NURTURE GROUPS AND THEIR STAFF'S RESILIENCE. EXPERIENCES OF SUPPORT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.

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ABSTRACT

Nurture groups are popular teacher-led interventions in the UK, considered to improve children's ability to learn by enhancing their emotional wellbeing. As Nurture group staff may work with children with overt behaviour presentations, it is important that staff resilience is supported. This study explores what school-related factors support nurture group staff's resilience and aims to identify roles schools and educational psychologists could play in supporting staff's resilience. Eight nurture group practitioners in one Outer London borough were interviewed to understand what fostered and supported their resilience. Data was analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Findings identified that specific interactions between personal and environmental factors support nurture group staff's resilience in schools. *Understanding resilience*, *Identity*, *School structure* and *Navigating the challenges of the role* are important themes identified. These findings were aligned with existing literature. Practical implications for schools and educational psychologists have been provided to develop and sustain nurture group staff's resilience, at individual, school and community levels. Directions for future research have also been discussed.

INTRODUCTION

What are nurture groups and how do they work?

Nurture groups (NGs) were created in the 1970s in a London borough by the educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall, after she witnessed many children entering primary school with acute social and emotional difficulties. Boxall hypothesised that these children's difficulties stemmed from poor early nurturing experiences (nurture**UK** {formerly known as Nurture Group Network}, 2018).

Classic NGs are organised as 10-12 pupils with a class teacher and teaching assistant mediating the learning. Their goal is to model and encourage positive and secure relationships, so pupils can learn and practise the skills needed to develop and maintain relationships (Boxall, 2002).

The daily routine is explicit and predictable. Activities like emotional literacy, group activities, turn taking and the nurture breakfast are designed to help children develop trust, greater self-awareness and awareness of the feelings of others, communication and language skills and the growth of confidence, resilience and self-esteem (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Colley, 2009).

NGs use six key principles of nurture (Lucas et al, 2006) and emphasise the importance of communication skills, language and self-esteem in development.

While the description above is considered a classic Boxall nurture group, Cooper and Whitebread (2007) identified three variations of the NG.

The first is a new variant nurture group, based on the principles of the classic model but with differences in their structure, such as the amount of time pupils spend in the group. New variant NGs can be found in Key Stage 3 (KS3). Regardless of these differences, these NGs maintain the core structural features (Grantham & Primrose, 2017).

The second variant is known as groups informed by nurture group principles. Such groups do not follow the organisational principles of classic and new variant NGs. They may focus on social and developmental issues and do not have the academic focus.

The last groups identified are the aberrant nurture groups. These alter key principles of the classic NG by favouring control and containment and lack an educational and/or developmental emphasis (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).

Legislation and national context

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recognised that social and emotional wellbeing can affect physical health in children and adults (NICE, 2008). This implies that supporting the emotional wellbeing of pupils is paramount to their psychological, emotional and physical health.

Numerous government publications focus on promoting and supporting pupil mental health and wellbeing, including publications by the Department for Education (DfE) (2016) and the Department of Health (2017), with the latest government mental health initiative in schools (eg HM Government, 2019) being currently developed.

Given the focus on students, teachers' resilience and emotional wellbeing is significantly relevant to creating a stable environment for pupils in school (Roffey, 2012). In March 2019, DfE announced new initiatives to support teacher wellbeing and recent research by Ofsted (2019) has similarly focused on promoting and supporting teacher wellbeing, thus acknowledging that teachers' wellbeing must be considered if they are to support pupils' wellbeing. Educational psychologists (EPs) alongside mental health professionals are some of those considered to be well placed to support wellbeing in schools at different levels, from individual to whole school interventions. For clarity, EPs in England and Wales are professionals with a psychology degree and a specific professional doctorate. They look at how children and young people experience life within the context of their school and home environment and how different factors in these environments interact with each other.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

When exploring wellbeing, Mguni et al., (2012) suggest that we must also consider resilience. Research on resilience is continuously developing, with some acknowledging that the concept comprises of external supporting factors in an individual's social environment and their internal strengths (Howard & Johnson, 2004; Mguni et al., 2012; Day & Hong, 2016). Following this, The

Dynamic, Interactive Model of Resilience (ahmed Shafi et al., 2020) was developed and highlights that resilience cannot simply be an individual trait but can be defined as domain, context and relationship specific, emerging as a result of an interaction between the individual and their contexts. This is similar to the definitions for resilience and staff resilience as presented by Ungar (2013) and Gu (2018) respectively, who state that it is the features of an individual and the environment around them that leads to resilience. In Gu's (2018) definition the environment is the work environment – and more specifically school.

