

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION



VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1 APRIL 2015

ISSN 2059-0466



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

**IN THIS ISSUE**

[www.nurturegroups.org](http://www.nurturegroups.org)

Results of the systematic review on nurture groups' effectiveness

Exploring parents' and children's perceptions of nurture groups

Part-time secondary school nurture groups

Comparing nurture group provision with one-to-one counselling

Future directions for nurture in education

---

# 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**  
**Tom Billington**  
**Tony Cline**  
**Heather Geddes**  
**Tommy MacKay**  
**Tina Rae**  
**Wendy Roden**  
**Mark Turner**

## 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** © 2015 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](mailto:info@nurturegroups.org)

Abstracts for publishing consideration should be sent via email for the attention of the editor at [info@nurturegroups.org](mailto:info@nurturegroups.org)

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

---

**CONTENTS**


---

- 3** **Results of the systematic review on nurture groups' effectiveness**  
How efficient are nurture groups?  
Under what conditions do nurture groups work best?  
**Dr Hanna Bennett**
- 
- 9** **Exploring parents' and children's perceptions of nurture groups**  
And the ways in which they impact upon parent-child relationships  
**Dr Ali Pyle** and **Dr Tina Rae\***  
\*University of East London
- 
- 15** **Part-time secondary school nurture groups**  
An analysis of participant outcomes and possible mechanisms of change  
**Dr Jessamine Chiappella**
- 
- 25** **Comparing nurture group provision with one-to-one counselling**  
What characteristics and evidence-based components produce positive change?  
**Eduarne Scott Loinaz**
- 
- 33** **Future directions for nurture in education**  
Developing a model and a research agenda  
**Professor Tommy MacKay**  
Professor at the National Centre for Autism Studies, University of Strathclyde,  
Director of Psychology Consultancy Services and an educational psychologist with Argyll & Bute Council

---

**ABOUT OUR AUTHORS**


---

**Dr Hanna Bennett** is a researcher interested in impact assessment and evaluation. She has previously assessed the EU's impact in the eastern neighbourhood during her PhD and effectiveness of brain gain programmes within the UNDP. Her recent work in the Nurture Group Network included a systematic review of nurture groups and identification of determinants explaining nurture groups' effectiveness.

**Dr Jessamine Chiappella** leads on nurture groups in Buckinghamshire as a part of her role as a Senior Educational Psychologist in the authority. Since completing her doctoral research on secondary school nurture groups she has been invited to become an Honorary Research Associate at UCL. The yearly evaluation of nurture groups in Buckinghamshire is an ongoing research interest.

**Professor Tommy MacKay** is a professor at the National Centre for Autism Studies, University of Strathclyde, Director of Psychology Consultancy Services and an educational psychologist with Argyll & Bute Council.

**Dr Ali Pyle** currently works as an Educational Psychologist, having previously worked in secondary schools, teaching psychology, sociology and PSHE. She has recently completed a Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of East London. Her areas of interest include social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and children's mental health. She has undertaken research in the areas of cognitive processing in individuals with hypomanic personality, resulting in a publication in *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, as well as more recently exploring parental perceptions of Nurture Groups for her doctoral research.

**Dr Tina Rae** is a Consultant Educational Psychologist, a registered member of the HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council) and a member of the British Psychological Society. She is currently working as a Consultant EP and as an academic and professional tutor on the Doctoral training course for Educational Psychologists in the Department of Psychology at the University of East London. Tina has written extensively on topics including social and emotional skills development, anger management, grief, loss and bereavement, critical incidents, emotional literacy, self-harm and suicide, and the use of therapeutic interventions with children and young people.

**Eduarne Scott Loinaz** is a researcher in comparative education specialising in social and emotional learning. Her recent work for The Nurture Group Network includes conducting a study of over 100 nurture groups in both primary and secondary schools, and linking the effective components of nurture group provision to other evidence-based psychosocial interventions.

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION



The nurture  
group network <sup>®</sup>  
helping children and young people to succeed

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

## A welcome to the International Journal of Nurture in Education

On behalf of the trustees and staff of the Nurture Group Network and as Editor of this new Journal, I welcome you to the first issue. The intention is that the Journal will provide the most complete and reliable source of information on developments in nurture in education through the presentation of current research. As such it will be essential reading for academics, consultants, school leaders, psychologists and special needs practitioners who wish to keep abreast of the latest developments in the field. Initially the Journal will be published annually, but the intention is to move towards more frequent editions. All contributions are subject to peer review.

The papers in the first edition go some way towards scoping the field of nurture in education, taking both a wide and a more focused approach to the area. A wide approach is taken in the first paper, Bennett's comprehensive review of existing literature on nurture groups where she also identifies some of those areas ripe for further research. A broad approach is also taken in the final paper where MacKay looks to the future, outlining a prospective research agenda for the area. Two of the papers provide a more detailed examination of relatively under-researched aspects of the operation of nurture groups. Chiapella takes both a quantitative and qualitative approach to examine the impact of a number of nurture groups in secondary schools, particularly interesting as nurture groups have recently become more common in the secondary phase, and Pyle and Rae explore the impact of the nurture group on the relationship between child and parent, incorporating the voices of both parent and child in a qualitative study. In her paper Scott Loinaz takes a comparative approach and for the first time looks at the outcomes of two interventions based on attachment theory; The Place2Be and nurture groups. In different ways all of these papers are innovative, either clarifying the field or examining a relatively under-researched aspect of it. All add to our knowledge of nurture in education.

Research relating to nurture can come from a variety of fields

including educational psychology, neuroscience or school leadership and improvement and we invite contributions to future editions from professionals in all these areas.

The suggested theme for the next edition is the nurturing school. As MacKay writes in this issue (p. 35): 'there needs to be more explicit recognition that the concept of nurture in education is of a universal nature and should involve a stated commitment to addressing the needs of all children and young people and not just those who are vulnerable.' We invite the submission of abstracts of between 200 and 300 words relating to the nurturing school and the wider application of nurture principles and look forward to receiving them by the end of June 2015.

The publication of the first issue of the Journal represents an important development for the Nurture Group Network, and it would not have been possible without the willing co-operation of the editorial board and reviewers of the submitted papers whom we thank most sincerely. Particular thanks go to Edurne Scott Loinaz our gifted researcher and research administrator for her invaluable contribution to the development and production of this first issue.

**Dr Marianne Coleman**  
**April 2015**

# Results of the systematic review on nurture groups' effectiveness

How efficient are nurture groups?

Under what Conditions do nurture groups work best?

Dr Hanna Bennett

## ABSTRACT

While nurture groups (NGs) have existed since the early 1970s and the academic literature has increasingly had interest in evaluating NGs since the 1990s, until now there has been no comprehensive review on their effectiveness. In order to contribute to current literature with an understanding of NGs' effectiveness, a comprehensive review on the previous literature was conducted between September 2013 and March 2014 by the author. This paper will present the results of the review and discusses NGs' ability to promote change in social, emotional and behavioural development (SEBD) and the key factors that contribute to NGs' effectiveness. It argues that while NGs can have a positive impact on children at least in the short term, with the available literature it is challenging to draw clear conclusions about the conditions under which nurture groups work best and further research is still required to clarify some remaining research questions.

## INTRODUCTION

Nurture groups, operating in school settings and usually consisting of a small group of children (between six and 12), were originally developed in the late 1960s by Marjorie Boxall to address social, emotional and behavioural problems in primary schools. In recent years NGs have also become operational in secondary schools. NGs, led usually by two members of staff, provide a set of routines either on a part or full-time basis for children who have social, emotional or behavioural challenges and have difficulties remaining in the mainstream class.

While numerous reports and articles since the 1990s have described positive experiences deriving from NGs, the diversity of methods and focus used to study NGs has often left it unclear how effective they really are and under what conditions they work. A comprehensive review was conducted to understand what we know and what we need to know in order to close the research gaps in the literature and incorporate these lessons into recommendations to conduct future research and to improve practice.

Through drawing on the systematic review, this paper will introduce the main findings on the NGs' effectiveness and elaborates on the questions: what impact NGs have and under what conditions do NGs work best?

## Scope and methods of the systematic review

The systematic review on NGs was undertaken between September 2013 and March 2014 and included studies that had been published since the 1990s until March 2013. It aimed to understand NGs' effectiveness in primary and secondary school settings, in the variant 1, 2 or 3 types of NG.

Variant 1 refers to the classic model of NG which is a class of 10-12 children and is staffed by a teacher and teaching assistant. Children spend half a day in the mainstream class per week and join their class for registration, assembly, break and lunchtimes (Boxall & Lucas 2010). Variant 2 NG adheres to the 'important principles of the classic model, but differs in structure and/or organisational features' (Cooper et al 2001 p.88). For instance, part-time nurture groups represent variant 2 NGs. Variant 3 NG is informed by NG principles but does not follow the same organisational principles.

Variant 4 are aberrant NGs (Cooper & Tiknaz 2007) and are claimed to be variants of NGs but they 'contravene, undermine or distort the key defining principles of the classic nurture group' (Cooper et al 2001 p.162).

