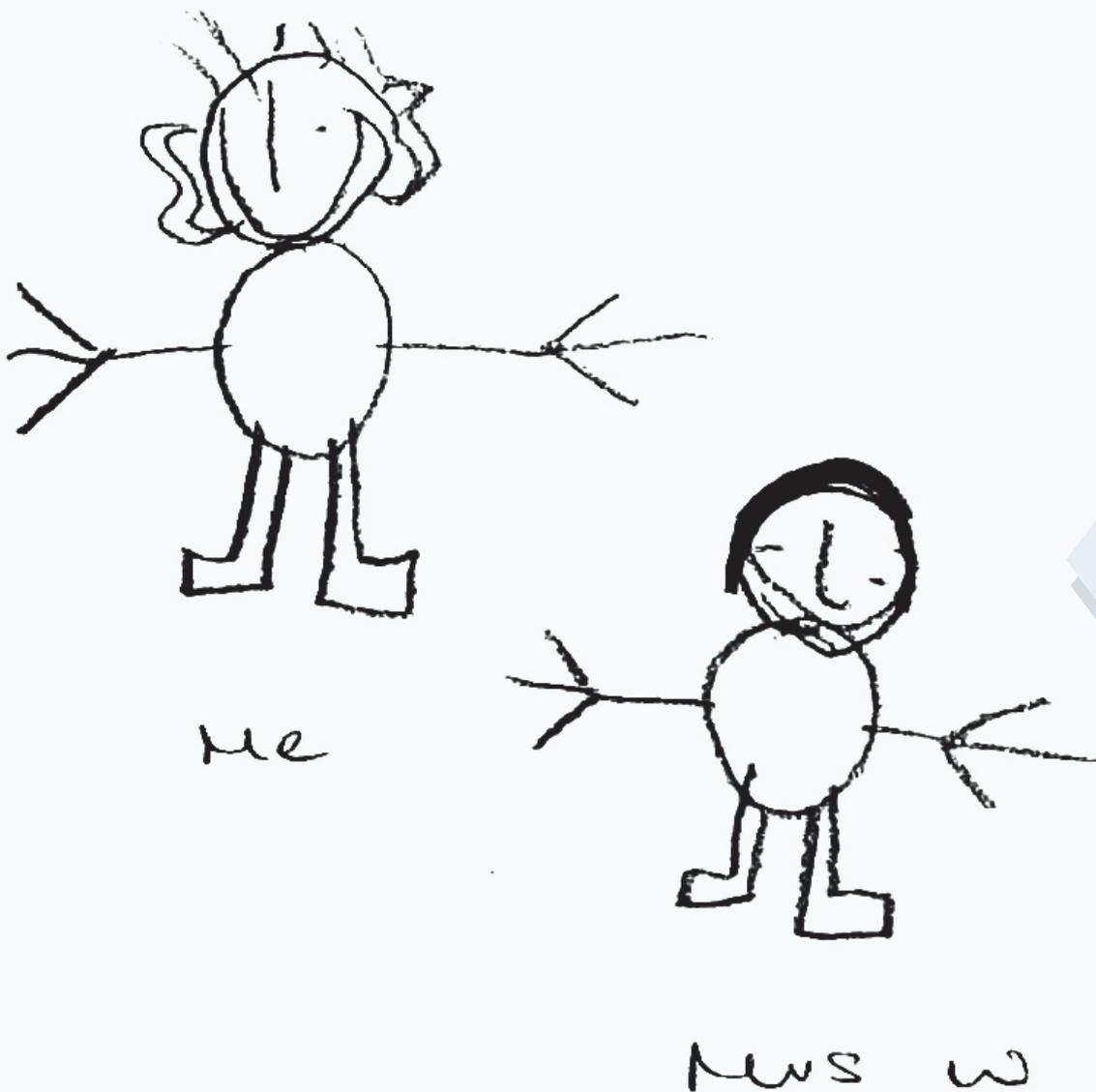
Drawing 1 – Nurture group student



Scoring awarded for Drawing 1 and explanation of marking

Drawing Scale	Score given by marker 1	Score given by marker 2	Commentary
Vitality-Creativity	6	6	A high score of 6 was awarded. It was felt that this drawing has some detail and reflects something 'going on' The student has drawn the school with detail of the different classrooms and drawn themselves and their teacher standing outside the school.
Family Pride/Happiness	5	5	A moderately high score of 5 was awarded. Although the drawing is not clear in directly portraying closeness between the student and teacher they are standing together with smiles on their faces.
Vulnerability	3	3	A moderately low score of 3 was awarded as it was not possible to infer feelings of vulnerability. The drawing is not distinguished by tiny figures that are crowded together or floating on the page. The drawings are grounded as they stand together and a background scene has been drawn.
Emotional distance/Isolation	3	3	A moderately low score of 3 was awarded as the drawing shows some signs of positive regard between teacher and child. The figures are positioned close to each other and smiling. A lower score was not awarded as the teacher is not significantly larger than the child and it was not possible to decipher if this is a close relationship.
Tension/Anger	2	2	A low score of 2 was awarded as the drawing has few signs of tension. The drawing appears direct and organised.
Role-reversal	3	3	A moderately low score of 3 was awarded. There is some clarity with regard to teacher-child roles. The teacher is slightly taller than the student and the student appears to be wearing a more colourful top looking more 'child-like'.
Bizarreness/Dissociation	2	2	A low score of 2 was awarded. There are clearly no distorted or disguised elements. The drawing suggests no signs of bizarreness
Global Pathology	3	3	A moderately low score of 3 was awarded. The drawing is quite simple in style but there are some indications of positive feelings as both figures are smiling and individuated.

Drawing 2 – Nurture group student



Scoring awarded for **Drawing 2** and explanation of marking

Drawing Scale	Score given by marker 1	Score given by marker 2	Commentary
Vitality-Creativity	3	4	After discussion, a moderate score of 4 was awarded. Marker 1 felt, as there was no background detail or colour and figures were drawn at the top of the page, a lower score of 3 should be awarded. However, it was agreed that drawings are complete and not careless or depressed in feeling therefore a moderate score of 4 was awarded.
Family Pride/Happiness	5	5	A moderately high score of 5 was awarded. While there is no background detail, the student and teacher are standing close to each other with smiles on their faces.
Vulnerability	5	5	A moderately high score of 5 was awarded, as it was felt this drawing portrayed some subtle signs of vulnerability. The drawing appeared immature. The figures are small and the arms and hands are exaggerated. The figures are drawn at the top of the page.
Emotional distance/Isolation	3	3	A moderately low score of 3 was awarded, as the drawing shows some signs of positive regard between teacher and child. The figures are positioned close to each other and smiling. It was not possible to score lower on this scale as the pupil had drawn themselves as being larger than the teacher.
Tension/Anger	3	3	A moderately low score of 3 was awarded, as there are only minor signs of tension that are balanced by more positive elements. The figures are smiling and complete.
Role-reversal	5	5	A moderately high score of 5 was awarded as the child is larger than the teacher.
Bizarreness/Dissociation	3	3	A moderately low score of 3 was awarded. There are only minor indications distorted or disguised elements, exaggerated body parts. This is balanced by more healthy features; the figures are close to each other and smiling.
Global Pathology	4	4	A moderate score of 4 was awarded as the drawing is difficult to gauge in terms of overall feeling. There are some positive features with some points of negative concern.

Results

A series of 2x2 mixed ANOVAs were conducted to investigate differences in scores for child-teacher relationship quality between children in part-time NGs and those in mainstream classes. Tests for skewness and kurtosis were negative, indicating that the data met the requirements for multi-variant statistical testing. The means and standard deviations for each of the dependent variables are presented in **tables 1** and **2**.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations for teacher measures of relationship quality

Variable	Control Group (n=32)				Nurture Group (n=31)			
	2010		2011		2010		2011	
Teacher Measures	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
STRS Conflict subscale raw score	25.34	9.77	25.25	8.80	24.81	7.38	24.06	9.33
STRS Closeness subscale raw score	35.59	6.11	38.00	6.25	39.71	4.62	41.58	6.48
STRS Dependency subscale raw score	12.28	3.86	11.75	3.61	12.35	4.54	11.84	3.83
Total STRS score raw score	100.03	14.70	102.97	14.13	104.55	10.25	107.68	13.13

Table 2: Means and standard deviations for pupil measures of relationship quality

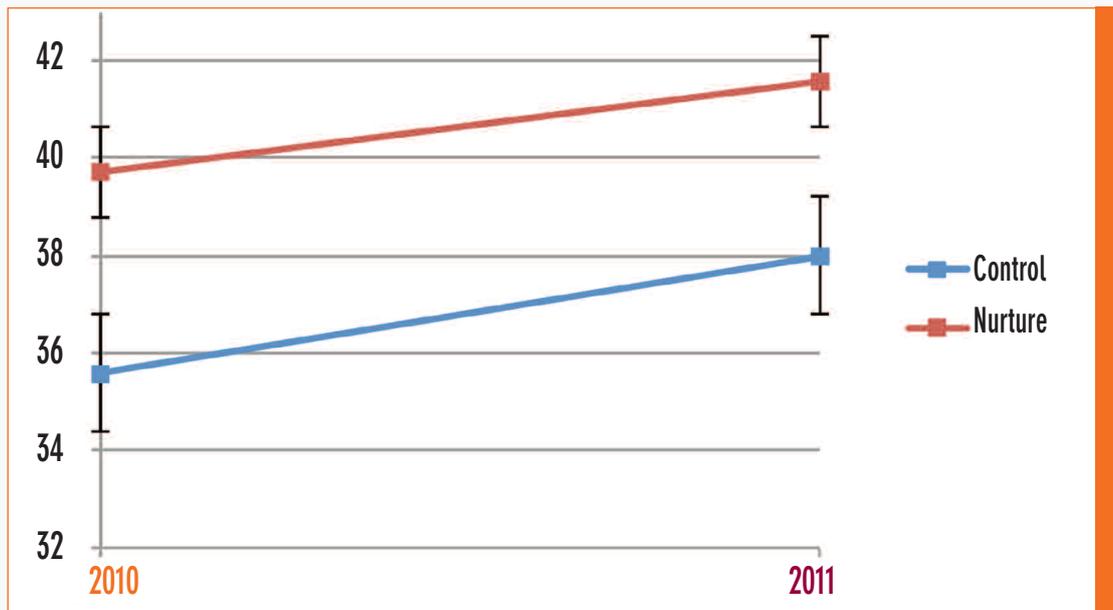
Variable	Control Group (n=32)				Nurture Group (n=31)			
	2010		2011		2010		2011	
Pupil Measures	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Total Teacher Acceptance Score	12.38	2.38	12.66	1.81	13.81	2.01	13.87	1.48
Vitality scale – drawings	5.22	1.29	5.13	1.39	4.71	1.37	4.87	1.36
Happiness scale – drawings	4.47	1.34	4.69	1.03	4.19	1.35	4.70	1.32
Vulnerability scale – drawings	4.06	1.39	4.34	1.26	5.00	1.10	4.47	1.36
Emotional scale – drawings	3.63	1.26	3.53	0.98	3.84	1.32	3.40	1.07
Tension and Anger scale – drawings	3.00	1.27	3.03	1.12	3.42	1.31	3.23	1.38
Role-reversal scale – drawings	3.25	1.32	3.09	1.25	3.87	1.54	3.33	1.27
Bizarre scale – drawings	3.06	1.48	2.84	1.08	3.65	1.56	3.10	1.30
Global Pathology – drawings	3.81	1.26	3.56	1.05	4.23	1.28	3.97	1.16

Results for teacher measures for child-teacher relationship quality

No significant differences were found between the groups in improvements in overall relationship quality (total score of the STRS). It was found that teachers from both groups reported significant improvements in overall relationship quality over time, ($F(1,61) = 4.911$ $p = .030$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .075$).

Further analyses of the sub-scales of the STRS revealed some differences between NGs and mainstream classes. A main effect for group was reported on the closeness scale of the STRS indicating that NG teachers felt they had a much closer relationship with their students, ($F(1,61) = 8.399$ $p < .005$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .121$). A main effect for time was also reported suggesting that teachers from both groups developed a closer relationship with their students over time, ($F(1,61) = 9.977$ $p < .002$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .141$). The main effect for group and main effect for time are displayed in figure 1.