Resilience can also be defined as the ability to continue to thrive or have a sense of purpose when experiencing stress, bounce back from adversity without significant negative disruptions in functioning and successfully adapt to accommodate risk (Perry, 2002; Gu & Day, 2007; Ledesma, 2014; Masten, 2014; Schussler et al., 2018) and can vary from one situation to another (Gu & Day, 2013; Amann, 2015).

RESEARCHER'S RATIONALE AND THEORETICAL POSITION

Currently, no published research has explored how NG staff's resilience and wellbeing is supported. Therefore, the current study sought to fill this very specific gap by adopting a social constructionist perspective, which incorporates views derived from positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic literature search was carried out in August 2018 using the search engines EBSCO Host to identify what literature was available in this area of resilience and NG, using the following databases:

- Academic Search Complete
- British Education Research
- Education Research Complete
- Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC)
- PsychINFO.

A parallel search was also carried out on Google Scholar to identify any relevant papers not highlighted in the above.

Limiters included English peer reviewed academic journals that focused on quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research into the resilience, wellbeing or self-efficacy of qualified primary school teachers and support staff in the United Kingdom over the last 20 years. As there were no relevant studies on NG staff's experiences of support for their resilience and wellbeing, the search was extended

to mainstream school teachers and support staff in primary settings.

Eleven studies were identified and analysed according to the focus of their research.

ORDER OF EXPLORATION

Three themes were identified that encompass the analysis of the 11 articles:

1. Experience of being in an intervention
2. Lived experience of school staff, and
3. Experience of support.

THEME 1. EXPERIENCE OF BEING IN AN INTERVENTION

Gibbs & Miller (2014) propose that teachers can sometimes experience significant stress and health issues due to various school factors; therefore, understanding what contributes to the resilience and wellbeing of teachers is important, so that support can be enhanced (Gibbs & Miller, 2014). One way in which this has been developed is the implementation of interventions in school.

Research has shown that positive psychology-based and mindfulness-based interventions such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) in school can reduce stress and improve the self-efficacy beliefs and wellbeing of staff.

Bandura (1997) states that self-efficacy beliefs are associated with protective factors such as achievement, personal wellbeing and resilience. Moreover, a positive sense of efficacy can act as a protective factor and help an individual to approach challenges in a more constructive manner (Critchley & Gibbs, 2012; Gu & Day, 2007; Hastings & Bham, 2003).

In a study on positive psychology intervention on a school's staff wellbeing, Critchley and Gibbs (2012) identified that by recording and reflecting on three positive events each day, participants improved their self-efficacy by transforming the way they thought about situations. In a different evaluative study on six primary schools, Gold et al. (2009) found that staff's scores for depression, anxiety and stress improved after taking part in an eight week MBSR course that focused on helping staff to change the way they respond to stressful events and thoughts. Such an intervention also helped staff to identify unhelpful thinking patterns and change them and respond to situations instead of reacting to them.

Although limited in number, the studies identified suggest that a mindfulness-based training intervention for teachers may be a beneficial way of supporting personal wellbeing and building resilience.

THEME 2. LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL STAFF

As Troman (2000), Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell (2012) and Margolis et al. (2014) recognise, over the previous decades the education system in England has undergone significant changes and restructuring. With the pace of education reforms occurring at an unprecedented rate, there is intense pressure on teachers to keep up with the rapid changes (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012).