The methodology of the review followed the general principles of systematic reviewing: databases were searched and a predetermined set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted and results filtered accordingly.

A literature search was conducted using databases for journals and PhD theses and searching in the library catalogues and articles in academic journals. The search words included 'nurture groups', 'nurture group', 'nurture', 'nurturing' and 'educational intervention' and studies were selected for this review if they were directly referring to a NG variant 1, 2, 3 as classified in Cooper et al (2001) and Cooper & Whitebread (2007).

Through the ERIC database, 27 relevant entries, and through Ethos search, 19 relevant entries were identified. A further search in academic journals through EBSCO and Google was conducted with the above mentioned search terms, and journals on education were identified through British Library listings, which were checked for further studies. In total 173 articles, books, reports or theses were identified, which fully or in part examined NGs.

Having identified these entries it was possible to see that literature on NGs can broadly be divided into descriptive studies discussing the origin, background and theory behind NGs, and studies that aim to identify factors that contribute to efficient interventions, or to evaluative research that aims to understand NG pupils' behavioural and academic change and experiences in the school setting, and analyse their effectiveness both in regard to pupils and the whole school environment. The reference lists and the authors from these entries were checked to identify any potential further studies.

As the purpose of the review was to understand what is known about NGs' effectiveness, the studies focusing on assessing change

through quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods or evaluated experiences of pupils or perceptions of pupils, parents and staff were selected. Studies were excluded if they were focusing on describing the origins of NGs, the running of NGs or their implementation in different circumstances.

The review drew data from 62 relevant studies as they were comprehensive in regard to the description of their focus, sample and methods and useful for identifying trends and gaps in the research. These studies were reviewed systematically using the principles of EPPI review methodology (available at: <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/>) and entries were categorised in Excel.

Number of Studies	Methods	Focus	Variant
62 studies in total	10 quantitative studies	40 primary school studies	10 classic nurture groups
45 evaluative	25 qualitative studies	9 secondary school studies	13 part-time variants
17 describing effectiveness	11 mixed methods studies	3 including both	9 mixture of variants or 'NG variant 3' studies

*(Some of the studies did not specify the methods used, whether they focused on primary or secondary children and the type of nurture group.)*

### Previous research on effectiveness of the NGs

Through the review it was possible to identify that most of the studies aimed to understand NGs' effectiveness through analysing behavioural change in pupils. Some studies also aimed to establish NGs' impact on academic attainment and the whole school environment.

Studies were using quantitative, qualitative or mixed method approaches to understand NGs' effectiveness in classic or variant type NGs and in primary or secondary school settings.

Quantitative research focused on analysing changes pre and post measurement either through the Boxall profile or SDQ questionnaire and most of the studies had a non-randomised design using matched control groups. Some studies were also conducted without using a control group (such as Binnie & Allen 2008, Cooke et al 2008, O'Connor & Colwell 2002). Studies with matched groups had sample sizes varying from one school to 34 schools and from one single case study to studies including 546 pupils from NGs and control groups. Control group selection included participants from the same school or selected matched schools (Cooper et al 2001, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Reynolds et al 2007; Sanders, 2007) or children were matched individually (Cooper et al 2001, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Reynolds et al 2007). Matching was often done by age, gender, educational attainment, ethnicity, SEBD levels, socio-economic status, the number of pupils on the roll, and the deprivation levels of the area.

Most of the quantitative studies were short term and the entry and exit measurement were within one year. Currently there are only five long term studies that have also conducted a follow-up study a year or two after exit (see Chenay 2011, Cooper et al 2001, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Reynolds et al 2007, O'Connor & Colwell

2002). These studies mainly assessed the changes in SEBD through Boxall profiles and SDQs and only in seven studies have there been attempts to cover questions regarding academic attainment (Binnie and Allen 2008, Cooper et al 2001, Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Reynolds et al 2009, 2010, Sanders 2007, Scott & Lee 2009, Seth-Smith et al 2010).

Qualitative research has aimed to understand NGs' effectiveness from parental, staff or pupil perspectives and has drawn on perception data from interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, observations and case studies.

In addition, multiple mixed method approaches have combined these two approaches to understand the effectiveness of NGs.

### Findings of the systematic review

Overall it can be argued that there was a consensus among the studies that NGs can have a positive impact on children's SEBD especially in the short term (i.e. Cooper et al 2001, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Reynolds et al 2009, Scott & Lee 2009, Seth-Smith et al 2010). More specifically the review enabled the identification of some key areas where NGs can have an impact and some conditions under which NGs seem to be working most efficiently. Furthermore it identified areas that require further research. This section will describe the areas of impact and conditions under which NGs seem to work most efficiently.

### Areas of impact

The most often reported areas of impact in the literature were: children's improved SEBD levels, the whole school environment and home-school relationships. NGs were also found to have an impact at the wider societal level: being very cost-effective educational

interventions in comparison to other interventions.

Both quantitative and qualitative studies demonstrated that children's behaviour was improving after their participation in the NGs. The most reported benefits for the children were found to be reducing displays of acting out behaviour and improving self-management of anger and calmness (Binnie & Allen 2008, Bishop & Swain 2000, Colwell & O'Connor 2002, Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Reynolds et al 2009, Sanders 2007, Scott & Lee 2009, Seth-Smith et al 2010). NGs were also found to reduce school exclusions and special placement (Cooper 2011, Iszatt & Wasilewska 1997, Ofsted 2009, Ofsted 2011, Estyn 2007).

The whole school environment was also demonstrated to benefit from NGs (Binnie & Allen 2008, Bishop & Swain 2000, Cooper et al 2001, 2004, Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Cooper and Whitebread 2007, Doyle 2001, Doyle 2003, 2004; Lucas 1999, Reynolds et al 2009; Sanders 2007; Scott & Lee 2009). The impact on other pupils within the whole school environment was identified in quantitative studies through comparison of SEBD scores of pupils with SEB issues who did not attend NGs (even though there was a NG in the school), compared to students with SEB issues who attended schools without NGs (Cooper & Whitebread 2007). Chenay (2011), however, points out that the results of Cooper & Whitebread's (2007) study should be interpreted with caution as direct causality could not be determined by their data because it may be equally likely that schools choosing to host NGs were those that already prioritised a nurturing approach.

Qualitative studies further reported increased capacity for the school to support pupils with SEB issues (Binnie & Allen 2008) and an increase in the dialogue in regard to addressing SEB needs in schools (Doyle 2001). It was also found that in schools where there were NGs, classroom teachers reported more commitment in their work and learning opportunities (Binnie & Allen 2008) and in general better behaviour management and more curricular and pedagogical adaptations (Sanders 2007). In addition, by creating a calmer classroom NGs were found to provide respite to class teachers, peers and parents (Bishop & Swain 2000, Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Cooper et al 2001, 2004, Binnie & Allen 2008, Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Papamichael 2012). While evidence shows these positive contributions to the whole school environment, these results should be interpreted with caution as these schools might have already had an improved ethos and capacity to support children with SEB issues. (Cooper 2004, Goodman 1997, 1999, Walker 2010).

The benefits of NGs were also found to reach beyond the school environment and some evidence was also available about improvements in a child's behaviour in the home context (Binnie & Allen 2008, Sanders 2007, Seth-Smith et al 2010). Teachers were found to be able to exert a powerful influence on the development and behaviour of young children even if they have continuing negative influences at home (Colwell & O'Connor 2002).

It can also be suggested that NGs have had a wider societal impact because when NGs have been compared to other educational interventions, they have been found to be the most cost-effective (Boxall & Lucas 2002, Iszatt & Wasilewska 1997, O'Connor & Colwell 2002). For instance, Boxall & Lucas (2009:4) argued that in comparison to EBD out of borough residential placement, which costs around £40,000+ per child, or the full-time

LSA support, which costs £14,000+ per child, a nurture group may bring down the cost to £1,833 per child.

### **Under what conditions do nurture groups work?**

While many studies have demonstrated that NGs have had a positive impact on a variety of aspects both in schools and pupils, there was very little information in regard to the particular conditions that would explain what make NGs successful. Only Davies (2011) and Parsons (2012) have so far in their PhDs focused on identifying factors at community, family, whole school and mainstream classroom levels to understand what factors contribute to successful outcomes.

Through the review of literature, however, it was possible to identify some issues that were repeatedly discussed as having the potential to contribute to successful outcomes. These factors will be categorised and discussed in regard to issues related to pupils themselves, group related factors, organisational issues and school related factors.

First, the review identified some particular characteristics of pupils which could be relevant for NGs' effectiveness, such as their English skills and national curriculum attainment levels, the challenges the children have, their age and gender.

So far there is some evidence that variations in children's fluency in English and national curriculum attainment levels have demonstrated differences in children's progress in NGs (Rautenbach 2010, Pintelei 2009, Cooper & Tiknaz 2005). Further research is needed, however, to determine how other factors such as children's characteristics, age and gender matter in terms of NGs' impact, as no consensus on these factors has been reached.