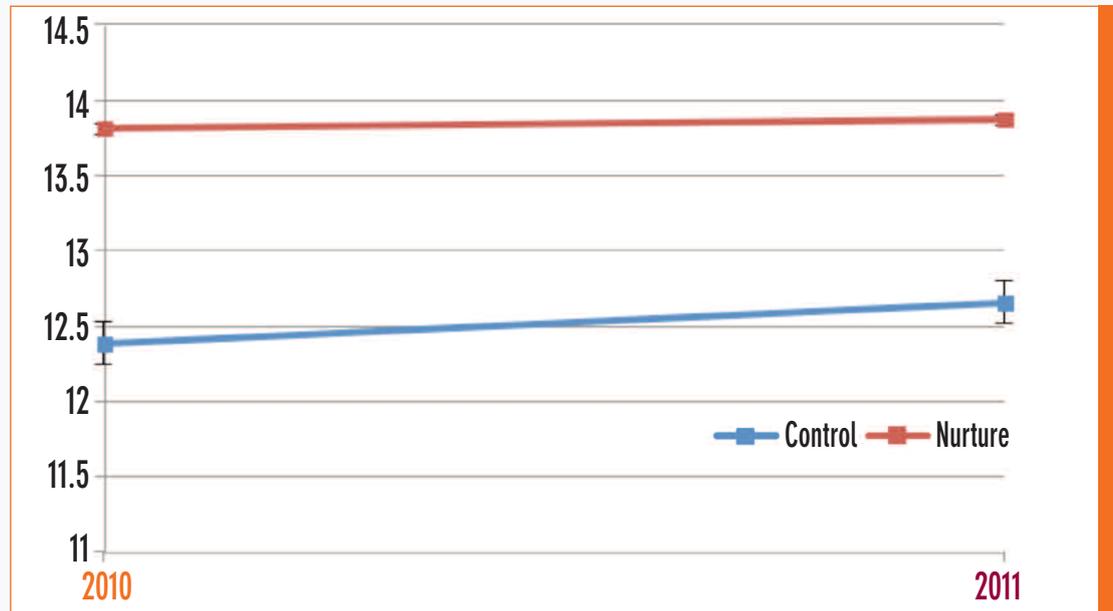
Figure 1:
Line graph of the main effect for group and for time on the closeness score of the STRS:



Results for child measure of child-teacher relationship quality

Analysis of the Teacher Acceptance Scale also revealed a significant difference between the groups where the NG children overall reported feeling more accepted by their teacher ($F(1,60) = 9.819$ $p = .003$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .141$). The main effect for group is displayed in figure 2. No significant differences were found between the groups in terms of relationships improving over time.

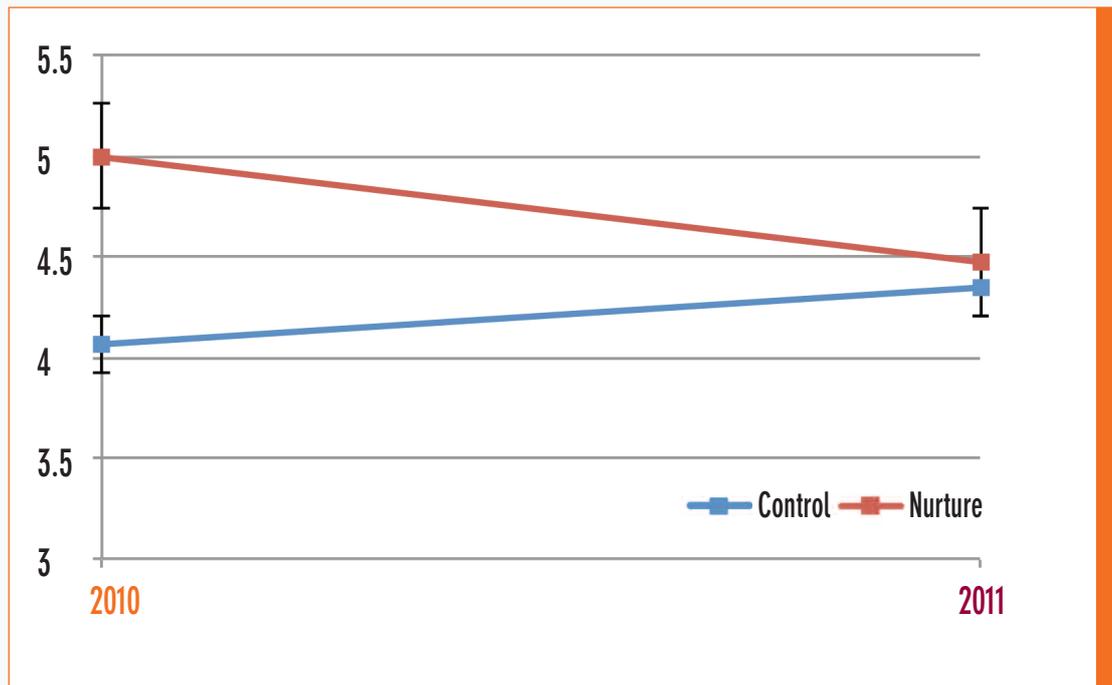
Figure 2:
Line graph of the main effect for group on the Teacher Acceptance score:



Apart from the vulnerability scale, analysis of the drawings scales revealed no significant effects indicating that the children's feelings towards their teacher did not significantly improve over time for either group, as measured by this scale.

A significant interaction effect for both time and group was however found for the vulnerability scale of the drawings, ($F(1,60) = 5.912$, $p < 0.018$, $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .090$). Analysis revealed that feelings of vulnerability between the child and teacher improved for the NG children while the mainstream children's feelings showed greater vulnerability over time. The interaction effect for time and group is displayed in figure 3.

Figure 3:
Line graph of the interaction for group and time and on the vulnerability scale of the drawings:



DISCUSSION

Discussion of teacher measures of child-teacher relationship quality

Findings from the STRS scale showed that overall relationship quality between teachers and pupils improved over time for both mainstream and NGs. There were no significant differences between the groups on the dependency and conflict subscales. However, NG teachers reported feeling closer to their students after they had attended the NG for a short time. These findings suggest that time helped to develop closeness between teachers and all pupils, as would be expected, but closer relationships were formed within the NGs.

Newberry and Davis (2008) examined teachers' conceptions of closeness and argued that for close relationships to occur, both students and teachers must develop shared interests and common understandings of each other. It is striking that NG teachers' judgments of closeness to their students were measurably different after working with them for a very short time. This may be a reflection of the unique experience a NG offers.

Discussion of child measures of child-teacher relationship quality

Findings from the Teacher Acceptance scale showed a similar

pattern of results to the STRS. A main effect for group was found whereby NG children reported feeling more accepted by their teacher even before the students had attended the NG for an established length of time.

Findings from using Fury's (1996; 1997) child-family drawing method revealed that the NG children began the year feeling more vulnerable in their relationship with the teacher but improved by the end of the school year, to a point where their level of felt vulnerability was comparable to that of children in mainstream classes. Boxall (2002) stated that children who attend NGs often have confused feelings and struggle to manage their emotional response. She argued that developing a relationship with a supportive attachment figure in school can help a young person to develop an internal model of others as being available and a model of self as being competent, worthy and loveable. This allows the young person to feel less overwhelmed by negative emotions and to be more aware of and able to manage their emotional responses thus lowering their vulnerability.

The present study, although limited, has also added to a small but growing research interest in children's representations of close relationships through drawings (Kaplan & Main, 1986) and more specifically to the research studies that have used Fury's Child-Family Drawing Global Rating Scale to assess children's representations of their relationships with teachers. While limited

findings were found from using this scale, it was found that feelings of emotional uncertainty between a teacher and a child can be improved by attending a NG. Such findings have wider implications for nurture in education. From the teacher's perspective, building strong positive relationships is worth investing in as they could help to promote children's emotional security. Furthermore, using nurture principles helped the students to feel more accepted and closer to their teacher even before the students had attended the NG for any established length of time. Therefore, if nurture principles were implemented at a whole school level then this may help to build supportive child-teacher relationships for all children. Despite significant improvements being found on the vulnerability scale, only one of the sub scales of the drawing task revealed an improvement in relationship quality. Such results raise the question of whether this drawing scale was able to adequately reflect a symbolic representation of a child's internal working model of child-teacher relationship quality.

Limitations

There were limitations in the sampling arranged for this study, in that children in the control groups attended different schools from those in the NGs. It is hoped that the matching of the schools reduced the negative impact this could have had. A further sampling limitation concerned the selection of the NGs. All ran for five half days a week and had achieved the 'Boxall Quality Mark' Profile Award (an award used to identify good practice). However, there was no detailed record of how far they varied in practice from the 'classic' NG principles noted by Cooper et al (2001, p.161).

Central among these characteristics are the ways in which:

- The practical, day-to-day work of the NG is rooted in understanding of the developmental needs of children, the interdependence of social, emotional and cognitive factors, and a commitment to the fostering of positive, healthy development;
- The work of the NG is fully integrated into mainstream school and LEA policies and structures, so as to avoid the 'sin bin' trap;
- Children's admission to, progress in and eventual departure from the NG are informed by the use of appropriate diagnostic and evaluative tools, such as the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998).

Fury's drawing measure has potentially provided some insight into the children's inner working models of their interactions with their teacher. However, any interpretation of the significant findings reported in results on both the Teacher Acceptance Scale and the drawing task must take account of the relative infancy of these measures and the limited evidence on their reliability. To date only a few studies have used these measures and in the present study only one of the sub scales of the drawing task revealed an improvement in relationship quality.

Schools are complex systems and it is reasonable to expect that these drawings may reflect other dynamics (e.g. general feelings towards school, relationships with other adults in schools and relationships with peer group), which may have

obscured projection of the internal working model of attachment to an individual teacher. Critics of using human figure drawings as psychological assessment tools cite empirical studies, which show poor reliability for drawings as a diagnostic tool, compared with interviews or behavioural observation (Pianta, Longmaid and Ferguson, 1999). There also appears to be some difficulty with concurrent validity in using drawing measures.

Using pupil and teacher self-report methods also does not account for varying extraneous variables such as teacher characteristics, the emotional climate of the classroom or how changing child characteristics might have influenced child-teacher relationship quality over time. Children's relationship history with their parents is also likely to contribute to the quality of the relationship they form with their teachers.

Directions for future development

A number of recommendations would be made to to eradicate the drawbacks found in this study. Future research on the subject should assess the fidelity of implementation of NGs. This could include observation of the group to assess how closely the groups are following identified good NG teaching practices. There also needs to be a comparison between different variants of NGs and of matched children attending classes of the same size but without using NG principles. A larger sample of pupils is needed and there is also a need for random assignment both of matched schools and matched children so that a proper comparison of all conditions can be made.

As drawing is supported in research as being a particularly non-threatening procedure that might elicit feelings not accessible to conscious awareness, further research and development of Fury's et al's (1997) drawing scale is needed. Future research needs to develop both the validity and reliability of the measure. For example, the content validity of the drawing could be explored by measuring whether there are specific domains that the scoring of the drawing favours and therefore measures more correctly. The test-retest reliability of the drawing measure could be explored by asking pupils to produce the drawings a number of different times over a short period of time.

Being able to observe systematically how children cope with feelings, which might be aroused in this task in terms of behavioural signs, may also help enrich the present data. Indeed, Fury (1996) states:

“The use of drawings as a window to inner models might be enriched by efforts to examine children's affective and behavioural responses during the task itself.”

(p.86).