A number of quantitative and qualitative studies focused on schools (Troman, 2000; Gu & Day, 2007; Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012; Paterson & Grantham, 2016) identified that staff collegiality, working collaboratively, feeling valued and respected and positive relationships with pupils are some of the contributing factors that influence teachers' self-efficacy and help to reduce teacher stress.

Additionally, Brown et al. (2002) found in their small scale, qualitative study on teachers that difficult relationships with colleagues can be a source of stress, while Roffey (2012) identified that positive feelings and relationships, being and feeling included, valued and respected were important factors in reducing stress and promoting resilience and wellbeing in school staff.

Furthermore, Paterson & Grantham (2016) used a case study approach in a Glasgow school and identified that a good work-life balance and a culture that promotes a positive school ethos for all influenced staff wellbeing. Similarly, in the Midlands, Day and Hong (2016) recognised that support from friends and family, professional support, strong sense of vocation, good relationships with leadership and protecting their time outside work contributed to staff resilience.

As noted in the Introduction, children who attend NGs typically have a history of withdrawn or disruptive behaviour and are often seen as needing significant levels of support (Sanders 2007; Syrnyk 2012). In a mixed method school-based study, Syrnyk (2012) found qualities such as self-awareness, objectivity, inner strength, effective at managing their own internal states and empathetic, are related to teachers identified as 'nurturing'. Furthermore, when exploring the positive aspects of a nurturing teacher, one of the main themes identified by participants was interpersonal relationships with colleagues and the importance of being able to offload to peers, as a source of support (Syrnyk, 2012).

Findings from these studies suggest that while some teaching staff may have innate qualities related

to resilience, they can also be influenced by the surrounding environment and support network. This point is also argued by Gu and Day (2013) and Gu (2014) who hypothesised that teachers' capacity to be resilient can be influenced by the personal, relational and organisational settings within which they work.

THEME 3. EXPERIENCE OF SUPPORT

As explored above, the wellbeing and the resilience of staff in schools has warranted some investigation (Mackenzie, 2012; Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Day & Gu, 2013; Gu, 2014; Greenfield, 2015). Hastings and Bham (2003) also identify that improving social support for teaching staff can help to alleviate stress and burnout.

Researchers have explored different ways in which teaching staff can support each other as a way of counteracting some of the factors that may contribute to the erosion of wellbeing and resilience (Sharrocks, 2014; Davison & Duffy, 2017). In providing a space for staff to come together, studies found that staff felt a greater feeling of classroom efficacy, greater job satisfaction, calmness, better collegial relationships and better ability to manage challenging behaviour (Sharrocks, 2014; Davidson & Duffy, 2017). Furthermore, Davison and Duffy (2017) used a mixed method design with 22 participants in 11 UK schools to identify that monthly group consultation sessions for NG staff resulted in a significant drop in levels of staff's concern around an issue, as well as an increase in their self-confidence and self-efficacy, following participation in the group consultation. The consultation, facilitated by an educational psychologist (EP) also helped to provide reassurance and companionship, reduced stress and eased anxiety.

Another resource identified to monitor wellbeing of staff is supervision (Rae et al., 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). Rae et al. (2017) highlighted that school staff preferred solution-focused, unbiased support with the opportunity to unburden themselves, contemplate and feel contained, while Willis and Baines (2018) found that supervision helped improve staff relationships and the sense of camaraderie, as they could address the issue of stress through offloading, sharing and validating each other's emotions and experiences. Group supervision was also identified as helpful in developing professional practice, as staff could share their expertise and discuss coping strategies.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE LITERATURE

At an individual level, self-efficacy, resilience and feelings of control are found to be related to wellbeing; positive relationships within schools at various levels, supportive and collaborative relationships, the ethos and culture fostered within schools around resilience and wellbeing and a sense of belonging are also highlighted as key factors. The studies are grounded in theoretical perspectives related to positive psychology, ecological theory, self-efficacy and social constructivism.

JUSTIFICATION AND METHOD
Research questions and design

Attachment theory, ecological systems theory and positive psychology constituted the standpoint for the current research. Due to clear gaps in research about how NG staff experience support for their resilience and wellbeing, this study aimed to develop an understanding around this phenomenon by exploring the following research question:

What are nurture group staff's experiences of how their resilience is supported in school?