For instance, children whose emotional needs were linked to self-esteem and anger management (Renwick & Spalding 2002) as well as those who were quiet and withdrawn have both seemed to benefit from NGs (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Sanders 2007). Although when children have been assessed through the Boxall profile including both the developmental and diagnostic strand, the previous research has mostly demonstrated that the developmental strand has shown the most consistent and easy improvement, whereas diagnostic strands did not show as much progress (Sanders 2007 and O'Connor & Colwell 2002, Rautenbach 2010, Cooke et al 2008, Broadhead et al 2011, Cooke et al 2008, Farrell et al 2009). Only in one research (Papamichaels 2012) did the diagnostic strand improve slightly more than the development strand. This suggests that those with challenges featuring in the developmental strand are more likely to benefit more.

Furthermore, while in general there is evidence of younger children benefitting more from NGs, some research demonstrates that older children benefit from them and different age groups may develop different aspects of their behaviour or academic levels (Cooper and Tiknaz 2005, Gerrard 2006, Sanders 2007). For instance, Sanders (2007) found that younger children showed more improvement than older children. This view was supported with research by Scott & Lee (2009) which found that the earlier children accessed the intervention, the more readily they were influenced by it. In addition they argued that NGs did not produce significant improvements for KS2 children even though it had some improvement, and it noted that those school samples containing

older children had less significant results. However, a study focusing on a variant 3 NG found, during a six-week intervention that younger children in some cases had shown less improvement than older (Renwick & Spalding 2002).

Moreover, evidence also suggests that younger and older children have gained improvements in different areas of behaviour and skills and it was found that not all children make the same progress (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Gerrard 2006, Sanders 2007). While children in reception classes were found to have had the greatest improvement in the total development scores (Reynolds et al 2009), Scott & Lee (2009) demonstrated that younger children showed more improvement in behavioural, emotional and social skills and the older children showed more improvement in academic skills (Hosie 2013). These results demonstrate a need for further clarification on the most optimal age of NG provision and increased understanding on what aspects of behaviour can benefit most from NGs.

Gender has not specifically attracted attention in the studies on variant 1 or 2 NGs (apart from Reynolds et al 2009 and Bani 2011) and there is no information yet on whether boys or girls would benefit more from NGs. Only one piece of research studying the impact in a variant model 3 (six-week intervention) suggested that boys had benefited more than girls (Renwick & Spalding 2002).

Second, class composition (Cooper & Whitebread 2002), the right balance between different ages and types of SEB challenges (Howes et al 2002, Rautenbach 2010), the group size (Davies 2011) and certain staff characteristics (Cooper and Tiknaz 2005) have been discussed in the literature as potential factors impacting the effectiveness of NGs. For instance, in regard to class composition it was found to be important to have two full-time members of staff in a NG (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Davies 2011). Cooper & Tiknaz also found in a national study that whether or not the NG teacher had been replaced during the running of the groups could actually have an impact on NG students' social, emotional and behavioural functioning (2005). Moreover, it was found to be important that the group had a mixture of different ages and types of SEB challenges. Having a functioning balance in the group can help the teachers to give equal amounts of attention to each child.

However, more detailed information is not yet available on the importance of class size and teacher characteristics, even if they were suggested to be important for NGs functioning in the previous literature. For instance, even though there is a minimum and maximum limit in the NG for pupils there is very little discussion about the impact of a group's size in the NG context.

While smaller group size can give the staff more opportunity and flexibility (Davies 2011), Boxall & Bennathan suggested (2000) that lower limit for numbers should be 10 pupils in order to avoid creating an undue attachment to the NG and the NG staff (Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Cooper 2004). Therefore it is suggested that there is a necessity for further research on the effect of class size as there are no systematic comparisons between children in NGs and matched children attending classes restricted to the same size but without using the NG principles (Reynolds et al 2009). In addition, there is no study focusing on teacher characteristics and behaviour while they are believed to have an impact on NG functioning (Davies 2011).

Third, the most discussed organisational factors in the previous literature relate to the time the group has been in existence, total length of time spent in the group and whether the pupil has attended a part or a full-time group.

There is a consensus about the correlation between NG efficiency and the length of the time the group has existed and the best results seem to have been achieved when the NG has been in existence at least for two years (Garner 2010, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Rautenbach 2010). It has also been demonstrated that pupils gain different skills depending on how long they spend in the group. There is strong evidence that most SEBD improvements take place in the first two terms of the school year (Cooper et al 2004, Broadhead et al 2011, Scott & Lee 2009, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Sanders 2007). However, this does not exclude that some children benefit from being part of the NG for a longer time (Garner 2010). Significant improvements on the 'organisation of experience' continue between terms two and three (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005) whereas cognitive progression and engagement in educational and learning tasks continue to improve within the third and fourth terms (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005). This then advocates supporting emotional needs first, from which academic progression will follow (Binnie & Allen 2008).

Furthermore, the question of whether the part-time variant group can be as influential as the classic full-time nurture group has attracted attention in the research (Cooper & Whitebread 2007, Cooper & Tiknaz 2005, Garner 2010, Scott & Lee 2009). While some researchers argue that longer periods predict higher levels of mean improvement (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005) and that full-time provisions may have encouraged greater progress due to their more intensive nature (Hosie 2013), most literature has agreed that the part-time model is as beneficial. Overall, various studies show that there has been no significant difference in scores between the children who have participated in the NG on a full or part-time basis (Cooper et al 2001, Binnie & Allen 2008, Sanders 2007, Scott & Lee 2009, Cheney 2011).

Fourth, school-related factors as a whole were considered to be important for efficient functioning of the NGs. It was found that NGs were more likely to be effective when they operate as a part of the school rather than an add-on to the school (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005) and schools were able to make the most of NGs when the whole-school community is committed to pupils' needs (Cooper & Tiknaz 2005). Furthermore, the working relationships of the staff and the ability to work collaboratively were other important factors in NGs' success. It was found to be important that the head teacher shared the vision with the NG staff and that the NG staff felt part of the whole school (Davies 2011). Good communication across members of staff was especially found to be crucial for NGs' success. If the communication did not work between the mainstream and NG teachers, school staff felt that the teachers were less able to assess pupils' academic attainment and that they knew the NG children less well (Sanders 2007). Poor communication also left NG teachers isolated (Sanders 2007, Dowsell 2011 p.89) and resulted in a lack of clarity about who was responsible for which aspect of the pupils' education (Ofsted 2011, Sanders 2007).



## What next?

While the systematic review was able to gather information about NGs' effectiveness in promoting SEBD and about the conditions that are important for its efficiency, it also clarified gaps in the literature that need future attention. This section will briefly discuss the gaps and create recommendations for future action.

First, even if there was a consensus in the literature that NGs can benefit SEBD in children especially in primary schools, there was less evidence of NGs' impact on children in secondary schools. There are only nine studies focusing on secondary school children: Colley (2009, 2011), Cooke et al (2008), Garner (2010), Garner & Miles (2011), Kourmoulaki (2012), Parsons (2012), Pintelei (2009), Vince (2007). So far studies focusing on secondary school children have been based on perceptions of children's improvement rather than on quantitative data. Future research would benefit from quantitative studies in the secondary school environment. Learning about what mechanisms would work best in secondary school settings could enhance NGs' presence in secondary schools and uncover the most efficient tools for supporting pupils' SEBD.

Second, whereas NGs have indicated potential for impacting academic attainment as demonstrated by Reynolds et al (2009), Scott & Lee (2009) and Seth-Smith et al (2010) through quantitative measures and by Binnie & Allen (2008), Cooper et al (2001), Cooper & Tiknaz (2005) and Sanders (2007) through teacher and parent perceptions, more research would be beneficial to draw conclusions on NGs' potential to support academic attainment through usage of different quantitative academic measures and studies covering a longer time span.

Third, while a wealth of literature described positive changes that NGs can bring about, little attention was paid to understanding what the key ingredients for NGs' effectiveness are. Some characteristics at pupil, NG, school and organisational level have already been identified to support efficient NGs, but further research is required to understand optimal conditions for NGs' success and to adjust NG practice accordingly. For instance, qualitative case studies could be considered to identify characteristics under which NGs perform best both in primary and secondary schools.

Fourth, in addition to the identified gaps in the research, the previous NG research has also suffered from some methodological weaknesses which should be addressed in the future research. For instance, there has been a lack of longitudinal studies, which makes it difficult to assess NGs' long-term impact. Most research reported improvements in the first two terms and did not investigate further and there were only a couple of longitudinal studies which covered a time period of over two years, but in these studies sample size had significantly reduced when it was time for a new measurement (two years after intervention).

Moreover, sample size and selection of samples challenged the validity of results. For instance, some quantitative studies drew conclusions with as few as four NGs in the study (see Tiknaz & Cooper 2005). Some qualitative studies also included as few as four parental and staff interviews, or were based on three pupils' and four staff perceptions (see Kirkbridge 2012 or Parsons 2012). Those samples, which were non-randomised and were chosen as they had volunteered for the research, caused a concern for the validity of results when these schools may already have a more positive or

negative view of NGs. In addition, those studies, which did not use any control groups (i.e. O'Connor & Colwell 2002 and Binnie & Allen 2008), found it difficult to determine whether the change took place due to the NG or some other factor. Therefore, future research would benefit from larger samples and also from a more selective sampling strategy (Garner 2010).