This could include, for example, who is drawn first, how much the child hesitates or tries to avoid the process and what the child says about the drawing. All of these aspects of the process could potentially provide further information about the child's relationship to his or her teacher.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to uncover the mechanisms at work underlying NG provision. From a theoretical perspective, the role of attachment was investigated within the NG context as this study measured perceptions of child-teacher relationships over a period of time. Findings revealed that both teachers and students from NGs felt closer and more accepted over time than students from mainstream classes. It was also found that feelings of emotional uncertainty (vulnerability) on the part of the child might be improved by attending a NG. Although difficulties with reliability and validity were reported with using Fury's (1996; 1997) Child-Family Drawing Global rating scale, this drawing measure is important for attachment research because there are limited attachment measures that have been used to measure relationships between students and their teachers. This research has helped to highlight the importance of developing significant attachments to significant adults in schools (Harrison et al, 2007) and also links in to a growing recognition of the need for early intervention to resolve attachment difficulties (Marvin, Cooper, Hoffman and Powell, 2002).

REFERENCES

- Bennathan, M and Boxall, M** (1998). *The Boxall Profile: a guide to the education of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, handbook for teachers*. Maidstone, Kent: Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.
- Bowlby, J** (1969). *Attachment and Loss. Vol. 1: Attachment*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Boxall, M** (2002). *Nurture Groups in School. Principles and Practice*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Cooper, P, Arnold, R and Boyd, E** (2001). The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(4), 160-166.
- Del Giudice, M** (2008). Sex-biased ratio of avoidant/ambivalent attachment in middle childhood. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 26, 369-379.
- Dobbs, J and Arnold, A** (2009). Relationship between teachers' reports of children's behaviour and their behaviour towards those children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 24(2), 95-105.
- Fury, GS** (1996). The relation between infant attachment history and representations of relationships in school-aged child-family drawings. *Dissertation Abstracts International*: B57(11). 7249 (University Microfilm No. 9711409).
- Fury, G, Carlson, EA and Sroufe, LA** (1997). Children's representations of attachment relationships in child-family drawings, *Child Development*, 68, 1154-1164.
- Goodman, R** (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: a research note. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 38(8), 581-586.
- Green, J, Stanley, C and Peters, S** (2007). Disorganized attachment representation and atypical parenting in young school age children with externalizing disorder. *Attachment and Human Development*, 9(3), 207-222.
- Harrison, LJ, Clarke, L. and Ungerer, JA** (2007). Children's drawings provide a new perspective on child-teacher relationship quality and school adjustment. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 22, 55-71.
- Harter, S and Pike, R** (1984). The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for young children. *Child Development*, 55, 1969-1982.
- Jerome, EM, Hamre, BK and Pianta, RC** (2009). Child-teacher Relationships from Kindergarten to Sixth Grade: Early Childhood Predictors of Teacher-perceived Conflict and Closeness. *Social Development*, 18(4), 915-945.
- Kaplan, N and Main, M** (1986). *Instructions for the classification of children's child-family drawings in terms of representation of attachment*. Unpublished manuscript, University of California, Berkeley.
- MacKay, T, Reynolds, S and Kearney, M** (2010). From attachment to attainment: the impact of nurture groups on academic achievement. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(3), 100-110.
- Marvin, R, Cooper, G, Hoffman, K and Powell, B** (2002). The circle of security Project: attachment-based intervention with care-giver/pre-school child dyads. *Attachment and Human Development*, 4(1), 107-124.
- Newberry, M and Davis, HA** (2008). The role of elementary teachers' conceptions of closeness to students on their differential behaviour in the classroom. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 24, 1965-1985.
- O'Connor, T and Colwell, J** (2002). The effectiveness and rationale of the 'nurture group' approach to helping children with emotional and behavioural difficulties remain within mainstream education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 29(2), 96-100.
- Pianta, R** (1992). *The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia
- Pianta, RC, Longmaid, K and Ferguson, JE (1999). Attachment-based classifications of children's child-family drawings: psychometric properties and relations with children's adjustment in kindergarten. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 28(2), 244-255.
- Pyle, A and Rae, T** (2015). Exploring parents' and children's perceptions of nurture groups and the way in which they impact upon parent-child relationships. *The International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 1(1), 1-40.
- Sanders, T** (2007). Helping children thrive at school: the effectiveness of nurture groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23(1), 45-61.
- Veltman MWM, and Browne KD** (2001). Three decades of child maltreatment research: implications for the school years. *Trauma, Violence, Abuse*, 2, 215-239.



Investing in student success through nurturing in universities

Two case studies in North America.

Tapo Chimbanga, Leeds Trinity University

ABSTRACT

In this article, I draw from the practices of nurturing that developed in England in the 1970s as an intervention to support young children who were often experiencing socioeconomic and cultural disadvantages. Nurture groups provided opportunities for social, emotional, and cognitive development where shortcomings in family provision created deficits. The introduction of nurturing practices in universities could equally be considered a social reconstructionist measure of social justice. The application of nurturing principles, for students traditionally considered outsiders, and particularly those disadvantaged through racism and socio-economic circumstances has immense benefits for universities. By providing structures that nurture racialised and disadvantaged students, even at postgraduate level, universities provide real opportunities to belong and succeed in university. I take a critical position as I discuss social and cultural capital in universities and use two case studies to highlight the need to re-evaluate measures of ability and belonging. Overall, I advocate for nurturing practices in higher education as a measure of social justice ensuring equity, inclusivity, and diversity in universities.

INTRODUCTION

A recollection of the historical necessity of nurture groups as a means of providing children with essential opportunities for further development establishes the same logic for university students denied early nurturing for their academic success (Hughes and Schlosser, 2014). Nurture groups, established first in the late 1960s, were a response to the social and emotional behavioural difficulties often exacerbated by the stress of socioeconomic disadvantage faced by inner-city populations, in London, (Bennathan and Boxall, 2013). Boxall (2002) states that struggles with upheaval, unemployment and other challenges adversely affected children's normal development and schooling at the time. In response, nurture work sought to repair the disrupted and impaired experiences of early learning to the developing child (Doyle, 2003; Bishop and Swain, 2000). According to the Nurture Groups Network, nurturing is a concept that highlights the "... importance of social environments – who you're with, and not who you're born to – and its significant influence on behaviour and cognitive ability." Nurture group practitioners believe a good start in life brings a host of advantages including a tendency to do better at school, attend regularly, and enjoy activities with friends. The aim of nurture groups is to offer the fundamental experiences that build skills to do well at school, make friends, and deal more confidently and calmly with the trials and tribulations of life, for life (Nurture Groups Network). Since their inception in the late 1960s, nurture group models have progressed beyond early years provision to intervention in primary and secondary schools (Bishop and Swain 2000).

In nurture group models there are four basic assurances offered to students that would be beneficial to students in universities: comfort, welcome, containment, and protection (Boxall, 2002). These assurances are cultivated through the six principles identified by Lucas et al (2006):

1. Children's learning is understood developmentally
2. The classroom offers a safe base
3. The importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing
4. Language is a vital means of communication
5. All behaviour is communication
6. The importance of transition in children's lives.

We may think of university students as competent individuals but studies indicate a need for structures that support social, emotional, and mental development for academic success (Kiyama et al, 2014; Kiyama and Luca, 2013; Gerdes and Mallinckrodt, 1994). The university

students who would benefit most from nurture groups are from disadvantaged and marginalised communities; and homes where socioeconomic hardships stalled the acquiring of pertinent academic, social, and emotional skills. Nurture groups could therefore be a means of cultivating diversity, equity, and inclusivity in universities. In particular, racialised students (Sólorzano et al, 2005; Harper et al, 2009) require measures that address historical factors that affect their sense of belonging and ability in academic settings. The needs of racialised students, distinguished through anti-oppressive and anti-racist pedagogy, require a change in culture and attitude that privileges all students through nurturing. In this context, racialised implies significant aspects of oppression and highlights the level of social discrimination that occurs on the basis of race in universities

In this article, I illustrate the transferability of nurture group principles into university settings. A critical analysis of the principles of nurturing highlights the importance and possibilities of

nurturing in universities as a means of developing student wellbeing. Similar to the difficulties and challenges faced by disadvantaged children entering the elementary school system, the conditions that a significant number of freshman university students face due to socioeconomic and cultural disadvantage disrupt their academic development. Even at postgraduate level, racialised and economically disadvantaged students face difficulties that threaten their success. Therefore, I argue for nurture-group practices to extend across formal education and learning, from early years to postgraduate level. I offer two case studies focusing on two intersectional factors contributing to student retention and success – socioeconomic and cultural – both of which might be due to selective structures of hegemonic belonging and ability.

METHOD

Although not associated specifically with the Nurture Groups Network's model of nurturing the featured case studies adhere to the six identified principles of nurturing; and offer the assurances that the nurturing principles provide. For both case studies, interviews were conducted via email with practitioners and participants of nurturing student support programmes in two universities. This method has been discussed by Meho (2006) as "semistructured in nature and involves multiple email exchanges between the interviewer and interviewee over an extended period of time" (pp. 1284). I contacted the interviewees via email and through a confidential and ethically (Parker 2008) sound correspondence gathered the information I needed. There are several advantages to this method of data collections as Meho states, including the elimination of geographical and economic factors in collecting data.

The challenges of university achievement: social and cultural capital

An emerging concern in higher education is the rate of dropouts at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Enrolment into a university can be a challenge (Stephan 2013) but once on campus the challenges do not go away. In 2014, the *New York Times Magazine* published an article that highlighted these phenomena.

The article: Am I supposed to be here? Am I good enough? (Tough, 2014) elucidates on the difficulties of staying in university for many students and refers to a "winnowing process that takes place in higher education". He advocates for a change in measures of student success catalysed by a change in the attitudes of the educators who should view 'ability' as a matter of socioeconomics rather than academic propensity. While 'winnowing' is perceived to weed out weak students, in fact it weeds out students without the social and cultural means to support academic success. The language used in Tough's article highlights the criteria used to measure a student's capacity to succeed in university; and implies a clumsiness and ineptitude rising out of the students' personal attributes rather than barriers in the selective university environment. Words such as

'derailed' and 'tripped up,' which result in the student being 'overwhelmed' and 'freaking out' in response to the closed environment point to aspects of social competence, rather than academic aptitude.

Proactive universities recognise that beyond socio-economics, the needs of marginalised students are complex and multidimensional, presenting long before they begin university (Stephan 2013; Hughes and Schlosser, 2014). Particularly, as Smith et al (2011) state, in historically white spaces people of colour are still treated as outsiders, meaning racialised students in universities must often justify their presence in white spaces and defend against oppression, which occurs even in the most subtle ways (Smith et al 2007a; 2007b; 2011). The psychic trauma and ramifications of defending against racism and its vicissitudes within 'racial badlands' according to Smith et al (2011), results in 'emotional, psychological, and physiological distress'. Universities as badlands are hostile, unaccommodating, and even ignorant of race as a subjective position, which leads to feelings of not belonging and inability. From a critical perspective 'ability' becomes questionable when based on traditional racial, social, and cultural means rather than academic aptitude.

Belonging, in this context, refers to how one fits in with the academic culture, and whether one is perceived to be good enough for the academy by self, peer or faculty (Litalien and Guay, 2015). For some students belonging depends significantly on their peer- and faculty-perceived identity, often judged in terms of race, and social and cultural capital. For many disadvantaged and marginalised students, university is supposed to be an equalising opportunity.

However to succeed, these students need to show that they indeed belong, know how to belong, and are able to maintain the requisites for belonging (Gronborg, 2015). Yoon (2012) argues success in an academic setting is a complicated process that requires the students' agency, identity awareness, negotiation, and external confirmation of their unique abilities from teachers and peers. For racialised students, identity is something often handed down through history, legislation, policies, and practices, limiting their power and cultural capital as foreign and other (Yoon 2012). Yoon's statements are true at any level of education that is why nurturing is a means of empowering marginalised and disadvantaged students. Nurturing creates the assurance of a welcoming campus and comfort within the larger community. Disadvantage is contained and students are protected from the historical and socio-political racialisation that would disadvantage them.