The research conformed with the University of East London's ethical requirements, adopted a qualitative design and is exploratory in nature.

As the authors allowed the participants to express their own meaning of resilience and the support they experience, a social constructionist position was deemed fit for this study.

Sampling and recruitment

This research was carried out within one Local Authority in socio-economically disadvantaged areas of an outer London borough and used a purposive homogenous sample. Two criteria were used for participant selection: to have at least two years of working in a NG (considered necessary, as they needed sufficient experience to give rise to the possibility of them needing support for their resilience in school) and to work in a primary school as either a class teacher or teaching assistant (which followed Boxall's NG initial criteria).

The local NG lead was contacted to identify potential participating schools. Six were identified as being suitable and four agreed to take part. The researcher also contacted two schools that ran NGs in which she practised and one school agreed to take part.

Informed consent followed a step process: first, a participant information letter explaining the purpose of the research was sent to schools to pass on to their NG staff. If NG staff agreed to take part, they were put in contact with the researcher. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the research and what

it would involve, as well as ensuring they were still happy to proceed with the interview. Consent forms were also signed.

Once interviews were completed, participants were debriefed so they could ask any questions and be signposted to appropriate supporting agencies.

Method and data analysis

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted and participants were interviewed individually, apart from two participants who preferred to be interviewed together. Interviews lasted between 10-60 minutes and were audio recorded to enable transcription.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen for data analysis, as it offers a glimpse into an individual's current understanding of their experience of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009) and it fits with the research's social constructionist position.

Quality of the research

Credibility was achieved by obtaining feedback from lay and academic members (ie family members and the researcher's director of studies) and by extended engagement with the research throughout data collection and analysis.

Dependability was achieved by the researcher's director of studies getting engaged in the review of the data analysis.

In addition, the use of an audit trail, supervision, peer review and the use of a research diary ensured that the findings of the research were grounded in the raw data. The researcher also had regular supervision sessions.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were informed by the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009), the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC, 2016) and UEL's Code of Practice (UEL, 2010). The research proposal gained UEL ethical approval and permission was also gained from the Principal EP and NG Lead of the LA in which the research was conducted.

All participating schools and staff were informed of the purpose of the research prior to engagement with the researcher and informed consent was gained. The right to withdraw was also reiterated (Robson, 2002) and ethical principles were observed at each step of the research (BPS, 2009).

Findings

Through IPA analysis, there were a number of superordinate themes and themes that emerged

relating to resilience as a concept, identity, school structure and navigating the challenges of the NG role (Table 1). They are discussed in detail below.

Table 1: *Superordinate themes and subthemes*

Superordinate Theme	Theme
1. Resilience as a concept	Beliefs about resilience
	Feelings related to resilience
	Self-perception of resilience
2. Identity	Sense of purpose
	Feelings about work in NG
	Professional and personal development
3. School structure	Feeling of trust and being valued
	Feedback
	Communication
	Nature of support and recovery
	Relationships
4. Navigating the challenges of the NG role	Flexibility and adaptability
	Recognising and managing thoughts and emotions
	Pressures and expectations

SUPERORDINATE THEME 1: RESILIENCE AS A CONCEPT

The concept of resilience was a saturated theme as all participants expressed an understanding and experience of resilience with similarities and differences in their understanding and experiences. Three sub-themes reflecting different aspects of resilience as a concept were identified: *beliefs about resilience*, *feelings related to resilience* and *self-perception* of resilience (Fig. 1). These are explored below.

Figure 1: *Understanding of resilience as a concept*

'Beliefs about resilience' was identified as a theme as participants expressed their understanding of what resilience meant to them and seemed to perceive and understand resilience in similar ways, with perseverance and bouncing back from difficult situations being key descriptors for most participants, as exemplified in the following extract:

> "To…persevere? To think that if they can't do something and persevere and try and have the confidence to continue with it.'' (p1, 11-12).