Finally, both quantitative and qualitative studies focusing on assessment of impact of NGs have suffered from subjectivity. Usually Boxall profiles have been evaluated by the teacher who knows the child best. However, as the profile is completed by only one person, it is open to subjective perception (Colwell & Connor 2002). Qualitative data can also suffer from subjectivity and lack of validity. The data received from interviews or questionnaires rely on subjective interpretations and have often only taken account of some of the stakeholders' views to draw conclusions on the findings. Furthermore, various pieces of research have identified the difficulty in interviewing pupils and have commented that children have only replied with short answers, and that some have been too shy to elaborate on their answers (Parsons 2012, Walker 2010), which has also raised questions of validity of some data. Thus, qualitative research could also benefit from triangulation of data and ensuring the inclusion of multiple stakeholders' perspectives.

## CONCLUSION

**The main findings of the previously conducted systematic review on NGs' efficiency were described in this paper. The first section of the paper introduced the methods and scope of the review. In the second section the previous literature on NGs was discussed. The third section focused on the main findings and the research gaps, before creating some recommendations for further research in the fourth section. The main finding of the review was that there is a consensus on the NGs' ability to promote change in regard to children's SEBD especially in the short term while longer-term evidence is still scarce. Further findings of the review included identification of the main areas of impact and the key conditions at the pupil, group, school and organisational levels that can promote NGs' efficiency. While this review contributed to the understanding of the current literature on NGs and on NGs' efficiency, it also clarified the areas that still require further research. NGs' impact on academic attainment and in secondary schools would especially benefit from more quantitative research even if there is already some promising evidence in these areas. Further research would also benefit from a case study approach to understand more conditions that can support NGs' efficiency and help to achieve its goals in practice.**

## REFERENCES

- Bailey, Simon (2007) So, what's all the fuss about nurture groups? Paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*, Institute of Education, University of London, 5-8 September 2007.
- Bani, Maria (2011) The Use and Frequency of Verbal and Non-Verbal Praise in Nurture Groups. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 16(1) pp47-67.
- Binnie, L. M. & Allen, K (2008) Whole school support for vulnerable children: The evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 13(3) pp201-16.
- Bishop, A & Swain, J (2000) The Bread, the Jam and some Coffee in the Morning: Perceptions of a Nurture Group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 5(3).
- Boxall, M & Lucas, S (2010) *Nurture Groups in Schools*. Second Edition. Sage Publications.
- Broadhead, M, Chilton, R & Stephens V (2011). Utilising the Boxall Profile within the Scallywags service for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. *British Journal of Special Education*. 38(1) pp19-27.
- Howes, A, Emmanuel, J & Farrell, P (2002) Can nurture groups facilitate inclusive practices?. In: *Making special education inclusive*, ed. Ainscow, M, Farrell, P, David Fulton, 2002.
- Chenay, G (2011) *Psychology in Schools: Understanding and Intervening within Vulnerable Populations* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Hull, United Kingdom.
- Colley, D (2011) *Development of Nurture Groups in Secondary Schools* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Leicester. United Kingdom.
- Colwell, J & O'Connor, T (2003) Understanding nurturing practices: a comparison of the use of strategies likely to enhance self-esteem in nurture. *British Journal of Special Education*, 30(3).
- Cooke, C, Yeomans, J, Parkes, J (2008) The Oasis: Nurture Group Provision for Key Stage 3 Pupils, *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 13(4) pp291-303.
- Cooper, P & Tiknaz, Y (2005) Progress and challenge in Nurture Groups: evidence from three case studies. *British Journal of Special Education*, 32(4) pp211-222.
- Cooper, P & Whitebread, D (2002) The Effectiveness of Nurture groups, Leicester: university of Leicester, School of Education.
- Cooper, P & Whitebread, D (2007) The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups: Evidence from a National Research Study. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 12(3) pp171-190.
- Cooper, P, Arnold, R & Boyd, E (2001) The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(4) pp160-166.
- Cooper, P & Lovey, J (1999) Early intervention in emotional and behavioural difficulties: the role of Nurture Groups. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 14(2) pp.122-131.
- Cooper, P (2004) Learning from nurture groups. *Education* 32(3) pp3-13
- Davies, O M (2011) Evidence-based practice in nurture groups: using a realistic evaluation framework to explore factors affecting practice and suggest future training directions (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.
- Dowsell, R (2011) Children's experiences of a nurture group (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Bristol, United Kingdom.
- Doyle, R (2005) I hate you. Please help me: a case study from a classic Boxall nurture group. *Pastoral Care. Pastoral Care in Education* 23(1) pp 3-11.
- Doyle, R (2001) 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).
- Garner, J (2010) Nurture groups in secondary schools: perceptions of children, parents and staff (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of East London, United Kingdom.
- 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*.
- Gerrard, B (2005) City of Glasgow Nurture Group Pilot Scheme Evaluation. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 10(4) pp 245-253.
- Goodman R (1999) The extended version of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire as a guide to psychiatric caseness and consequent burden. *Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology*, 40(5) pp. 791-800.
- Hosie, C (2013). An Evaluation of the Impact of Nurture Provision upon Young Children, Including their Language and their Literacy Skills (Unpublished PhD thesis). East London University, United Kingdom.
- Farrell, P T, Emanuel, J, Howes, A J 'Can nurture groups facilitate inclusive practices?' In *Making special education inclusive*, ed. Ainscow, M, Farrell, P, David Fulton, 2002.
- Iszatt, J & 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) pp. 121-139.
- Kirkbridge, R (2012) "they were a little family" – An exploratory study of parental involvement in nurture groups – from a practitioner and parent perspective (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.
- Kourmoulaki, A (2013) Nurture groups in a Scottish Secondary School: purpose, features, value and areas for development. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 18(1) pp.60-76.
- Lucas, Sylvia (1999) The Nurturing School: The Impact of Nurture Group Principles and Practice on the whole school. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 4(3) pp. 14-19.
- March, S, & Healy, N (2007) What is the parental perception on progress made by nurture group children. *Educational Psychology in Scotland*, 9(1) pp. 2-7.
- O'Connor, T & 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) pp. 96-100.
- Ofsted (2011) Supporting children with challenging behaviour through a nurture group approach. Survey Report. Available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/supporting-children-challenging-behaviour-through-nurture-group-approach>.
- Papamichael, A (2012) The impact of Nurture Group principles and practice on the whole primary school (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Exeter, United Kingdom.
- Parsons, N (2012) Nurture Support for Socially and Emotionally Vulnerable Pupils in the Transition to Secondary School: a Case Study Exploration (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Manchester, United Kingdom.
- Pintilei, A (2009) An in-depth examination of extant literature pertinent to nurture groups and an exploratory study, using grounded theory methods, of young people's views and experiences of a secondary school nurture group (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Birmingham, United Kingdom.
- Purcell, S (2012) Q-Methodological Study: Educational Psychologists' Perceptions of their role in supporting and developing nurture principles and practices in educational settings-Implications for practice (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.
- Rautenbach, R A (2010) From nurture group to nurturing community: Exploring processes and evaluating outcomes when nurturing principles are consistent between nurture group, home and school (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Exeter, United Kingdom.
- Renwick, F & Spalding, B (2002) A Quiet Place project: an evaluation of early therapeutic intervention within mainstream schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, 29(3) pp. 144-149.
- Reynolds, S, Kearney, M and MacKay, T (2007) Nurture groups: the answer to everything? Paper presented at: the British Psychological Society Division of Educational and Child Psychology Annual Conference, Glasgow, Scotland.
- Reynolds, S, Kearney, M and MacKay, T (2009) Nurture Groups: a large – scale, controlled study of effect on development and academic attainment. *British Journal of Special Education*, 36(4) pp. 204 – 212.
- Sanders, T (2007) Helping Children Thrive at School: The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23(1) pp. 45-61.
- Scott, K & Lee, A (2009) Beyond the 'classic' nurture group model: an evaluation of part-time and cross-age nurture groups in a Scottish local authority. *Support for Learning*, 24(1) pp. 5-10.
- Seth-Smith, F, Netali L, Richard P, Fonagy, P & Jaffey, D (2010) Do nurture groups improve the social, emotional and behavioural functioning of at risk children? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(1).
- Taylor, V et al (2009). Introducing Family SEAL Through Nurture Groups, Project Evaluation Report. Staffordshire. Available at: [http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/welfareservice/SpecialEducationalNeeds/spps/information/FamilySealEvaluationReport\(pdf348kb\).pdf](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/welfareservice/SpecialEducationalNeeds/spps/information/FamilySealEvaluationReport(pdf348kb).pdf).
- Taylor, V M, Gulliford, A (2011) Parental Perspectives on Nurture Groups: The Potential for Engagement. *British Journal of Special Education*, 38(2) pp. 73-82.
- Goodman, R (1997) The strengths and difficulties questionnaire: a research note *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, 38(5) pp. 581-586.
- Vince, A (2007) Promoting success at school: a case study of a nurture group intervention (Unpublished MA thesis). University of Canterbury, United Kingdom.
- Walker, L C (2010) The impact of nurture group interventions: parental involvement and perceptions (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Sheffield, United Kingdom.