Traditional standards of belonging and ability do not accommodate or make room for diversity. For example, Contreras and Contreras (2015) consider this problem in a California university by examining the success rates of Hispanic students. They recommend a redefining of what is relevant in predicting students' success. Nurturing practices in universities offer a means to re-evaluate the measures of ability by considering the subjectivity of students. Coming from a different racial or cultural background

means the cultural capital of university is something disadvantaged students need to acquire along with the necessary grades to succeed. Ability is measured first through racial and social identity, and cultural capital, then academic achievement, meaning actual academic ability counts less than socioeconomic and cultural advantage. A nurturing culture can challenge exclusive measures based on race and socioeconomic privilege, in favour of practical student-focused measures towards success. Through nurturing principles accommodations, concessions, and adjustments take the form of resource re-allocation rather than simple remedial academic supplementation. Nurturing infrastructure changes the subjective positions of students considered subpar, making them part of a community of high-achieving scholars (Tough, 2014).

Feelings of not belonging can be detrimental to students' abilities to achieve academic success, hence the high dropout rates and low retention of disadvantaged students. These students are marked with stigma, fear, limitations and ignorance. Before long they find themselves back where they came from resentful, demoralised, and in debt (Tough, 2014). In response, Tough suggests we move beyond material obstacles:

“If you want to help low-income students succeed, it's not enough to deal with their academic and financial obstacles. You also need to address their doubts, misconceptions, and fears. To solve the problem of college completion, you first need to get inside the mind of a college student.”

Nurturing principles address students' feelings directly and offer resilience building environments that increase chances of graduation, and success beyond university. The following case studies highlight university-wide nurturing practices and more intimate nurture groups that cultivate both belonging and ability; therefore success.

Case study 1: The University of Texas Communal Socioeconomic Approach

The University Leadership Network (ULN) is part of a broad compliment of initiatives at the University of Texas (UT) aimed at increasing student success and improving graduation rates. In line with the first principle of nurturing, learning is understood developmentally, so UT's network of student success services offers academic, social, and developmental support to students lacking in these aspects as they begin their studies. The student support programmes aim to nurture systematically identified students so they develop the skills and competencies required to succeed both socially and culturally, thereby increasing student retention and chances for individual success. Advanced identification strategies are imperative for the investment of resources towards student success. Where the classic nurture-group model consists of a teacher and an assistant, universities require more sophisticated apparatus and administration to yield noteworthy results due to the size of higher education institutions. Creativity and innovation are necessary to reach students falling through the cracks, therefore common elements of these programmes include community building, peer leadership and mentoring, faculty engagement, and individual attention from culturally competent and sensitive staff.

UT uses a predictive analytics model to identify the incoming students most likely to benefit from nurturing when they start their first semester. Designed to avoid misconceptions and discriminatory practices, the algorithm identifies incoming students with the greatest need for support based on their predicted four-year graduation rate. As with any intervention, early identification is crucial to prevent avoidable crises and dropouts. ULN, as a nurturing model, recognises the importance of transitions in student life (as with principle 6) and implements nurturing interventions as early as possible, helping students adjust to life on campus and the independent, self-directed learning requirements of academia. According to Lindsey Kaschner, one of the facilitators of the UT Student Success Initiatives, the model developed using more than 10 years of historical data, and the calculation includes 14 academic and demographic factors like SAT score, high school class rank, high school academic credits, parent income, and first generation in college status. Approximately 500 students enrolled in student success programmes receive support for academic, developmental, and social growth. As a group, the socioeconomic background of ULN students differs from that of the overall student population, meaning without nurturing an entire demographic group is at high risk of dropping out.

It is important to note, according to Kaschner, that the programme maintains the belief that this prediction does not reflect a student's potential for success. Rather, the programme helps students develop not only as successful college students but also as leaders, through self-reflection, experiential learning, peer mentoring, professional development, and community service. Nurturing, viewed as a social reconstructionist practice – a measure of social justice – provides those traditionally oppressed in education a means of finding their place and value on campus. To this end, ULN nurtures from a position of leadership development aimed at students developing leadership skills, achieving academic success consistent with graduation in four years, and continuing on to a successful career. An unofficial programme motto, often repeated by director Jennifer Smith, is: “Lead from where you are, in the classroom, community, or workplace”. As part of this development, students are encouraged to be fearless, ask questions, and learn from mistakes.

Professor Laude is one of the faculty practising nurturing under the ULN programme. Tough (2014) explains: “As a freshman at the University of the South, in Sewanee, Tennessee, Laude felt bewildered and out of place, the son of a working-class, Italian-American family

from Modesto, California, trying to find his way at a college steeped in Southern tradition, where students joined secret societies and wore academic gowns to class. 'It was a massive culture shock,' Laude told me. 'I was completely at a loss on how to fit in socially. And I was tremendously bad at studying. Everything was just overwhelming.' He spent most of his freshman year on the brink of dropping out."

Laude's personal experience as a socially and emotionally underdeveloped first year student gave him insight into the struggles of his students. His response began with the provision of a place for identified students to work in smaller comfortable and containing groups. The act of separating them from their peers was not to lower expectations but to maintain and facilitate high expectations. This fulfils the second principle of nurturing; the classroom as a safe base. As an extension of this basic strategy, Laude also communicated an important message right from the beginning: they were expected to do as well as everyone else. He insisted all communication convey the idea that engagement in the special programme is not because students were marked for failure, rather, there was confidence in their success. His actions, in line with principle 4 and 5, illustrate that all behaviour is communication and language is a vital means of communication. The impact went beyond his chemistry class as students statistically on track to fail returned for their sophomore year at rates above average for the university as a whole (Tough 2014). Three years later, they had graduation rates that were also above the university average.

As Laude proves, the attitude of educators makes a significant impact on student retention. Levine-Rasky (2001) argues, the efficacy of pedagogy lies in the attitude of educators; and identifies three signposts that progress a culturally reconstructionist education framework. First, the educator must identify with inequality and social injustice, meaning they can connect to their students across race, ethnic and economic lines because of personal experiences of marginalisation and discrimination. This indicates a great need for diversity in university staffing so that students can identify with the people measuring their success. The second signpost is the use and value of critical pedagogy, which is student-centred and multicultural. The third signpost is a desire to learn more about educational inequality and its causes, including the social domination manifest in institutional racism and the practice of whiteness. These signposts correspond with the principles of nurturing; in particular, all behaviour is communication. An institutional approach to racial, social, and cultural disadvantage (such as a determined recruitment of diverse educators capable of responding to the needs of marginalised students through nurturing attitudes and practices) communicates the value of diversity. Through attitudes that foster equity, inclusivity, and diversity, universities offer pedagogy that is culturally responsive to the needs of students traditionally marginalized in higher education.

Principle three of nurturing states the importance of nurture to the development of wellbeing. To this end, culturally responsive and

relevant pedagogy is an approach that asserts: "...the value of focusing classroom curricula and practice upon students' cultural frames of reference. An examination of teacher training programmes reveals that many newly minted teachers are still unclear on what culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy entails. It is a pedagogy that recognises students' differences, validates students' cultures, and asserts that upon cultural congruence of classroom practices, students will discover increasing success in school" (Parhar and Sensoy, 2011 pp.191-192).

Parhar and Sensoy present the tenets of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy some of which are teaching from diverse perspectives; building bridges between academic learning and students' prior understanding, knowledge, native language and values; and holding students to high standards with high expectations for all students. Also included are encouraging a 'community of learners' or encouraging students to learn collaboratively by motivating students to become active participants in their learning, and attempting to create a climate of caring, respect, and the valuing of students' cultures in the classroom by validating students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials. Economies of scale make these tenets virtually impossible when we consider the ratio of educator to student (O'Brien, 2010). Another barrier to culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy is the lack of educators' understanding of their students' frames of reference (Hadley, 2013). As O'Brien states:

"We still often struggle with how to care and how to show we care. Caring about others requires respecting them as separate, autonomous people worthy of our care."
(p.114)

That means responsiveness comes through an assurance of nurturing.

Unfortunately, university curricula, like elementary and secondary curricula, are still biased towards whiteness, which means universities admit culturally diverse students, who either assimilate or drop out (Parhar and Sensoy, 2011; Joshee and Sinfield, 2010; Volante and Earl, 2002). Students drop out of university when both pedagogy and culture neither make sense to their personal experiences nor offer practical solutions to their subjective problems. In response, and as a solution, nurturing addresses problems associated with diversity because it provides a framework from which educators can offer a culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. For marginalised students in programmes where the curriculum and profession is Eurocentric and privileged against them (Hadley, 2013), nurturing re-contextualises pedagogy.

Case study 2: York University's Socially Responsive Nurture Group Approach

The needs of doctoral students must take into account their professional positions as graduate teaching assistants as well as their studentships. As part of the student body, doctoral students often fall through the gaps of student support but have the duty to provide supportive responses to undergraduates in their care. Supervising faculty may be supportive but the limitations are vast and continue to change with political, economic, and cultural dynamics. Adversely, faculty may not be keen to advocate for doctoral students' subjective needs (Kozlowski, 2014). Doctoral students need nurturing that fosters personal wellbeing, and a professional sense of responsibility for the undergraduates under their tutorship. Struggling and socially isolated doctoral students cannot be effective in their pedagogy, which ultimately means the undergraduates are at a further disadvantage. In the following case study, the nurture group fosters both the professional and academic development of doctoral students.

York University in Canada has over 60,000 students and faculty with a relatively high number being first generation immigrants. At undergraduate level, supportive structures have developed in response to the specific needs of these students. Mature students also receive tailored support to help them succeed in their undergraduate studies. However, at postgraduate level supports specific to first generation racialised and immigrant students are lacking, which means many doctoral students struggle with feelings of isolation, despair, and detachment (Stebbleton et al, 2014a and 2014b).

“Our work can seem inconsequential and irrelevant,” reveals one black female student. In response to this deficit, Professor Carl James runs a graduate student network, a reading group for racially and ethnically marginalised students in doctoral studies under the umbrella of the York Centre for Education and Community (YCEC). The group offers a social and emotional support network as well as opportunities for the doctoral students to disseminate their work.

James' major role as a mentor involves helping the students navigate the academic system, develop social and emotional skills and competencies, as well as aid them in finishing their doctoral studies and obtain employment as educators in higher education.

The students meet regularly to read each other's work, collaborate on academic writing, conference presentations, workshops and seminars as well as to socialise. The group applies principle two of nurturing frameworks by providing a safe base where the group of ethnically diverse students coming from different departments and faculties feel comfortable, welcome, contained, and protected (Boxall 2002). Where a faculty member from a similar background may not be available to mentor the group provides a socially responsive and stimulating environment where students can develop pedagogical skills and advance their doctoral studies. A participant states:

“Since York has so few spaces where we can intensely learn from mentors of colour, having a place where we could have a frank discussion about issues we faced as racial minorities was important. Furthermore, because my work is also focused on racialised bodies in Canada, I found it made a difference to have a mentor who was well immersed in this type of work as well.”

University educators lack time and resources for individual students' needs (O'Brien, 2010). Consequently, the social and emotional wellbeing of underrepresented students suffers, which can result in poor outcomes as the sense of despair can become overwhelming. In accordance with principle three, university nurture groups may reduce the need for mental health intervention as students have a safe, containing space to work through their difficulties with support. As the practice of nurturing links to attachment theory (Bennathan and Boxall 1996), having a responsive atmosphere and structure to address student isolation and relational difficulties in university life is of particular significance. The nurture group serves as a response to feelings of detachment, dysfunction, and isolation for the doctoral students. They find others with whom they can identify and a mentor with whom they can speak at an intimate level about their difficulties. A female participant reports:

“The reading group allowed me a space where I could openly discuss both academic and non-academic experiences. It contributed to my personal development by giving me a space to express even the most uncomfortable topics and issues. It also gave me an opportunity to offer advice, constructive criticism and critiques in a place that valued my opinions. Members of this group provided me with key mentorship tips and practical advice on how I could manage my academic career. I am incredibly grateful for the friendships and bonds that developed with people in the reading group.”

Nurture groups also help students build interpersonal and community focused relationship skills. Students who require nurturing generally lack strong community-focused relationships that provide support and also expect participation from students (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000; Boxall, 2002). Nurture groups are not a space where the benefits flow in one direction. There is an expectation for students in nurture groups to help and support other students and work collaboratively in making the group beneficial for everyone (Boxall, 2002). The doctoral group expected a significant level of commitment and participation from members, which made the group members more aware of the community surrounding them and therefore alleviated feelings of isolation.