The theme of 'Feelings related to resilience' refers

to positive and negative feelings participants felt were related to, and impacted on, their resilience. Autonomy, empowerment, pride, self-worth and ownership of their role were among the positive feelings identified. By contrast, negative feelings related to resilience included self-doubt, loss of control, feeling overwhelmed, responsible, physically and mentally drained, powerless and experiencing negative emotions in relation to outcomes for pupils, as one participant expresses:

> "…kind of thinking 'right okay, can I keep going?' you know, 'have I got the strength to keep going for this child?'." (p8, 285-286).

Participants' perception of their own resilience was mentioned or implied by all who took part in the study. Some participants described their level of resilience in the present moment and discussed how it has changed over time, while other participants reported their resilience as more constant and discussed personal qualities that they have that contribute to their resilience:

> "I guess really I'm just a resilient kind of person anyway, you know I do that, get on with whatever and then you've just got to carry on." (p4, 219-220).

SUPERORDINATE THEME 2: IDENTITY

The second superordinate theme, related to a sense of identity to the NG community, appeared to be determined by several factors, placed under three themes: *a sense of purpose*, *feelings about work in NG* and *professional and personal development* (Fig 2).

Figure 2: *Components of identity*

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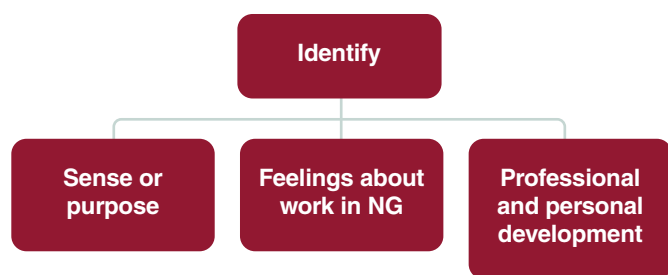
Most of the participants discussed their own views about the *purpose of their work* in an NG or reasons for working in an NG. Some participants hinted to
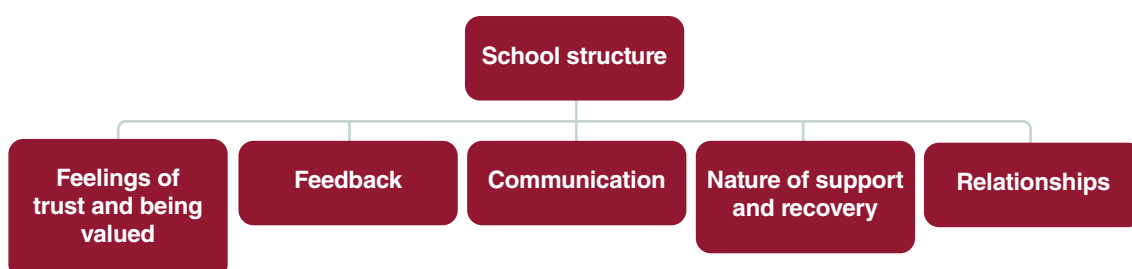
a sense of purpose streaming from the work they do, while others discussed how the role itself felt as though they had a sense of purpose.

> "I don't know what would be next for me. That's my thing," (p4, 154).

Feelings about the NG role was also identified as a theme, as many of the participants mentioned positive or negative feelings related to their work in NG:

> "…you do get the occasional parent that comes and says, 'wow like you really made a difference and we really appreciate what you've done' and that always makes you feel like your job's worthwhile." (p2, 37-39).

Most participants identified *professional or personal development* in their role as a member of NG staff and reflected on the importance of personal and professional development in the form of advice including that from professionals such as EPs and training. Speaking with an EP was noted as helping participants develop and enhance their skills and move forward in their thinking for a pupil when they felt stuck.

SUPERORDINATE THEME 3: SCHOOL STRUCTURE

While participants discussed their perceptions of resilience and feelings related to it, they also communicated what the researcher interpreted as support from within the school structure. This superordinate theme is therefore referred to as 'School structure'. Five subthemes were identified and are as follows: *feeling of trust and being valued*, *feedback*, *communication, nature of support and recovery* and *relationships* (Fig 3).