# Nurture groups and parent-child relationships

## Exploring parents' and children's perceptions of nurture groups and the ways in which they impact upon parent-child relationships

Dr Ali Pyle and Dr Tina Rae\*

\*University of East London, UK

### ABSTRACT

There is currently very little research investigating the impact of nurture groups on children in their home context, particularly with regard to changes in the parent-child relationship. Where a positive impact upon this relationship has been previously found (e.g. Binnie & Allen, 2008, Cooper & Whitebread, 2007), the underlying processes have received little attention. The aim of this research was to explore both parents' and pupils' perceptions of the impact of nurture groups on the parent-child relationship.

This purely qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to gain the views of parents (n=12), and three focus groups to harness the perceptions of the pupils in primary school new-variant nurture groups (n= 11). The data was analysed using an adaptation of Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

The key findings included the parents' perception that their children had lower anxiety and increased confidence as a result of the nurture group intervention. They also perceived there to be a change in their interactions at home, with the children being more communicative, more affectionate, and having fewer emotional outbursts. The children's views were largely consistent with those of their parents.

The interviews also unveiled that some parents knew very little about the nurture groups, their aims, and the expected outcomes. The implications of this for children, nurture group practitioners and educational psychologists are discussed.

### INTRODUCTION

Nurture groups are small classes that aim to provide a safe, secure environment for children to develop their social, emotional and behavioural skills (Boxall 2002). The classic nurture groups described by Boxall (2002) would involve 10-12 pupils usually in primary school settings, as well as two members of staff; a teacher and a teaching assistant. The children would spend the majority of their time in this setting within the school, and receive highly structured and supported learning experiences. Children generally spend around two terms in this provision, as an early intervention to remove the barriers that social, emotional or behavioural difficulties may place upon their academic progress. New-variant nurture groups follow the same principles as the classic model, but differ in terms of the structure or organisation. For example, they may run on a part-time basis in which the children spend anywhere from half a day, to four days per week in the nurture group.

## The impact of early parent-child relationships

According to Boxall (2000) some children are unable to organise themselves and behave in a way that is appropriate to meet expectations when they first start school. She explained that the reason for this often lies in their early experiences, such as having a mother who was unable to respond sensitively to their needs, or the interaction between the parent and child being impaired or disrupted in some way (e.g. childcare arrangements). She added that some parents may not have the experience or capacity to deal with their child's challenging behaviour; becoming stressed and unpredictable. According to Bowlby's (1969) Attachment Theory, this can result in children feeling confused, lacking a sense of stability, having minimal trust in adults, and low self-confidence. When these children begin school, this lack of trust in adults can mean they have difficulty accepting the teacher, and struggle to

adapt to the routines of the classroom. These social and emotional skills are essential in being able to learn within the classroom, and therefore for some children who have not had the opportunity to develop these skills in their early lives for whatever reason, nurture groups seek to provide an environment within which these early experiences can be recreated, and skills nurtured.

### Nurture groups and parent-child relationships

Research has found that not only do nurture groups have a positive impact upon children's social, emotional and academic skills, but they can also have a positive effect on parent-child relationships. For example, March & Healy (2007) found that the words that parents chose to describe their children were significantly more positive following the intervention, with many specifically commenting on

how the communication and relationship between them and their child had improved. Cooper, Arnold & Boyd (2001) also reported 'clear evidence' (p.164) of an improvement in relations, with parents feeling less anxiety and more optimism with regard to their child's development. In addition, Cooper & Whitebread (2007) found that some parents reported dramatic improvements in their relationships with their children, with many attributing this change to the improvement of their child's behaviour at school. This study accessed a large number of parents from a variety of nurture groups, suggesting that these findings may be generalised more widely.

Despite being a relatively frequently reported benefit of the nurture group intervention, only one piece of research has attempted to explore the process underlying the change in the parent-child relationship. Taylor & Gulliford (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews with parents, and nurture group staff in two neighbouring counties in the Midlands. They found that the most consistently occurring observation from parents following the Nurture Group was an improvement in communication and interaction at home. The parents commented that they felt less stressed, and felt happier seeing their child happy. Taylor & Gulliford used a transactional model to explain the change in the relationship between the child and their parent. They suggested that some parents may feel rejected when their child seems uncommunicative, and therefore when the child comes home and begins to talk about the nurture group with their parent, the parent feels less rejected and reacts more positively towards the child. In turn, the parent will give more praise to the child, altering their parenting style, resulting in the child feeling more responsive and secure. This is an interesting explanation for the change, however Taylor and Gulliford (2011) only explored the parent-child relationship from the parents' perspective, and as such may not give a valid representation.

### **The voice of the child**

It is particularly interesting how few research studies have investigated the children's perceptions of nurture groups, given the general increase in research seeking the child's perspective over recent years (Reid et al 2010). This research will seek to understand the process underlying any changes in the parent-child relationship following the nurture group intervention. However, as well as understanding the perspective of parents, the child's voice will also be sought, as this is an area that is as yet unexplored.

## **Method**

**Data for this qualitative study were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups to explore the following research questions:**

1. How do nurture groups impact on the parent-child relationships?
2. How do parents explain any changes in their relationship with their child?
3. How do children explain any changes in their relationship with their parents?

## **Interviews**

The participants recruited for the semi-structured interviews were 12 parents (accessed through 10 interviews) of children (sex- m = 7, f = 3) aged between four and seven (mean = 5.9 years) in nurture groups in primary schools in a large county in the South-East of England.

**The selection criteria for the parents were as follows;**

- All had children who were currently in the nurture group or left the nurture group within the last term.
- Children had to be in a classic or new-variant nurture group.
- Children must be aged between four and 11 years old.
- Children must be in a nurture group within a mainstream primary school.
- Children must not have been diagnosed with a developmental or medical condition that may affect their social and emotional development (e.g. autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder).
- The children had to have been in the nurture group for at least two terms to measure the impact.
- Children must not have been taking part in any other intervention for social and emotional skills whilst in the nurture group.
- Parents must not have been taking part in a parenting programme during the time in which their child was in the nurture group.

The interviews took place in quiet, private rooms, either within school or at home if that was felt to be more convenient for the families involved. The interviews consisted of a set of pre-determined open questions and these varied according to the findings of previous interviews. The interview schedule was developed through consideration of several factors; the target audience, the research questions, and pre-existing research.

### **Focus groups**

Focus groups were also conducted with children in three of the nurture groups. The focus groups each involved four children and were held in three of the schools from which the parents were selected.

One of the focus groups involved children who were all in Year 2, another involved children in Year 4, and a third involved children from Year 1 (average age 7.4 years). Overall, the views of 12 children were collected (11 of which were analysed), with their ages ranging between six and nine years (six boys, five girls). The children were all receiving the intervention at the time of the focus group, having been in the nurture group for at least two terms (average duration of intervention was 3.4 terms); or had finished the intervention within the last term (with the exception of one child whose data was not included in the analysis). In two of the focus groups, one of the children was the son/daughter of the parents involved in the semi-structured interviews, allowing for a direct triangulation of views. To measure the impact of the nurture group the children involved were not receiving other forms of therapeutic intervention. The children were given an explanation of the purpose of the group

at the outset and asked for informed consent. The children were asked to answer and discuss open questions that were explained in a straightforward manner, and each focus group took place within the nurture room, in the school setting.

## Data analysis

The interviews and focus groups were recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed. A grounded theory approach was used during the data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is a qualitative approach originally developed by Glaser & Strauss (1968), and is concerned with the development of new theory that is grounded in the data, rather than the verification of existing theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998). The Strauss & Corbin (1998) model provided a structured framework for the collection, and coding of the data, from which theory was developed.

## Findings

### Parent perceptions

#### How do nurture groups impact on the parent-child relationships?

**Parenting style.** Some parents were able to identify clearly how their relationships with their children had changed while the children were in the nurture group. Several commented that they now shout at their children less.

*“I don't shout at him as much, that's about it. Not moaning at him as often.”*

(Interview 8)

Some felt that this was because the children had developed more understanding of their parents' demands; others reported that as the children's behaviour at school improved, it meant they could be more positive with them in the home context, while one other said that it was something that she herself had identified as something she needed to control.

*“I do shout at him less, yes, definitely, because I have to learn to control that as well.”*

(Interview 3)

**Attachment style.** Another parent commented that his relationship with his child had changed because the child had become more affectionate.

*“I came home from work the other day and he came out of the room to give me a hug and told me that he loved me, which doesn't happen a lot, but he does that. I suppose that didn't happen last year.”*

(Interview 10)

The majority of parents highlighted a reduction in anxiety, particularly towards unfamiliar adults. There was also a reduction in separation anxiety, with some of the children being able to stay the night away from their parents for the first time.