A male participant states:

“As postgraduate study is an intensely lonely endeavour I found the group supported my social development in keeping me accountable with respect to showing up and being ready to offer thoughts and critiques to other members' work or having something done as promised to the collective.”

At doctoral level learning to be an academic while teaching is common practice for doctoral students hired as teaching assistants and student support for undergraduates. Therefore learning is developmental and nurturing makes it possible to continue the learning process outside of the classroom. Being part of the nurture group helps doctoral students develop their own support and mentorship skills so they can assist other students in similar situations as well as their undergraduate students. Nurture groups help students acquire self-actualising skills and social skills that make them more valuable to the group and community as a whole.

A participant identified this:

“In terms of social development, the reading group allowed me to extensively develop my communication and analytical skills. It gave me a platform to discuss ideas, listen to interpretations of my work, and allow me a space to defend my arguments in a clear and insightful manner. Even the harshest criticisms were welcomed through support and laughter. Socially, I felt equipped enough to deal with the microaggressions I experienced in white-dominated academic spaces. I learned better strategies to navigate changing social spaces in ways that allowed for positive self-care.”

Doyle (2003) states: “A major role of nurture group provision is to provide opportunities for children to re-enact early experiences and make sense of them with support from empathetic adults, in a secure learning environment” (p.256). Similarly, having an experienced mentor to help develop ways to cope with the social and cultural pressures of academia is valuable. Some students in the nurture group reported being the only racialised student in their cohort and often feeling out of place. For racialised and marginalised students having a safe place to explore the difficulties of racism and discrimination without fear of reprisal is a valuable experience. In hegemonic spaces, students cannot be open about their experiences and often feel silenced or ostracised for pointing out any apparent injustices. Sometimes situations build up slowly into a tension that students cannot deal with effectively (Smith et al, 2007a; 2007b; 2011). In a nurture group, students can find the resources to deal with the emotional and mental turmoil of discrimination. A nurture space protects against the backlash of expressing their feelings as racialised individuals. It also contains their difficulties and offers ways to cope and overcome hardships. More importantly, in accordance with nurturing principles 4 and 5, it allows students to communicate through language and behaviour how and what they are experiencing.

Culturally responsive pedagogy relies significantly on what educators know about different races, ethnicities and cultures (Moon, 2011). Unfortunately, the educator may be mistaken in their responsiveness – ignorant of a student’s background, or inaccurately informed, which can have devastating effects. From a nurturing perspective, the importance of a mentor who has similar experiences cannot be underestimated. In the YCEC doctoral group,

students reported having a professor with first hand experiences, supportive, and positive solutions made a big difference in the nurture group. Participants reported:

“Carl James has been my supervisor since my MA degree, which began in 2009. In many ways Carl has been a mentor but also a friend and an intellectual guide in the murky waters of postgraduate school. It is without a doubt that without him I would not be working towards a doctoral degree. His unwaveringly high expectations coupled with his supportive friendship have been the perfectly challenging intellectual environment most conducive to my own development.”

“Carl was an amazing mentor. He offered practical advice as well as honest and important academic criticism of my work and theories. I found he engaged with me in an open and welcoming manner. Although, it took time to build this relationship, Carl helped support my ideas and allowed me to be honest with my feelings without fear of future reprisal. I am grateful for his mentorship.”

A critical orientation in nurturing can begin to address racial prejudices as it combines a progressive social vision with a radical critique of schooling in which education becomes part of the larger strategy to effect social justice (Volante and Earl 2002, pp.422). In other words, the nurturing of marginalised and oppressed students serves as a way of moving a larger social justice agenda forward.

When nurtured within the wider university community, marginalised students become nurturing professionals for other marginalised people. Nurturing gives marginalised students the message that they belong and they have a role to play in their immediate community as well as in the future. When racialised educators take a nurturing role, students find a role model and feel able to expand their knowledge and experience. Therefore, in hegemonic spaces diversity becomes a crucial and relevant ingredient for success.

Another participant reports: ***“I really liked the way that Carl allowed us the time to socialise alone, joining us later in our discussions. His attendance was extremely beneficial and allowed us to bounce ideas and theories off him. He also helped to keep our discussions focused wherever possible.”***

Maintaining goals and semi-formal structures is an important aspect of nurturing (Boxall 2002). The mentor, although empathetic and supportive, maintained a professional atmosphere so that the doctoral students could maintain a focus on their work. It was also a way to model academic professionalism, share differing expertise and opinions, and disagree in a critical and constructive manner. The students learned to appreciate interdisciplinary collaborations and developed the skills to utilise diversity in a productive and positive manner. One participant describes the YCEC group as a safe space where students find commonalities as well as take advantage of diversity to further each other’s goals and success. For this participant this aspect was particularly important as she felt it helped her think about ideas differently and include other methods in her work.

CONCLUSION

Nurturing is necessary in early years settings, primary schools, secondary schools, and in universities as a way of increasing opportunities for success. There are significant similarities in challenges and barriers for children just beginning their educational journeys and students beginning their journeys in higher education. Even at higher levels of education, disadvantage threatens students' success. Racially, socially, and culturally disadvantaged students require developmental resources to navigate traditional university life. Traditional measures of belonging and ability affect their ability to function socially and culturally at an appropriately effective level.

In university creativity, flexibility, and community are fundamental to addressing deficits in equity, inclusivity, and diversity. Nurturing begins with positive attitudes towards students offered with an expectation to succeed. Universities have student-counselling services, just as primary and secondary schools have pastoral care; however, nurturing is a step beyond those provisions. Nurturing might be the means to ensure a more inclusive and equitable higher education system that privileges diversity. As a framework, it provides developmental opportunities for students to thrive as leaders within a learning community.

REFERENCES

- Bennathan, M and Boxall, M** (2013) *Effective intervention in primary schools: Nurture groups*. Routledge.
- Bishop, A and Swain, J** (2000) 'The bread, the jam and some coffee in the morning': Perceptions of a nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 5(3), pp.18-24.
- Boxall, M** (2002) *Nurture groups in school: Principles & practice*. Sage.
- Contreras, F and Contreras, GJ (2015) Raising the Bar for Hispanic Serving Institutions An Analysis of College Completion and Success Rates. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 14(2), pp.151-170.
- Doyle, R** (2003) Developing the nurturing school: Spreading nurture group principles and practices into mainstream classrooms. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 8(4), pp.252-266.
- Gerdes, H and Mallinckrodt, B** (1994) Emotional, social, and academic adjustment of college students: A longitudinal study of retention. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 72(3), pp.281-288.
- Grønborg, L** (2015) "...It's like the immigrants stick together, the stupid ones, and the ones who want to learn something": dynamics of peer relations, social categories, and dropout in vocational educational training. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(5), pp.514-532.
- Hadley, S** (2013) Dominant narratives: Complicity and the need for vigilance in the creative arts therapies. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 40(4), pp.373-381.
- Harper, SR, Patton, LD and Wooden, OS** (2009) Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), pp.389-414.
- Hughes, NK and Schlösser, A** (2014) The effectiveness of nurture groups: a systematic review. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 19(4), pp.386-409.
- Joshee, R and Sinfield, I** (2010) The Canadian multicultural education policy web: Lessons to learn, pitfalls to avoid. *Multicultural Education Review*, 2(1), pp.55-75.
- Kiyama, JM and Luca, SG** (2014) Structured opportunities: Exploring the social and academic benefits for peer mentors in retention programs. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 15(4), pp.489-514.
- Kiyama, JM, Luca, SG, Raucci, M and Crump-Owens, S** (2014) A cycle of retention: Peer Mentors' Accounts of Active Engagement and Agency. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 32(1), p.81.
- Kozlowski, KP** (2014) Culture or Teacher Bias? Racial and Ethnic Variation in Student-Teacher Effort Assessment Match/Mismatch. *Race and Social Problems*, 7(1), pp.43-59.
- Levine-Rasky, C** (2001) Identifying the prospective multicultural educator: Three signposts, three portraits. *The Urban Review*, 33(4), pp.291-319.
- Litalien, D and Guay, F** (2015) Dropout intentions in PhD studies: A comprehensive model based on interpersonal relationships and motivational resources. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 41, pp.218-231.

Lucas, S, Insley, K and Buckland, G (2006) Nurture Group Principles and Curriculum Guidelines Helping Children to Achieve. *The Nurture Group Network*.

Meho, LI (2006) E-mail interviewing in qualitative research: A methodological discussion. *Journal of the American society for information science and technology*, 57(10), pp.1284-1295.

Moon, S (2011) Rethinking culturally responsive teaching: Toward new (im) possibilities of curriculum studies and policy. *Multicultural Education Review* 3(2), pp.69-102.

O'Brien, LM (2010) Caring in the ivory tower. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(1), pp.109-115.

Parhar, N and Sensoy, Ö (2011) Culturally relevant pedagogy redux: Canadian teachers' conceptions of their work and its challenges. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 34(2), pp.189-218.

Parker, J (2008) Email, ethics and data collection in social work research: some reflections from a research project. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, 4(1), pp.75-83.

Smith, WA, Allen, WR and Danley, LL (2007a) 'Assume the Position... You Fit the Description' Psychosocial Experiences and Racial Battle Fatigue Among African American Male College Students. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(4), pp.551-578.

Smith, WA, Yosso, TJ and Solórzano, DG (2007b) Racial primes and black misandry on historically white campuses: Toward critical race accountability in educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(5), pp.559-585.

Smith, WA, Hung, M and Franklin, JD (2011) Racial battle fatigue and the miseducation of Black men: Racial microaggressions, societal problems, and environmental stress. *The Journal of Negro Education*, pp.63-82.

Solórzano, DG, Villalpando, O and Oseguera, L (2005) Educational inequities and Latina/o undergraduate students in the United States: A critical race analysis of their educational progress. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(3), pp.272-294.

Stebbleton, MJ, Soria, KM and Huesman, RL (2014a) First-Generation Students' Sense of Belonging, Mental Health, and Use of Counseling Services at Public Research Universities. *Journal of College Counseling* 17(1), pp.6-20.

Stebbleton, MJ, Soria, KM, Huesman Jr, RL and Torres, V (2014b) Recent immigrant students at research universities: The relationship between campus climate and sense of belonging. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(2), pp.196-202.

Stephan, JL (2013) Social capital and the college enrollment process: How can a school program make a difference. *Teachers College Record*, 115(4), pp.1-39.

Tough, P (2014) Am I supposed to be here? Am I good enough? *New York Times Magazine*, May, 18, pp.26-54. (Online title, Who Gets to Graduate?)

Volante, L. and Earl, L (2002) Teacher candidates' perceptions of conceptual orientations in their preservice program. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, pp.419-438.

Yoon, B (2012) Junsuk and Junhyuck Adolescent Immigrants' Educational Journey to Success and Identity Negotiation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(5), pp.971-1002.

A systemic evaluation of a nurture group in Scotland

Jenny Fraser-Smith and Kirsty Henry

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the staff who took part in this study, engaging with the process honestly and with a desire to make positive change to the current running of the nurture group. Also, thank you to Claire Kerr, Linda Corlett and Shiona Alexander for providing critical feedback after reading our article.

ABSTRACT

Nurture groups are seen in a variety of school establishments and are considered an effective provision for children with additional social, emotional and behavioural needs. According to an HMIE report (2009) that reviewed the impact of nurture groups in primary schools in Scotland, providing a nurture group environment within a school allows children to integrate more effectively into the mainstream curriculum with reduced or no support in future years. Previous research in this area has considered the benefits and challenges pupils face when a school adopts the nurture group intervention. Embedded within these studies are aspects of school systemic processes that also impact on the success of a nurture group. This study takes a uniquely systemic perspective to evaluate a nurture group in a primary school in Scotland. Furthermore, a systemic evaluation will assist the best course of implementation for schools that may be considering the nurture group intervention. A solution-focused meeting was adopted to gather qualitative data and content analysis revealed 15 categories. Each category was discussed and during this process of analysis four key internal systems emerged: parental involvement, communication, selection process and training. This study highlights a number of systems that need to be in place for both the longevity and effective running of a nurture group.