Highlighting different ways of *feeling trusted and valued* was a common theme that was present in all participants' interviews. These feelings were discussed by participants in both positive and negative terms. Some participants felt their appointment to the NG role gave them a feeling of being trusted while others felt that they wanted more reassurance that they are doing their job well, were being valued and acknowledged.

Figure 3: *Components of school structure*

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"...when I came in here initially, I knew that okay, this is a big job or you know these are vulnerable children and then you are given the role to be the teacher for this group and I felt 'yes' I must have made an impression somewhere so I could be you know, given this task to work with these children..." (p6, 44-47).

Feedback from colleagues and parents as well as feedback from observations on practice was a theme highlighted by all staff during the interviews and seen to be key contributors to participants' resilience:

"...one of the nice things is how we work really well together so they always appreciate that...and our... um...how we work with the children and how the children react to us and the relationship we've built with the children." (p1, 25-27).

Highlighting different ways of *communicating* and the effectiveness of communication across the school system was another common theme discussed by participants. All participants identified formal and informal communication systems with members of staff within school. A lack of communication between NGs and senior management regarding the needs of pupils was highlighted as a challenge that NGs faced as this led to a lack of understanding about the nature of an NG and the work they carry out.

Time for *recovery* after a significant incident and support within schools and with outside agencies, including EPs were also considered important by participants.

For some participants, break time was the time they needed to recover in order to then continue their work. Participants also commented on what they would like to improve, such time to talk with somebody in the form of supervision to help them to feel more supported in their role:

"...break times, you really need your break times because you do...that's your time when you can just sit down and have your glass of water or have your cup of tea..." (p5, 158-160).

Interpersonal *relationships* were discussed by all participants throughout the interviews and were viewed as being important contributors to resilience. One strong theme that came across all participants was the relationship between NG colleagues as well as senior management.

Superordinate theme 4: Navigating the challenges of the NG role

Throughout the interviews all participants discussed experiences within their role that challenged their resilience. Navigating the challenges of the NG role was identified as a superordinate theme as it

appeared to have a significant presence across the participants, who discussed the demands and challenges related to their role. Three themes were identified as *flexibility and adaptability*, *recognising and managing thoughts and emotions* and *pressures and expectations* (Fig. 4). These are discussed below.

Figure 4: *Components of navigating the challenges of the NG role*
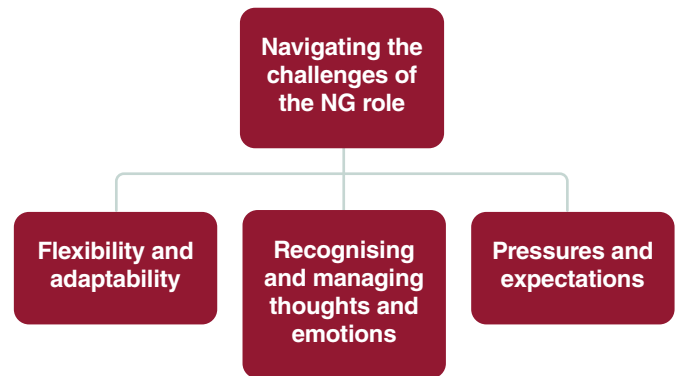
The ability to be *flexible and adaptable* in the role were discussed by the majority of participants and were important contributors to resilience.

"...but if something goes wrong with a child in there, getting really cross, then or they're refusing to do something then I might be like 'okay we'll do something silly', just to break it. So, if it's walking down the corridor, and they weren't able to walk, and they were running, then we might bounce like kangaroos or something just to get back." (p3, 44-48).

Being able to *recognise and manage thoughts and emotions* while in the role was highlighted as one way of being able to enhance resilience. Participants discussed their experience of being able to recognise when they were struggling with their work and having time and space to be emotional. It was also important that their colleague recognised their need to have space to regulate their feelings and swapped their roles within NG when they felt their work was becoming too overwhelming for them.