*“I can just go and I don't have to worry about him screaming and fighting...so that has got better”*

(Interview 7)

**Reduction in outbursts.** The parents observed that the children were more able to share their attention following the intervention. The children were also described as being more understanding, and as having fewer emotional outbursts, arguably making parent-child interactions easier.

*“Yeah actually, things don't go flying any more. He used to, when he was in a strop the chair would go flying or something...but he doesn't do that any more so thinking about it, it must have done something good!”*

(Interview 8)

**Increased communication.** Many of the children had also become more communicative, speaking more freely about school and the nurture group to their parents.

*“He's more confident with children and he's socialising with children of his own age, and he's coming home and talking about friends and things.”*

(Interview 6)

#### How do parents explain any changes in the relationship with their child?

**Increased attention in the nurture group.** It was clear from the data that parents saw two main attributes of nurture groups as being responsible for the changes that they saw in their children.

These were the small group size, and the relationships that the children had with the nurture group staff.

*“...he does work better in small groups because he does listen more rather, because he is easily distracted in a class of 28, he's just lost.”*

(Interview 7)

*“...it's quite good as well because I confer with [nurture leader] and X will tell her stuff that she won't mention to me so...”*

(Interview 4)

The parents felt that these factors allowed the children to be given more attention, which often benefited them academically. It was also expressed that the exclusivity of the nurture groups made the children feel special, boosting their confidence and giving them a sense of belonging.

*“I think now she's confident because she knows there is a few more children that are like her, she's not the only one.”*

(Interview 2)

*“I think he just loves the whole thing, I think he feels special.”*

(Interview 10)

However, the increased attention was also seen as a drawback, as it frequently meant that the children were more demanding of their parents and expected more time and attention from them; something that they were often unable to provide.

*“I feel like because she is getting the one-to-one at school, the teachers giving her all ears, she expects that at home and I can't do that at home all the time. And then she feels a bit pushed back. Which I feel is the negative side of this.”*

(Interview 2)

There seemed to be a sense of guilt and resentment that accompanied this, as many of the parents went on to describe the other demands placed upon their time such as work, or younger siblings requiring care. This is a finding that has not been raised by previous research and therefore warrants further exploration.

**Biological maturation.** There was a reluctance at times to attribute changes in the children to the nurture group, with parents often finding it difficult to discriminate between changes that occurred due to the child's age and stage of development, and changes that were as a result of the nurture group.

*“...where she's growing up, she's different as well, so I don't know exactly what has made her different.”*

(Interview 1)

At times this seemed to be due to a lack of understanding about the function, aims and expected outcomes of the nurture groups; with parents focusing on problem behaviour, rather than social and emotional development.

Despite this, all of the parents noticed differences in their children. The majority of the parents cited their children as being more confident and more independent, as also found by March & Healy (2007).

*“I think she has got more independent as well since she's been here...I'm sure the group has helped.”*

(Interview 4)

## Pupil perceptions

### How do nurture groups impact on the parent-child relationships?

**Better behaviour.** Most of the children admitted that they were better behaved at home following the intervention, meaning that they got into trouble less with their parents. They felt that this was mainly due to being taught to listen in the nurture group, and also because they were now more helpful at home.

*“Because the nurture group says that you should listen more, because I'm not being told off now because I listen to my mum.”*

(Focus Group 2)

*“I help and my little brother tries to do the hoover and when my mum comes in and says 'let me do it' then I do it and I tidy up.”*

(Focus Group 1)

**Increased communication.** The children also felt that they were more communicative, and that they were more likely to talk to their parents about school. One child elaborated on this, explaining that being in the nurture group gave her something to talk about that her parents might show an interest in.

*“I really like the feeling when I go home because when I say something like new every time, like, or like when I said I have toast and stuff, I feel like because like, I feel like my parents haven't done that when they were little like these kind of stuff, so they could be interested in it.”*

(Focus Group 2)

This supports the transactional model described by Taylor & Gulliford (2011), but adds a twist, suggesting that as the pupils become more communicative, the parents reciprocate because it is of interest to them, rather than being because they feel less rejected, as originally suggested by Taylor & Gulliford (2011). Some of the other children commented that they were more communicative because they now had positive feedback to share with their parents, suggesting an improvement in self-image following the intervention.

*“I talk to my parents and tell them that I've been good at school.”*

(Focus Group 1)

### How do children explain any changes in the relationship with their parents?

The children felt that there were three key factors which had contributed to the effectiveness of the nurture group. One was that it was fun that made them enjoy school more and increased their overall feelings of happiness when at school; the second was the relationship they had with each other and the staff (as found by Cooper, Arnold & Boyd, 2001); and the final one was the fact that it was a small group.

**Small group size.** This seemed important to them as it allowed them to gain the confidence to speak and the ability to listen to others. They particularly liked that they were given attention in the small group and were listened to.

*“I like coming to the nurture group because it's a smaller group and the people are my friends and I like learning new skills, but sometimes in class I get shy when I speak.”*

(Focus Group 2)

*“...it really helps me being in a small group because I can easier answer questions, but when I'm in a whole class, I mean a big class, it's hard for me to get the teacher's attention because there's 30 of us.”*

(Focus Group 2)

This allowed them to learn valuable speaking and listening skills which they felt impacted on their relationships with their parents, as they were able to listen more carefully to avoid getting into trouble, and were more confident in speaking about school, particularly as they had enjoyed it so much. The small group size is not a factor that has been specifically raised in past research, however factors such as it being a 'safe', 'calm' environment have (Cooper, Arnold & Boyd 2001). This highlights the possibility that these are the attributes of the small group that allow the children to develop their speaking and listening skills, and to feel more confident.

**Maturity.** The children seemed to show signs that they had changed in the way that they perceived themselves as a result of accessing the nurture group; viewing themselves as more outgoing, brave and mature. The children described themselves before as being nervous and easily upset, but felt that they had now become more grown up.

*“I was quite nervous and well not really used to things like this, like having to learn in a small group, and also, well I got told I was a bit mature now, but I felt like I can be grown up now, and can be ready for things.”*

(Focus Group 2)

## Discussion

### Similarities between the parent and child perspectives

Overall there are some striking similarities between the pupil perceptions and the parent perceptions. Both the parents and children highlighted the small group size and nurture group staff as being of key importance in the progress that was made. They both mentioned the impact of the relationships built with the staff, and also that the increased attention was a benefit. Parents were aware of this aspect of the nurture group intervention and felt it was very beneficial to their children in terms of their social, emotional and academic development. Both parents and the children identified that the children were more communicative and willing to talk about school following the intervention. This finding was previously explained by Taylor & Gulliford (2011) using a transactional model (Christenson 2004). This is the idea that a change in the behaviour of the child can act as a catalyst for further positive interactions between the child and adult. Taylor and Gulliford (2011) used the model to explain how an increase in communication can lead to a parent feeling less rejected, meaning that they then react more positively towards the child.

In the current research, this model would provide a useful way to explain the changes in the interactions between the parent and child. For instance, the children became more communicative, perhaps as one child suggested, because they had something to discuss that they felt would interest the adult. The parents then felt more positive towards the child as they were able to engage in mutually interesting conversation. This may have led to the children feeling less rejected, therefore behaving better through being given attention in a more constructive way; meaning that the adult shouted less and responded to the child more positively. Finally, this may have led to increased affection from the child due to the improvement in the relationship, and a desire for more time together.

### Differences between the parent and child perspectives

It is interesting that the 'fun' aspect that was so important to the children did not emerge from the parent data. One parent actually expressed concern at the fact that they just 'played' in the nurture group. This aspect is clearly of less value to the parent group, and perhaps indicates a lack of understanding of the role of a nurture group in providing early learning opportunities through meeting the child at their developmental level.

The parents identified that the children were more understanding following the intervention. While the children did not use this term, they explained that they were now more helpful at home and listened better, which may be interpreted by their parents as them being more understanding. The pupils also considered themselves to be more mature, which is consistent with the aim of nurture to provide missed opportunities to support emotional, social and academic wellbeing. This was mentioned by several of the focus groups, but not once by the parents. With some of the parents preferring to attribute progress to biological development, rather than the nurture group, perhaps this maturity underpins all of the progress made, and may be more to do with experience of the

nurture group rather than biological development, as believed by the parents.

The current findings have clear links to attachment theory, the rationale upon which nurture groups are based (Bennathan & Boxall 2000). Both parents and the pupils acknowledged the importance of the close relationship built with nurture group staff. According to attachment theory, this nurturing, predictable relationship provides a safe base to explore surroundings, supporting children's social and cognitive development. This may explain why the children felt more 'mature', as they had been provided with the missed nurturing opportunities that they needed in order to develop those skills. The parents commented that the children had lower anxiety, particularly in relation to unfamiliar adults, and also lower separation anxiety.

Both of these concepts (stranger anxiety and separation anxiety) are characteristic of an insecurely attached child (Ainsworth 1978), suggesting that the nurture group may have helped the children to become more securely attached to their primary caregiver or caregivers. This may be the process by which the children became more independent and more affectionate towards their parents.