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) reviewed the impact of nurture groups in Scottish primary schools. Consequently, the Scottish Government aimed to further promote nurture groups and nurture approaches across early years, primary and secondary settings as part of the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2010). It is out with the scope of this paper to present a full account of a nurture group. However, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) provide a full overview of the theory and principles underpinning the nurture group intervention.

To date, evaluations of nurture groups have focused on their effectiveness at the individual child level. Hence, there is a need to consider systemic evaluation in order to explore the broader factors that lead to the success of this intervention. There are a range of approaches to systemic evaluations and this study adopted a stakeholder evaluation approach that involves the exploration of different people's real world experiences to reveal significant issues (Boyd et al, 2007).

Within a school there are a number of systems; a quality assurance system, a curriculum system, the management of pupil behaviour, a classroom system, and support systems for staff, pupils and parents. The ethos, development, and success of the school are reliant on the interplay and effectiveness of these internal systems. A systemic evaluation is an exploration of these internal systems to establish what works well and where improvements are required.

While previous research has evaluated nurture groups at the individual level, they have noted particular systems that have had an impact on the success of a nurture group. Cooper & Tiknaz (2005) found that communication between mainstream class teachers and the nurture group staff was limited to one-way communication in the form of feedback, rather than communicating in a manner that afforded an opportunity to develop a shared understanding of how a pupil's needs could be met in the mainstream classroom.

According to Binnie & Allen (2008) a challenge of the intervention is organising liaison time with class teachers. Class teachers commented that while liaison between mainstream teachers and nurture group teachers was planned, communication was not consistent (Sanders, 2007). Further, the importance of a system of

supervisory support and advice for nurture group staff, in addition to a need for support from the wider school community (and home) was highlighted by Garner & Thomas (2011). This need was linked to the difficulties around the understanding and communication between the mainstream teaching staff and the nurture group staff, which impacted on the successful reintegration of pupils into their mainstream class. Cooper & Tiknaz (2005) also found that the working relationship between the nurture group teacher and teaching assistant was important in providing each other with support, working collaboratively on planning and monitoring, and being good role models for the children.

The system to support staff to complete the required training for those running a nurture group has not been explored by previous research but its importance has been noted. Shaver and McClatchey (2013) highlighted the challenges faced by the cost of the training. Additionally, nurture group teachers have highlighted that the teaching assistant working in partnership with them needs to know the key principles underpinning the nurture group (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005) and this comes through available training. Additional training was also noted by Binnie and Allen (2008) as being

beneficial to the ongoing continual professional development of staff in the nurture group.

The interplay between systems that inform the selection process for nurture groups has been touched on in previous research. Cooper & Tiknaz (2005) explored the factors that contributed to the effective running of a nurture group. The composition of the group was highlighted as an important factor in the outcomes for the group, in addition to the systems that inform the decision of who attends the nurture group. However, pupil selection was also highlighted as a barrier to the intervention (Binnie & Allen, 2008).

The interaction between the school system and the family system is frequently reported as important. The relationships built between nurture group staff and parents can become a strong link in which to engage parents with the school (Shaver & McClatchey, 2013). Taylor and Gulliford (2011) found that the role of the nurture group staff and their perceived status and power impacted their confidence to create and develop communication systems between home and school.

Sanders (2007) reported that teachers felt that the success of the nurture group was a result of a holistic approach to addressing pupils' needs, driven by the school's management team. Furthermore, teachers felt the educational psychologist provided an important role in supporting nurture group staff, assisting in quality assurance and managing the initiative within the Local Authority. While nurture groups have had a positive impact on pupils (HMIE, 2009) further enquiry is needed to discover whether it is the intervention, the process, or both, that impacts on this outcome (Bywater, 2012). Previous research has considered the benefits and challenges that arise for pupils where their school adopts a nurture group intervention. Embedded within these studies are aspects of systemic processes that could also impact on the success of the intervention, however no previous research has focused solely on a systemic evaluation.

This study takes a uniquely systemic perspective to evaluating a nurture group by using a solution focused meeting process to explore both the success of nurture groups, and the best course of implementation for schools new to the intervention. While focus groups have been used previously, this study explored an alternative approach by adopting a solution-focused meeting.

In light of the literature review and the researchers' desire to use a solution focused approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the nurture group, the research project aimed to investigate the question; how can a solution focused meeting assist in evaluating the effectiveness of a nurture group within a mainstream primary school? This article reports on one aspect of a larger project that aimed to address this research question. Thus, this article will focus on reporting the evaluation of the nurture group and will not address how the solution focused meeting assisted the evaluation process.

METHOD

By embracing an inductive approach, the researchers' used two solution focused meetings (SFM) to gather qualitative data. This evaluation wanted to avoid a typical evaluation process where strengths and pressures are acknowledged, but evidence of the steps that people can take to make a change to the current situation are not explored. By contrast, a SFM goes beyond the evaluation of strengths and pressures enabling participants to generate a shared action plan. In addition, a SFM enables participants to interact with each other and allows the facilitator to contribute to the discussion (Alexander & Sked, 2010). Another benefit of adopting a SFM is that each person has an 'equal voice' (Alexander & Sked, 2010) and therefore aims to reduce the influence of a person's status, providing a forum for equal contributions.

As social constructivists the researchers felt this method of gathering data was well placed to not only allow the gathering of meaningful data, but also to allow the researchers to be reflexive and consider the perception and construction of their own reality and its impact on collaborative working. Furthermore, how the researchers constructed knowledge influences the questions they pose while facilitating the SFM. It is important to note that while a consistency in perspective may support a greater depth during the data analysis, it could be argued that the researchers' epistemological stance might indicate a bias toward the selection of SFMs as a method of data collection. However, the researchers felt that they addressed this because a solution-focused approach advocates the deconstruction of the 'expert' position in favour of empowering all participants (Hobbs, 2006).

PARTICIPANTS

A mainstream primary school, situated in a relatively deprived area of a small Scottish authority participated in the study. The Nurture, Support and Development Group within the school was based on the principles of nurture groups, as defined by Boxall (2002) and is subsequently referred to as a nurture group. The staffing of the group was complex; the current nurture group teacher had not undertaken any nurture training. The one teacher who was trained was not directly involved with the nurture group but she liaised regularly with the Deputy Head Teacher and the current nurture teacher regarding the children in the nurture group. However, it is important to note that this teacher did not take part in this study. The first SFM was attended by the teacher and the auxiliary staff member who run the nurture group, eight class teachers and the Deputy Head Teacher (DHT). The second SFM included the teacher from the nurture group, seven class teachers, two of whom had not attended the previous meeting and the DHT. The research concentrated on the school systemic processes impacting on the nurture group and therefore it did not seem appropriate to invite parents for this study.

PARTICIPANTS

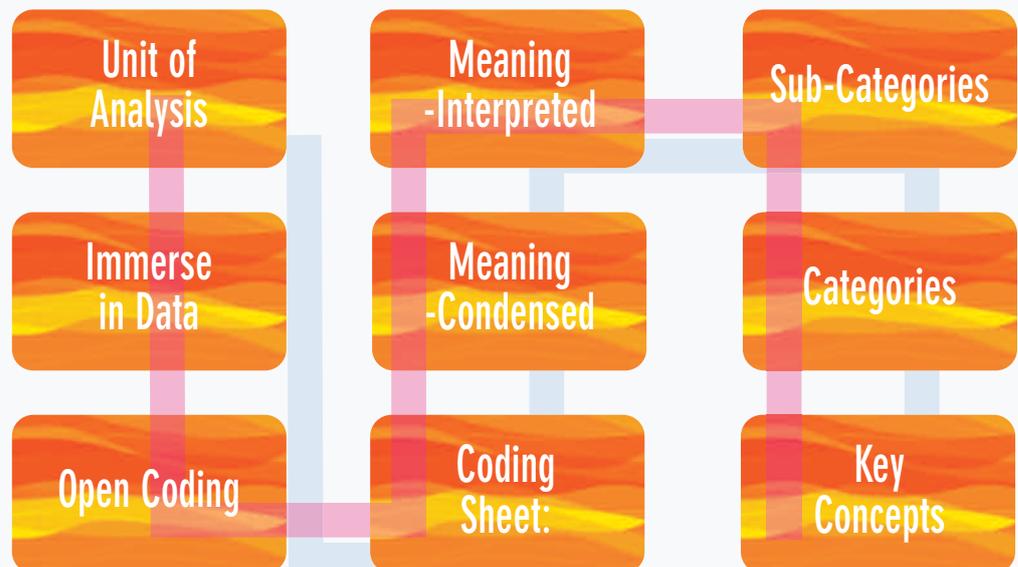
This study followed guidelines provided by The British Psychological Society's code of ethics (2009) and HCPC (2008) standards of conduct, performance and ethics. Furthermore, due to the educational context in which this study took place the BERA (2011) guidelines were adhered to. Both SFMs took place within the nurture room and the meetings took place four weeks apart. After sharing a description of the purpose and process of the SFM, the group members were encouraged to generate a list of strengths and pressures of the nurture group intervention, which were scribed by one of the researchers. The concerns highlighted by the participants were reframed and considered under the heading, *the main issues are how to...* On completing this task, each person was given the opportunity to vote for what they individually perceived to be the main issues. Each participant had five votes. The votes were counted and the top three issues identified were used as the foundation to collectively consider possible ideas to address these issues and make steps to change. These ideas became the action plan. The researchers alternated the role of facilitator and scribe.

Both meetings followed the same format and both meetings were audio recorded and transcribed. Due to the dual role undertaken by the researchers of facilitating/scribing and researcher, it was decided that audio recording allowed for later analysis. Transcription of the audio recordings was chosen to analyse the evaluations and to consider the interaction between participants as they co-constructed their reality of the situation.

ANALYSIS

The data was analysed using qualitative content analysis (see Figure 1). During the process of reading, open coding was used to note thoughts in the margin of the text. These memos were collated onto a coding sheet adapted from Graneheim & Lundman (2004). By condensing the meanings of the memos (by further defining the initial interpretations of the original memos) the researchers were able to extract the manifest content and then interpret the meaning to access the latent content. At this stage sub categories were generated, that were then subsequently grouped into categories. These categories were then grouped further creating high order categories resulting in the emergence of four key concepts. While it would be desirable to return to the participants for feedback about the coding and final themes, time prevented this respondent validation. However a summary report was made available to the school.

Figure 1:
The process of analysis



FINDINGS

The systemic evaluation of the nurture group revealed 15 categories. During this process of analysis, four key systemic concepts emerged: parental involvement, communication, selection process and training. The key issues arising from these four concepts are considered below.