The *pressures and expectations* that participants had of themselves as well as from school were identified by all as affecting their ability to cope with the demands of the role. Participants indicated their awareness of the need for academic progress in their pupils but there were thoughts around schools' expectations for pupils and their work as being unrealistic at times.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The central findings from this research were outlined within the superordinate themes of resilience as a concept, identity, school structure and navigating the challenges of the NG role. Based on the findings

presented, it appears that there are multiple factors that contribute to NG staff resilience, both at an individual and systemic level. The main points of the findings are now discussed in relation to the literature review identified and linked to relevant theoretical frameworks. Strengths and limitations of the research followed by implications of the research for EPs will also be discussed.

LINKS TO PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THEORY

Feelings related to resilience

According to the Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b) individuals' motivations or reasons for engaging in specific behaviours are influenced by the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The current study identifies that feelings around autonomy and competence were reported by all participants as important factors that contributed to either feeling motivated or not, which in turn impacted on resilience. This is consistent with findings by Rae et al. (2017) whereby teachers identified that the volatile nature of the children they worked with was a direct cause of stress to them.

Identity

All participants identified a sense of purpose in the work they do; additionally, similarly to Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell's (2012) and Day and Hong (2016),

NG staff felt they could make a change to pupils' experience of school, thus enhancing their sense of purpose.

Additionally, NG staff referred to both the positive and negative feelings related to the work they do. The positive aspects contributed to NG staff feeling a greater sense of self-efficacy, while negative aspects, to NG staff feeling deskilled and impacting on their motivation and confidence in work, ultimately on their sense of purpose.

These dynamics enhance previous research findings, in which self-efficacy beliefs are found to influence wellbeing and resilience, with negative beliefs about the role that teachers occupy, affecting motivation (Bandura, 1997; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Critchley & Gibbs, 2012). Middleton (2018) also found that while NG staff were committed to their work, their motivation was also negatively impacted by feelings of frustration – feelings also expressed by participants from the current study.

According to SDT, individual motivations for engaging in specific behaviour are influenced by both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2008). From the current research, a sense of purpose was different for each participant and suggested that each participant's motivation to work in NG comes from an internal drive to meet the needs of their pupils. Similarly, Syrnyk (2012) found that nurturing teachers were intrinsically motivated by the desire to see positive changes in their pupils. Furthermore, findings by Middleton (2019) highlighted that NG staff appeared to possess certain emotional characteristics that allowed them to navigate the challenges of the job and their belief that their role had value. This is also consistent with findings from the current study.

School structure

The NG staff in this research identified good working relationships with colleagues, which served as a vital protective factor for NG staff's resilience, supporting findings from Troman (2000), Paterson and Grantham (2016) and Day and Hong (2016).

NG staff reported a close working relationship with their NG colleagues, while working relationships with members of staff other than leadership staff were not mentioned. Interestingly, NG staff did not feel they could talk about their own emotions to mainstream staff, as NG was perceived to be different and only those that worked within it could understand the difficulties they were experiencing. It seems that both in the literature identified and the present study, what is important for NG staff is that the people they turn to for support understand the challenges of their role (Sharrocks, 2014; Davison and Duffy, 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018, Middleton, 2019). Similarly, Middleton (2018) found that NG staff felt that those who did not work within NGs may not understood the difficulties they experienced.

Participants in the current research all described a feeling of connectedness to at least one person and were able to form close and meaningful relationships.

The current study suggests that opportunities to reflect on the day, time to recover and swapping of roles was seen as important for resilience and is consistent with findings by Rae et al. (2017) and Syrnyk (2012). Davison and Duffy's (2012) conclusion that participants did not feel alone after taking part in group consultations was somehow mirrored in the current research, with participants reporting that knowing there were people that they could call on helped them feel supported and less alone in their role.

Navigating the challenges of the NG role

In the current study, being flexible and adaptable to changes was considered important for staff resilience. This finding is supported by Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell (2012), who identified that

teachers who adapted and managed change effectively had better wellbeing that those who could not. Findings by Rae et al. (2017) that SEMH teachers needed to self-manage their emotions, detach themselves from situations and reflect on situations as a way of managing stress are also supported by the current research.