### Limitations

There were some methodological issues that may have impacted on the validity of the findings. First, it was decided that in order to allow the children to feel safe and comfortable, the nurture group practitioners would be invited to remain in the room during the focus group with the children. This may have impacted on the answers that the children gave, particularly as they were asked about their views of the nurture group staff. Therefore, their views were portrayed more positively than they may otherwise have been if the staff had not been present. However, the data from the parents did support that the children perceived the nurture group staff very positively, and not allowing the nurture group staff to be present may have made the children less comfortable and less willing to talk. For this reason, it could also have been criticised as being unethical.

A further criticism is of the sampling technique used. Parents were accessed through schools, and those who volunteered were chosen to be interviewed. It was felt that this sampling technique was necessary as the group have been difficult to access in previous research (Garner & Thomas 2011). However, this may have meant that those parents who agreed to take part in the research were those that had experienced a good outcome from the nurture group intervention. Also, it is likely that the nurture group staff would only have asked those parents they knew would portray the nurture group in a positive way. Therefore, there is a chance that the findings of the research may have a positive bias. For this reason, in future research a random sampling technique would allow for a more representative sample to be drawn in which the nurture group staff are not responsible for the selection of participants.

Focus groups were chosen as a methodology that would be suitable for primary school children, so they would not feel uncomfortable and intimidated in speaking alone to a stranger. This methodology allowed the children to express their views openly, but with the youngest group (aged five to six years) in particular, there was little interaction between the children, and they looked to the researcher constantly to facilitate. Researcher input was also necessary frequently to involve pupils who were less involved than

others, and the methodology posed a particular challenge to those children who experienced language and communication difficulties. In the future, focus groups would still be an appropriate methodology to engage the pupils in a relaxed manner around the table in the nurture room, but more explicit instructions may need to be given to encourage them to discuss each question among themselves, as it is likely to be a new experience for them.

Alternatively, for the younger pupils a group interview may be more appropriate as it would provide the more adult-led format with which they are familiar, as well as scaffolding their speech and language needs.

## Implications

As a qualitative piece of research, with a small sample size, the aim of this study was not to make generalisations to nurture groups on a wider scale. However, there were some findings that if supported by larger scale research, may have implications for nurture group staff, parents of children in nurture groups, and also educational psychologists.

**Implications for staff and parents.** One of the key implications of this research for nurture group staff is with regard to their communications with parents. Overall, parents knew very little about nurture groups, their aims, the activities the children do, or the expected outcomes. This meant that the nurture groups were sometimes perceived with suspicion and negativity as parents felt excluded. Very few of the parents knew what the nurture groups set out to achieve and therefore were sometimes unwilling to attribute the changes that they had noticed to the nurture group. Although this may not be generalizable to other nurture groups, it supports similar concerns raised by Kourmoulaki (2013), and highlights the importance of communication with parents. Ideally, nurture group practitioners should involve parents throughout the intervention, through inviting them to visit and meet other parents. This is of particular importance at the beginning of the intervention so that parents have a full understanding of why their child has been recommended to participate in the nurture group.

In some cases, it may be that the parents of children in nurture groups are also vulnerable, and would benefit from a nurturing intervention themselves. The Estyn report (2013) exploring the impact of poverty on children in Wales, highlighted a case study in which a school had set up a 'family nurture room', where the family also attended the nurture group several times per week. Running the intervention in this way would inform and involve parents, while educating them in the principles of nurture, and supporting the parent-child relationship.

**Implications for educational psychologists (EPs)** EPs have a role in educating nurture practitioners in the importance of involving parents and communicating with them openly. Where parents are being excluded, or there is unethical practice (e.g. calling nurture groups 'social skills groups' and not discussing the true aims), the EP should act as a critical friend, promoting ethical practice to ensure that parents are treated fairly. EPs could achieve this through supporting nurture group practitioners in developing information leaflets about nurture groups for parents so that they are fully informed in a diplomatic and sensitive way.

## CONCLUSION

**The current study explored the impact of the nurture group intervention upon parent-child relationships. The findings suggest that both parents and children are able to identify several ways in which their interactions had changed as a result of the intervention, including increased communication and affection. The key factors perceived as being responsible for these changes included the small group size, and the relationship that the children develop with the nurture group staff. Despite the majority of parents holding nurture groups in high regard, this research supported other research in this field in finding that parents had little knowledge and understanding of the nurture group intervention. This implies that practitioners may require support in being confident to discuss the nurture group intervention openly and honestly with parents.**

## REFERENCES

- Ainsworth, M (1978) *Patterns of Attachment*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bennathan, M & Boxall, M (2000) *Effective Intervention in Primary Schools: Nurture Groups*. London: David Fulton Publishing.
- Binnie, L M & Allen, K (2008) Whole school support for vulnerable children: The evaluation of a part-time nurture group. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, 13(3) pp.201-216.
- Bowlby, J (1969) *Attachment and loss: volume 1*. New York: Basic Books.
- Boxall, M (2002) *NGs in school: Principle and practice*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Christenson, S L (2004) The family-school partnership: an opportunity to promote the learning competence of all students, *School Psychology Review*, 33(1) pp.83-104.
- Cooper, P, Arnold, R, & Boyd, E (2001) The effectiveness of Nurture Groups: preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*. 28(4) pp.160-166.
- 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.171-191.
- Estyn (2013) *Working together to tackle the impact of poverty of educational attainment*. Retrieved February 21, 2014, from [www.nurturegroups.org/data/files/News/Untitled\\_attachment\\_00062.pdf](http://www.nurturegroups.org/data/files/News/Untitled_attachment_00062.pdf)
- Garner, J, & Thomas, M (2011) The role and contribution of Nurture Groups in secondary schools: perceptions of children, parents and staff. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, 16(2) pp.207-224.
- Glaser, B, & Strauss, A (1967) *Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Kourmoulaki, A. (2013). Nurture groups in a Scottish secondary school: Purpose, features, value and areas for development. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties*, 18(1) pp.60-76.
- March, S., & Healy, N. (2007). What is the parental perception on progress made by nurture group children. *Educational Psychology in Scotland*, 9(1) pp.2-7.
- Reid, K, Challoner, C., Lancett, A., Jones, G., Aprhysart, G. & Challoner, S. (2010). The views of primary pupils on school attendance at Key Stage 2 in Wales. *Educational Studies*, 36(5) pp.465-479.
- Strauss, & Corbin, J (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques & Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.
- Taylor, V M & Gulliford, A (2011) Parental perspectives on nurture groups: the potential for engagement. *British Journal of Special Education*, 38(2) pp.73-82.



# Part-time secondary school nurture groups

## An analysis of participant outcomes and possible mechanisms of change

Dr Jessamine Chiappella

### ABSTRACT

Nurture groups (NGs) are an intervention implemented to improve the social, emotional and behavioural functioning of vulnerable children and they are increasingly being used within secondary school settings (Colley 2009). The psychological processes underpinning change within a NG intervention for adolescents has been identified as a topic that warrants further research (Garner and Thomas 2011). This study aimed to explore the processes involved in promoting change in participants of secondary school NGs through evidence provided by questionnaires and through a thematic analysis of NG practitioners' perspectives.

Participants were identified through SDQ screening and teacher referral; there were 29 male and 20 female young people aged between 11 and 14 years in part-time NGs for two terms. In addition, nine NG practitioners took part in semi-structured individual interviews. This study used questionnaires completed pre- and post-intervention by young people, parents/carers and teachers to explore changes in observed attachment-related behaviours and social, emotional and behavioural functioning in young people following NG participation. In addition, a thematic analysis was completed to explore NG practitioners' perspectives on change and secondary school NG processes. The measures were the Boxall Profile for Young People, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and the Social Skills Questionnaire. The results showed that parent, teacher and young person emotional symptoms scores and total difficulties scores reduced following NG participation. No significant changes in social skills levels or attachment-related behaviours were seen. From a thematic analysis of interviews with NG practitioners, themes of change and mechanisms of change emerged. Findings are discussed in terms of attachment theory and social learning theory. Limitations are outlined.

### INTRODUCTION

In a county we will call Greenshire, to ensure the anonymity of participants in this study is preserved, the educational psychology service had been supporting primary schools to run part-time nurture groups (NGs) and decided to extend this support to secondary schools. NGs are a school-based intervention that aim to address key relationship and developmental factors underlying social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that prevent children from fully participating in learning at school (Seth-Smith, Levi, Pratt, Fonagy and Jaffey 2010).

This pilot project was started in response to a request from school staff for a group approach that would support vulnerable young people in secondary schools. At the time, there was very little published research available about secondary school nurture groups, except for 'The Oasis' (Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes 2008). Even recently, further research into NGs within secondary schools has been called for (Hughes and Schlösser 2014). Therefore, as part of the project, an evaluation process that included quantitative and qualitative methods was designed, to explore the outcomes and possible mechanisms of change for young people attending part-time NGs in secondary schools.