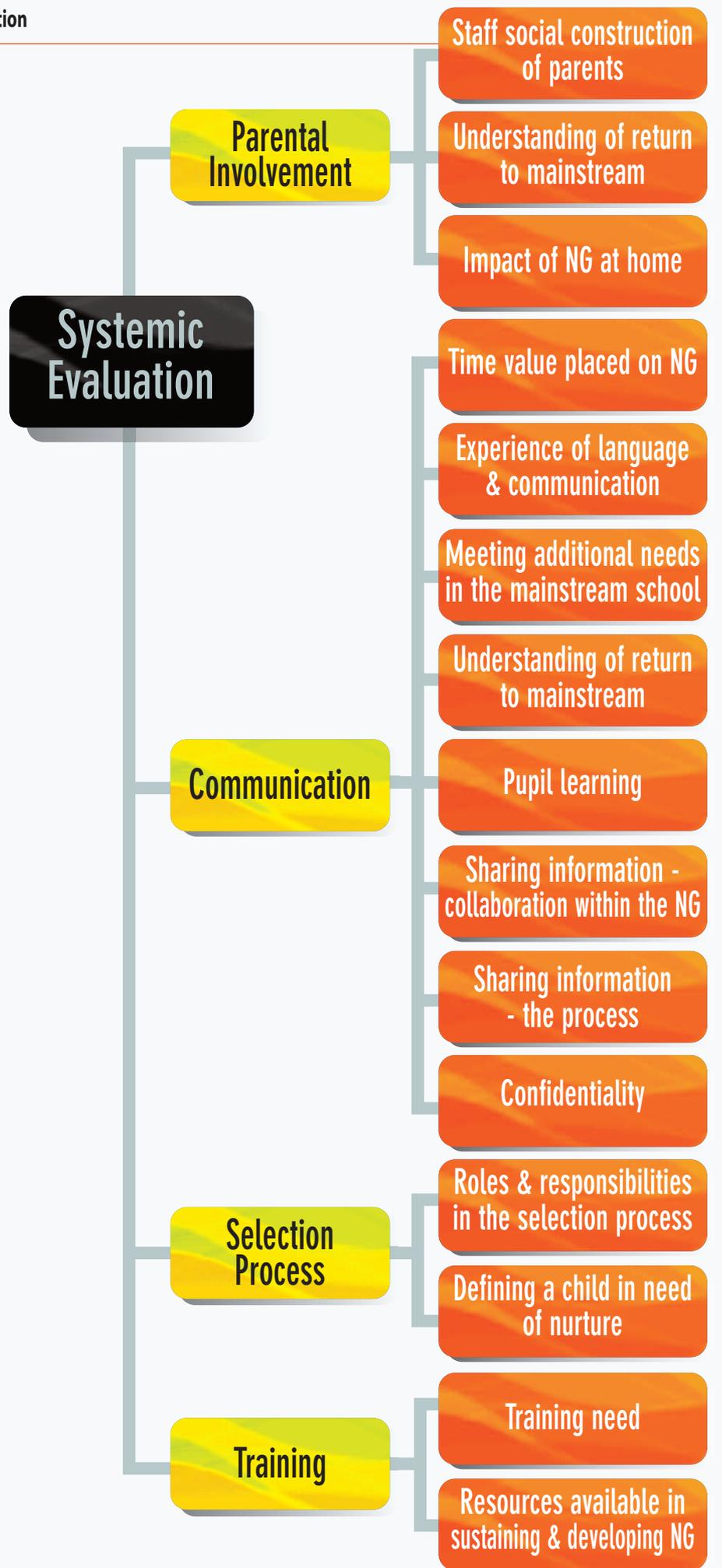
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents were not involved with this nurture group. The nurture group staff and mainstream teaching staff had constructed the parents as the cause of the child's needs. They provided an example of a parent being allowed to view their child through the glass pane in the door.

Furthermore, the transition between nurture group and the child's mainstream class are acknowledged by the nurture group principle of 'transitions are significant in the lives of children'. The perceptions of teaching staff (and parents alike) regarding a child's readiness for full reintegration into their mainstream class are important, as this can impact on how the children perceive the transition. Interestingly the adopted language used when describing a pupil leaving the classroom is followed by a sense of entering the nurture group. However, the language used during the SFMs to describe the transition from the nurture group back to mainstream, was about leaving the nurture group with no sense of going anywhere.

COMMUNICATION

Good communication between the nurture group teacher and the teaching assistant is evident. Regular discussions formalise the observations made by staff on pupils' achievement in learning, and their social development. The SFM allowed nurture group staff to consider how they could use this level of communication to improve sharing information with the mainstream class teachers, on both learning progress and social, emotional and behavioural development strategies. As a result, class



teachers and the nurture group staff explored possibilities to achieve this. It was acknowledged that much of the communication occurred on an informal basis. Furthermore, staff acknowledged there was a lack of time to discuss learning targets and outcomes of pupils. Nurture group staff have attempted to include teachers in contributing to learning plans, but time is an issue in enabling this to take place on a regular basis. Despite acknowledging the barriers to regular communication between the nurture group staff and the mainstream teaching staff it was evident that staff try to overcome this (in part) by the 'professional dialogue' over coffee or a 'walk and talk' in the school corridor to gain an understanding of the progress being made by individual pupils.

It is evident this group developed individual ways of solving the problem of communication with teaching staff. However, due to the nature of a SFM process, participants were afforded an opportunity to explore ideas of how to increase communication with the class teachers. The group went onto discuss and negotiate what should be included in the new monitoring form. The differing views shared during the SFMs of what should be communicated to the mainstream class teachers demonstrated that for some class teachers, what was important to know was whether behaviour had improved, or specific learning targets had been achieved. Whereas the nurture group staff wanted to share progress regarding social behaviour and self-regulation abilities in light of certain learning experiences.

Initial discussions also indicated it was a one-way communication system, with the nurture group staff taking control of the process. Subsequent discussion through the SFM resulted in the acknowledgement and need for class teachers to have a greater role in communicating with the nurture group staff on their pupils' progress. This was particularly important when pupils were ready to return to the mainstream classroom. Presently there was a sense that pupils were being 'phased out' of the nurture group rather than it being communicated as a 'phased return' to their usual classroom.

SELECTION PROCESS

During discussion surrounding the school's process for selecting pupils for the nurture group intervention, it became evident that mainstream teaching staff found it challenging to select pupils based on a differing level of understanding of the purpose of the nurture group intervention. The Boxall Profile was viewed by staff as a tool that provided them with 'super information'. However, it appeared that the Boxall Profile assessment tool was in conflict with the staff's view of which pupils were in need of access to the nurture group.

The selection process was discussed and it emerged that while the class teacher is given a lead role in identifying need and carrying out the initial Boxall Profile, the selection process was not straightforward in this school. The current nurture group teacher perceived her role in the selection process as minimal due to the

greater knowledge held by the deputy about the child/family and knowledge held by the previous nurture teacher. These relational dynamics within the system could have an impact on the confidence staff have in making the most appropriate selection of children into the nurture group. This is exemplified in the following extract drawn from the findings, which reflects the current nurture group teacher's position within the system: ***"I think perhaps that the child should be in nurture but it ultimately isn't my decision."***

TRAINING

The current staffing relationships within the nurture group are very strong, evidencing good communication, planning and monitoring of progress. The nurture group teacher was not nurture trained and the nurture trained person was not directly involved with the nurture group; she had returned to a mainstream teacher role. The trained member of staff continued to be required to share her knowledge and still remains instrumental in key decisions concerning the nurture group. The dialogue demonstrated the current nurture group teacher's lack of confidence and uncertainty about making changes without the approval of the school's only nurture group trained member of staff. The SFM allowed the facilitator to explore the current staff's understanding of the official training needed to lead a traditional nurture group intervention. The discussion highlighted how the current staff members had been misinformed surrounding the lengths and commitment to formal training in the nurture approach. This misinformation had become a barrier to undertaking any form of formal training.

DISCUSSION

Four key concepts were extrapolated from the systemic evaluation; parental involvement, communication, selection process and training. The implementation plan of nurture groups originally proposed by Boxall (2002) differs from the actual implementation witnessed in this real world setting. While many nurture groups are the variant of the original design (Cooper, 2004) the mechanisms that support this nurture group have been impacted on by a lack of training. Therefore, staff do not have the knowledge about the intervention to successfully implement aspects of it. These four concepts are intertwined and therefore the impact of training has the potential to influence the selection process, communication and parental engagement.

In opposition to previous research undertaken by Taylor and Gulliford (2011), rather than striving to engage parents with the nurture group, this study found the nurture group staff actively avoided direct involvement from parents. Taylor and Gulliford (2011) described the importance of the initial consultation with parents in forging positive relationships. They further reported parents' preference for regular informal contact with nurture group staff (Taylor and Gulliford, 2011). Cooper and Tiknaz (2007, as cited in Garner & Thomas, 2011) suggested the process of parental

engagement relates to the wider school forms of communication. Interestingly, discussion regarding communication was focused on that which occurred within the school setting and no discussion of communication processes with external stakeholders arose.

The communication system between nurture group staff was reported to be satisfactory with a focus on improving the two-way communications with the mainstream teaching staff. Difficulties in organising a time to liaise was also highlighted in research by Binnie and Allen (2008). A process of adopting an electronic means of communication highlighted the staff's capacity to increase communication and ensure it was not limited to the nurture group feeding back to the teachers. This study found the teaching staff felt the nurture group staff were approachable which reflects the findings of other research (Sanders, 2007).

The selection process was highlighted as a challenge for the school and this finding replicated that of Binnie and Allen (2008). The circumstances were possibly further complicated through the complexities of roles within the school where the current nurture group teacher had not undertaken the nurture training and the nurture trained person was not directly involved with the nurture group, solely the selection process and for informal support. These staffing issues meant there was not a shared ownership over the decision of a child in need of nurture. Furthermore, communication with parents regarding the child's behaviour at home is an important aspect in establishing the allocation of a place in the group, but this was not discussed during the SFMs. In addition, the child's involvement in the decision to attend the nurture group or the methods of gaining the child's perspective was not discussed. The facilitators did not explore these issues directly and it could be argued that this is a limitation of the SFM process due to the facilitators' choice of response to the emerging discussions. There were discrepancies in the professional judgement regarding selection which conflicted with the results of the Boxall profile. This, and the conflicting opinions regarding the child's need perceived by teaching staff, could be explained through a lack of knowledge of the underpinning theory. This demonstrated a lack of shared understanding around the targeted purpose of nurture group and the wider processes that impacted on optimal partnership working within the school.

The limited nurture group training found in this study is not unique to this school. Syrnyk (2012, p.153) also found a "general lack of knowledge about the nurture approach prior to starting the role." However, the experiential learning already undertaken through running the nurture group should put the current nurture group staff in a good position to make links between theory and practice if training is undertaken. A three-day training course in the theory and practice of nurture groups is available through the Nurture Group Network (2013). An engagement with the course would be an opportunity to develop external support systems. Also, increased knowledge and understanding of the intervention could facilitate inclusion of appropriate staff within the selection process and progression in communication within the school setting.

Furthermore, an increase in awareness of the importance of parental engagement would also lead to the development of improved communication systems with parents. This could be the first step in developing relationships which impact on changing opinions and could lead to less blame and more understanding.

Further discussion around formal training highlighted just how time and financial constraints impacted on more teaching staff being trained in the nurture group intervention. Research has shown that the effectiveness of a nurture group is linked to a whole school approach (Binnie & Allen, 2008; Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 1998; Sanders, 2007). Therefore a school will get the best out of the nurture group if the six principles underpinning the approach are accepted and their complexity is fully understood by all staff and others concerned with the school (Cooper, 2009).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researchers were mindful that the 'voice on the table' may not represent the views of the whole group since there were a mixture of dominant characters, quiet characters and the positions within the school hierarchy influenced the contributions made by group members. An example of this was when one teacher said she did not wish to dedicate more time to meetings about the nurture group and the silence from the other teachers was interpreted as agreement. The researchers also aimed to be sensitive to the consequence of the meeting in terms of future relationships and the ability of staff to move forward by sending the minutes to all those involved. The credibility of the research could have been improved if the researchers had asked the participants for feedback on the interpretations generated from the meetings. When the researchers emailed the meeting minutes they did receive additions which were added to the minutes. However these additions were not included in the data analysis. Only one nurture group was studied and therefore these findings cannot be generalised. However, the findings are informative of systemic issues which professionals can be mindful of.

During analysis the nurture principles did not clearly emerge thus it may have been useful to have the six principles as a topic for discussion during the SFMs. Another topic which was covered superficially was the links between the nurture group and the parents and more widely, the parents' engagement with the school. It would also have been beneficial to have gathered the parents' perspectives regarding systemic processes.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study paves the way for systemic evaluations, future research may be well placed in focusing on the systemic mechanisms that directly support the success of nurture groups. This could be facilitated by carrying out multiple studies across a variety of nurture groups within primary schools. Furthermore, research that focuses on the implementation of nurture groups could map the effective practice within nurture groups on to the multiple systems

operating within the school, leading to a nurturing school ethos. In instances where there are plans to implement a nurture group, research into the readiness of the school and their expectations could be explored. Additionally, the implementation fidelity of this intervention could also be explored. Future research studies that focus on the views of parents and children within the nurture group may progress Taylor and Gulliford's (2011) research to explore the impact of nurture groups on improved family relationships.