Likewise, pressures and expectations for pupils to make academic progress was noted as one factor impacting on the wellbeing of NG staff by Middleton (2019) and findings from the current research study also support this.

STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

An immediate application of this study was the practical and immediate local impact. As the main investigator was a trainee EP when undertaking the current study, she was able to suggest ways in which NG staff can be supported in school and how EPs may be deployed to support NG staff and schools in practice.

Another strength of this study is the homogeneity of the sample in that they were all NG staff in primary school settings.

LIMITATIONS

As well as strengths within the research, limitations to this study have also been acknowledged.

Interviewing eight members of NG staff and participating in an in-depth analysis was felt to be suitable for the present research, however there was no triangulation of information. Given more time, further triangulation of data would have increased the validity and rigour of the findings.

This study contained retrospective views expressed by NG staff in the interviews and while the interviews were in-depth, it must be recognised that these were glimpses into the participants' experiences and the data could have been influenced by how individual NG staff were feeling that day.

As the researcher could only approach NG staff once schools had given permission for them to take part, there is some sampling bias; as there may have been something about all the participants and schools who agreed to take part.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NG STAFF AND SCHOOL STAFF IN GENERAL

While the current research focused on what role EPs can play in supporting NG staff, there are also implications for NG staff and school staff in general with the following steps being most relevant to consider:

- Adopt a whole school approach to resilience and

wellbeing and develop a resilience and wellbeing policy for staff.

- Improve systems around effective communication between NG and other school staff so that there is a clear understanding of the work being carried out, as a lack of communication can lead to a lack of understanding of NG and impact on resilience.

- Integrate NG staff more within school life so that they are more present within school, to reduce feelings of isolation.

- Allow systems for giving positive feedback and recognition of strengths in line with a positive psychology approach, which also contributes to feelings of being valued.

- Consider emotional support for school staff as part of standard practice, such as regularly checking in with staff to make sure they are okay.

- Focus professional development for staff on resilience, to help to equip them with the skills needed to succeed in their role and improve their self-efficacy

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

This study identified that the NG staff's resilience involves a combination of feelings, thoughts and behaviours shaped by the school culture in which NG staff work, with EPs being well placed to support NG staff.

A great deal of what is summarised below will be standard practice for many EPs, however, there are some ideas that may be useful for further discussion.

- Individual support for NG staff consistent with the emotional support they stated they required.

- Offering training and advice to equip NG staff with the skills needed to improve their resilience or maintain their ability to be resilient.

Help NG staff to develop positive coping mechanisms in difficult situations to increase their stress related growth. Stress related growth is a term that has been used to describe positive changes experienced by individuals as a result of struggling with a stressful situation (Park & Fenster, 2004).

- Help NG staff develop their skills in self-reflections and their current way of reflecting on incidents with a model for reflection.

- Develop a peer support group that all NGs have access to, such as Jackson's (2008) Work Discussion Group. Offering a space for NG staff to be able to confide in each other can empower them to work through the difficulties

they face (Jackson, 2008). More recent literature also provides frameworks for peer supervision (Middleton, Rae & Walshe, 2020)

With regard to future research, the start of this study identified a clear lack of research on NG staff resilience and wellbeing and hence further exploration in this area would be suitable. This could include evaluating interventions aimed at supporting NG staff resilience and wellbeing or the concept of NG staff resilience and wellbeing using different approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study has contributed to the research on teachers' wellbeing and resilience and provided a unique insight into the wellbeing and resilience of NG staff. We identified that the role of an NG teacher or teaching assistant is highly motivating but equally demanding. There is a danger of NG staff being isolated and their resilience eroded in the school environment due to the daily difficult situations they encounter in the NG environment. Therefore, careful consideration needs to be taken to them being included in school life and their wellbeing to be carefully considered and supported. By exploring their experiences, significant areas for support have been identified and the impact that these have on their resilience documented. The findings presented indicate the need to be aware of the systemic influences on NG staff's resilience as well as their individual characteristics.

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