Tying all that is known about the impact of early years experiences on development, further research into the links between nurturing approaches, and whole school practice, may serve this area of research well and support professionals in meeting the needs of all children and young people.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted a number of systems that need to be in place to allow a nurture group to run effectively, namely; adequate training, good communication systems across the school, parental engagement, and the involvement of parents, children and appropriate staff in the selection process. To ensure continued success of the nurture group intervention in meeting the needs of pupils, all levels of personnel within the school need to have an understanding of the purpose and rationale for the nurture group, and create and carry out monitoring and evaluation of the nurture group that is right for the school. If the whole school embraces the nurture group intervention, the nurture group principles can permeate mainstream classroom practice, developing the self-awareness, self-control, confidence and social development of all pupils within the school not just those accessing the nurture group intervention (Doyle, 2001).

REFERENCES

- Alexander, S, & Sked, H** (2010). The development of solution focused multi-agency meetings in a psychology service. *Educational Psychology in Practice: Theory, Research and Practice in Educational Psychology*. 26(3), pp.239-249. DOI: 10.1080/02667363.2010.495204
- Binnie, L, & Allen, K** (2008). Whole school support for vulnerable children: the evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. 13(3), pp.201-216. DOI: 10.1080/13632750802253202
- British Educational Research Association** (2011). *Ethical guidelines for educational research*. [online]. [Accessed 29 June 2015]. Available from: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf>
- Boxall, M** (2002). *Nurture Groups in Schools: Principles and Practice*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Boyd, A, Geerling, T, Gregory, WJ, Kagan, C, Midgley, G, Murray, P, & Walsh, MP** (2007). Systemic evaluation: a participative, multi-method approach. *Journal of the Operational Research Society*. 58, pp.1306-1320. DOI: 10.1057/palgrave.jors.2602281
- British Psychological Society** (2009). *Code of Ethics and Conduct*. [Online]. [Accessed 29 June 2015]. Available from: http://www.bps.org.uk/system/files/documents/code_of_ethics_and_conduct.pdf
- Bywater, T** (2012). Developing rigorous programme evaluation. In B. Kelly & D.F. Perkins (Eds.), *Handbook of implementation science for psychology in education*. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139013949 (pp.37-53)
- Cooper, P** (2004). Learning from nurture groups. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*. 32, pp.59-72. DOI: 10.1080/03004270485200341
- Cooper, P** (2009). *Understanding and Supporting Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Cooper, P, Arnold, R, & Boyd, E** (1998). The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*. 28(4), pp.160-166. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00219
- Cooper, P, & Tiknaz, Y** (2007). *Nurture groups in school and at home: Connecting with children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Cooper, P, & Whitebread, D** (2007). The effectiveness of nurture groups on student progress: Evidence from a national research study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 12(3), pp.171 - 190. DOI: 10.1080/13632750701489915
- Doyle, R** (2001). Focus on practice: using a readiness scale for integrating pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties form a nurture group into their mainstream classroom- a pilot study. *British Journal of Special Education*. 28(3), pp.126-132. DOI: 10.1111/1467-8527.00211
- Garner, J, & Thomas, M** (2011). The role and contribution of nurture groups in secondary schools: perceptions of children, parents and staff. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. 16(2), pp.207-224. DOI: 10.1080/13632752.2011.569410

Graneheim, UH, & Lundman, B (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nursing Education Today*. 24(2), pp.105-112. DOI:10.1016/j.nrdt.2003.10.001

HCPC (2008). *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics*. [Online]. [Accessed 29 June 2015]. Available from:
<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10003B6EStandardsOfConduct,PerformanceAndEthics.pdf>

Hobbs, C (2006). The solution oriented school programme: drawing on the strengths of staff and pupils to build solutions towards inclusive schools. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research InterAction. *The Journal of Solution Focus in Organisations*. Available from <http://www.utiladivecenter.com/sycol/members/Overview/Articles/sos%20research%20paper.pdf>

HMIE (2009). Developing successful learners in nurturing schools: the impact of nurture groups in primary schools. [Online]. [Accessed 29 June 2015] Available from http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/Images/ingps_tcm4-712899.pdf

Sanders, T (2007). Helping children thrive at school: The effectiveness of nurture groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice*. 23(1), pp.45-61. DOI: 10.1080/02667360601154600

Scottish Government (2010). Building curriculum for excellence through positive relationships and behaviour. [Online]. [Accessed 29 June 2015]. Available from:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/316280/0100664.pdf>

Shaver, I., & McClatchey, K (2013). Assessing effectiveness of nurture groups in Northern Scotland. *Support for Learning*. 28(3), pp.97-102.

Syrnyk, C. (2012). The nurture teacher: characteristics, challenges and training. *British Journal of Special Education*. 39(3), pp.147-155.

Taylor, VM, & Gulliford, A (2011). Parental perspectives on nurture groups: the potential for engagement. *British Journal of Special Education*. 38(2), pp.73-82. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8578.2011.00501.x

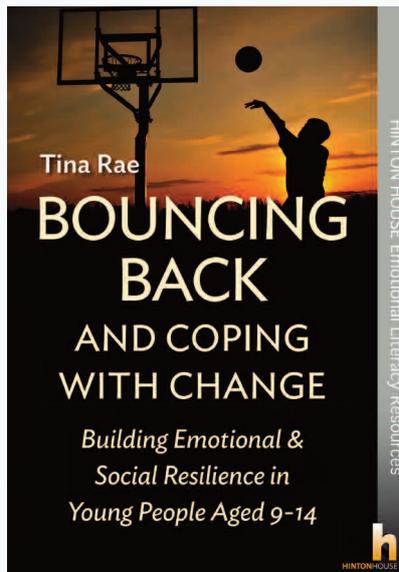


BOOK REVIEW

BOUNCING BACK & COPING WITH CHANGE

Building Emotional & Social Resilience in Young People Aged 9-14

Dr Tina Rae has worked with adults, children and families within educational settings, specialist services and in clinical contexts. She has published more than 75 titles on a wide range of topics and presents at national and international conferences.



The preface sets the tone for the book and the audience, which she describes as “people who care for and nurture young people”. This is an excellent resource for those who work within schools, and anyone who works with children and young people to support wellbeing.

In the introduction, Rae outlines the importance of the wellbeing of staff and carers and acknowledges the need of the adult to have resilience to be able to teach these coping skills. She also highlights the need for consistency within schools and a whole school approach. The introduction explores some of the complexities of wellbeing and some of the difficulties faced by practitioners and carers within their settings to support children and young people. It identifies the fact that within schools, the practitioner can have an enormous impact on the child and young person through their interactions and can “successfully prevent the escalation of mental health problems” (p3).

The next few pages highlight ‘Resilience, Change, Building and Developing Resilience’, giving clarity to the subject with in-depth research and practical understanding of the subject. Rae also incorporates Cognitive Behaviour Therapy techniques (CBT) with a clear examples. This is a good introduction for people who may already understand the principles of CBT as well as those who are new to it.

The Mindfulness section examines the approach within the sessions and the benefits of increasing children’s and young people’s life skills. Throughout, the information is validated by accessible, accurate references.

The research at the end of the Mindfulness chapter is not as clear, it mentioned that there is ‘an increasing evidence base to support this intervention’ and then moved to Huppert and Johnson (p 27) delivering a four-week programme within an independent fee paying school. It stated ‘it would seem that there was a significant increase in wellbeing amongst students’. When the programme was adapted and delivered over eight weeks in state schools it appears there are no findings for this study.

I would also have liked the paragraph about FLOW (p17) to be referenced as the other subjects are. In the sessions (p54) it mentions ‘Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’ and refers to a book written with Martin Seligman, however I feel that the founder of the identification of FLOW could have been introduced in the explanatory paragraph on the subject.

The rest of the book comprises the 20 sessions. They are all highly structured with ready to use material both within the book and on the CD Rom. The CD Rom is easy to navigate and clearly labelled. It is clear that the materials are based on research and Tina Rae’s extensive experience of working with complex and vulnerable children, young people and adults.

Each session outlines the ‘Introduction and aims’, giving practical advice. There is an icebreaker, warm up activity, the actual activity, feedback and reflection and a closing section of mindfulness. They are ready to use lessons or could be adapted to the needs of the individual.

Overall the resource is well written and referenced throughout with some excellent up to date recommended websites to encourage the reader to further develop their understanding.

I believe that this is a vital resource within schools for both non-qualified and qualified staff and carers to teach these skills, helping the child and young people to identify and develop new habits and techniques for life, boosting wellbeing and lowering stress. It is an inclusive resource as it could be used for all children and young people not just SEBD or those identified as at risk of mental health difficulties.

Bouncing Back and Coping with Change is available from the NGN website.

Become a member

If you would like more information on membership please contact **Chris Grant** on **0141 280 0524** or **chris@nurturegroups.org**



Members are entitled to the following benefits

The Nurture Group Network is proud to have over 1000 members in the UK and internationally, all working to achieve excellence in nurture and to ensure all children and young people have an equal chance of success in education and life. **Why not join us?**

By becoming a member you will be adding your support to helping us achieve our goals. We want to raise the profile of nurture, taking its agenda to the heart of government enabling the access to nurture provision for all who could benefit from it.

The more people that join with us, the louder our voice becomes.

- 10% OFF ALL PUBLICATIONS, COURSES AND CONFERENCES
- FREE COPIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION
- ACCESS TO THE MEMBERS' AREA OF THE NEW NGN WEBSITE. HERE YOU CAN EXCHANGE OPINIONS ON NURTURE, EDUCATION, TEACHING AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN. OUR MEMBERS ALSO FIND THIS THE IDEAL FORUM TO SHARE IDEAS AROUND NURTURE GROUPS, AS WELL AS SEEK ADVICE FROM FELLOW MEMBERS.
- REGULAR COPIES OF THE NURTURE NEWSLETTER

www.nurturegroups.org

The nurture group network helping children and young people to succeed

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION



Members of NGN receive the journal **free** of charge. However, if you would like to place an order for an annual subscription, please complete the form below.



WELCOME

TO THE SECOND EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION. THIS IS ESSENTIAL READING FOR ACADEMICS, CONSULTANTS, SCHOOL LEADERS, PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PRACTITIONERS WISHING TO KEEP UP-TO-DATE WITH THE LATEST RESEARCH IN THE FIELD.

The journal is currently published annually, but we intend to produce more frequent editions in the future.

If you would like to submit a paper for the next edition or more information on how to contribute, please contact **edurne@nurturegroups.org**. Please note that all entries are subject to peer review.

SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS

A	Single copy UK	Institutions/Schools etc	£45
B	Single copy UK	Individuals (paid on personal credit card and delivered to home address)	£15
C	Single copy	International Institutions/Schools etc	£60
D	Single copy	International Individuals (paid on personal credit card and delivered to home address)	£25

ORDER FORM

SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS PRICES INCLUDING P & P

International Journal of Nurture in Education	A £45	<input type="checkbox"/>	B £15	<input type="checkbox"/>	C £60	<input type="checkbox"/>	D £25	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	--------------------------

For the attention of:
 First name _____ Surname _____
Organisation/Company
 (if applicable) _____
Postal/invoice address
 Address _____

 Postcode _____

E-mail _____
 Tel _____
 Fax _____
 Please state: Member **YES** **NO**
Membership no. _____

www.nurturegroups.org

The nurture group network helping children and young people to succeed

The Nurture Group Network
 Unit 2013 Mile End Mill
 Abbey Mill Business Centre
 12 Seedhill Road, Paisley PA1 1JS
 Tel: 0141 280 0524
 E-mail: melisa@nurturegroups.org



**THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
NURTURE IN EDUCATION**

The nurture
group network ®
helping children and young people to succeed

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION



ISSN 2059-0466

Published by The Nurture Group Network



www.nurturegroups.org

The nurture
group network ®
helping children and young people to succeed

National Office

t 020 3475 8980

e info@nurturegroups.org

 [@nurturegroups](https://twitter.com/nurturegroups)

18A Victoria Park Square

Bethnal Green, London E2 9PB

Glasgow

t 0141 280 0524

The Nurture Group Network,

Unit 2013 Mile End Mill,

Abbey Mill Business Centre,

12 Seedhill Road,

Paisley PA1 1JS

Registered England and Wales, charity number: 1115972.

Scottish registered charity number: SC042703