## Nurture groups

NGs were originally devised by Majorie Boxall to provide inclusive support to young children who were struggling to access learning opportunities due to unmet early learning needs (Bennathan and Boxall 2000). Colley (2009) identified that many secondary schools offered nurture provision that differed significantly from the original or 'classic' NG model. In Greenshire, primary school NGs had been offering a part-time model and therefore the secondary NG model that was developed was also based on the intervention being delivered on a part-time basis. Given the curriculum pressures in secondary schools, as well as the availability of staff to run the group, it was felt that secondary schools would be more likely to implement and maintain NG provision if the model were a

part-time one. NG principles were adhered to within the model (Lucas, Insley & Buckland 2006), table 1 (p.16). In addition, a NG working agreement was devised so that schools would also provide two dedicated NG practitioners who were released for training, supervision, as well as delivery times. Schools also agreed to implement the key structural features of NGs, such as to provide a dedicated and appropriately furnished nurture room e.g. with facility to make hot drinks and snacks, a seating area, a table and games and other resources; stable group membership (i.e. not a 'drop-in' facility) and a regular session time and session structure for the group. These reflect the features shown by other secondary nurture groups deemed to be genuine NGs (e.g. Garner and Thomas 2011). The aim of the sessions was the development of social and emotional skills within a comfortable setting.

**Table 1: NG Principles** (Lucas, Insley and Buckland 2006)

- **Learning is understood developmentally.**
- **The classroom offers a safe base.**
- **The importance for nurture for the development of self-esteem.**
- **Language as a vital means of communication.**
- **All behaviour is communication.**
- **The importance of transitions in the lives of children and young people.**

### **Nurture group outcomes**

Large-scale evaluation studies of primary school NGs have reported social, emotional and behavioural improvements in participants when compared to controls, as well as improvements in academic attainment (Seth-Smith, Levi, Pratt, Fonagy and Jaffey 2010, Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney 2009). MacKay, Reynolds and Kearney (2010) argue that attachment theory underpins NG interventions, as attachment theory informs the understanding that NG staff have about the factors underlying the children's difficulties, and the assessment processes used by the groups and the strategies used to address identified needs of children within the group. Attachment theory describes the process by which an infant and caregiver develop a relationship in which the child elicits caregiving behaviour to meet their needs and which becomes the basis of the child's internal representation of relationships that allows the child to explore the world, enabling them to learn and form relationships with others. As well as the initial bond with a primary caregiver, the child forms other attachment relationships, for example with family members and teachers (Pearce 2010).

Seth-Smith et al (2010) have suggested that further research needs to take place to explore the social skills mechanisms involved in changes observed in NGs. Published research into secondary school NGs has been on a small scale and has not established whether similar outcomes are observed for the young people who participate in these interventions. Qualitative research has suggested that secondary NGs had led to perceived beneficial outcomes for the young people, such as greater confidence and levels of participation and engagement, increased motivation and independence and feelings of happiness (Garner and Thomas 2011, Kormoulaki 2012). The outcomes reported have been discussed in terms of attachment theory as well as other frameworks, such as social skill development. It was identified that further research was needed in order to explore the outcomes of secondary school NGs for participants and the processes involved in promoting change for young people within secondary NGs.

This research was designed to measure social skills changes as well as changes in attachment-related behaviours, as previous research has identified social skill change as an area that should be explored further (Seth-Smith et al, 2010). In addition, given the part-time nature of secondary school NGs and the developmental phase of the participants, it was hypothesised that it might be more difficult for an attachment mechanism to bring about change for this age group and that NGs in secondary schools might be working more like a social skills group, as they provide an opportunity for direct teaching and practise of social competencies.

## **Method**

**This study employed a multi-strategy design, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect data.**

It was a non-randomised, prospective, pre-test, post-test design. The Boxall Profile for Young People (BPYP, Bennathan, Boxall, & Colley 2010) was used pre- and post NG participation. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, Goodman 1999) and the Social Skills Questionnaire (SSQ, Spence 1995) were also completed by parent/carers, teachers and young people before and after the NG intervention. This range of evaluation measures allowed changes in attachment-related behaviours (MacKay, Reynolds & Kearney 2010) and social, emotional and behavioural functioning to be measured, as well as enabling triangulation of different perspectives across two of the three measures chosen. Not enough data was collected from a wait-list control group to enable comparisons to be made; therefore the study was exploratory in nature.

### **The research questions were:**

- Would changes in social skills and pro-social behaviour be observed?
- Would changes in emotional distress be observed?
- Would changes in attachment-related behaviours be observed?
- Would other changes in social, emotional and behavioural functioning be observed?

The qualitative element of the study took the form of a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) of semi-structured interviews carried out by the researcher with nine female secondary school NG practitioners. Practitioners were self-selecting, and represented the range of NGs that contributed quantitative data on young people. The semi-structured interview elicited views about observed changes in the young people and the types of NG processes felt to be contributing to any changes described.

The NG participants were all in Key Stage Three at mainstream secondary schools in Greenshire aged between 11 and 14 years during the two-term intervention period. There were 29 males and 20 females. The smallest group had four participants; the largest had nine. Six schools contributed data to the study from nine NGs. The young people, who were identified for NG intervention by their schools on the basis of perceived need, were from a variety of social backgrounds and had a mix of presenting needs. They were also generally seen as vulnerable young people who struggled socially.

Some had experienced bereavement or loss, some were in local authority care, some had learning or attention difficulties, some had poor attendance levels. All were identified as struggling to fully participate in lessons, as it was felt that withdrawing young people from some lessons to attend the NG regularly would not have been appropriate for pupils who were successfully accessing the curriculum.

Fidelity to the NG principles and model were assured through the close contact the nurture team had with nurture practitioners, through providing training and networking support, as well as through the completion of the NG working agreement and the self-evaluative framework (the Nurture MOT).

## Results

### Quantitative analysis

As the data did not meet assumptions for the use of parametric statistics, a non-parametric alternative to the t-test, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test, was used in the statistical analysis of pre- and post-measures.

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests were used to analyse the SDQs completed by parent/carers, teachers and young people. These showed significant decreases in 'Total difficulties' scores and in 'Emotional symptoms' scores across all respondents. Additionally, parent questionnaires showed a decrease in 'attentional/hyperactivity difficulties' (See Tables 2, 3 & 4 and Figures 1 & 2). No significant changes were seen in the behavioural difficulties scale, the social difficulties scale or the pro-social behaviour scale.

The Boxall Profile for Young People (BPYP) scores did not show significant changes on any of the developmental or diagnostic strands.

The Social Skills Questionnaires (SSQ) also did not reveal any significant changes, suggesting no improvement in social skills. Baseline means for the SSQ were found to be significantly lower for the NG cohort than for the standardisation sample, suggesting that social skills were less well developed for these young people (Chiappella 2014, unpublished doctoral thesis).

**Table 2: Parent-completed SDQ Mean and Median Scores and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests**

<b>SDQ Parent (n = 26)</b>	<b>Mean Pre-NG (SD)</b>	<b>Mean Post-NG (SD)</b>	<b>Median (IQR) Pre-NG</b>	<b>Median (IQR) Post-NG</b>	<b>Wilcoxon Test</b>	<b>Significance (p) Effect size (r)</b>
<b>Parent total</b>	<b>15.15</b> (5.51)	<b>13.17</b> (7.35)	<b>14.00</b> (10.50 – 18.50)	<b>12.00</b> (6.00 – 19.25)	<b>Z = -2.507</b>	<b>p = 0.012 *</b> <b>r = 0.35</b>
<b>Parent emotional symptoms</b>	<b>4.15</b> (2.82)	<b>3.40</b> (2.82)	<b>4.00</b> (2.00 – 6.00)	<b>3.00</b> (0.75 – 5.25)	<b>Z = -2.158</b>	<b>p = 0.031 *</b> <b>r = 0.30</b>
<b>Parent behavioural difficulties</b>	<b>2.81</b> (2.70)	<b>2.33</b> (2.04)	<b>2.61</b> (1.00 – 4.00)	<b>2.00</b> (1.00 – 4.00)	<b>Z = -0.985</b>	<b>p = 0.325</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Parent attention/ hyperactivity difficulties</b>	<b>5.17</b> (2.44)	<b>4.17</b> (2.47)	<b>6.00</b> (3.00 – 6.00)	<b>4.00</b> (2.00 – 6.00)	<b>Z = -2.672</b>	<b>p = 0.008 **</b> <b>r = 0.37</b>
<b>Parent social difficulties</b>	<b>3.37</b> (2.32)	<b>3.20</b> (2.34)	<b>4.00</b> (1.00 – 4.50)	<b>3.00</b> (1.00 – 5.00)	<b>Z = -0.950</b>	<b>p = 0.342</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Parent pro -social skills</b>	<b>7.78</b> (2.12)	<b>7.57</b> (2.33)	<b>8.00</b> (7.00 – 9.75)	<b>8.00</b> (6.00 – 10.00)	<b>Z = -0.566</b>	<b>p = 0.571</b> <b>n.s.</b>

**Table 3: Teacher-completed SDQ Mean Scores and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests**

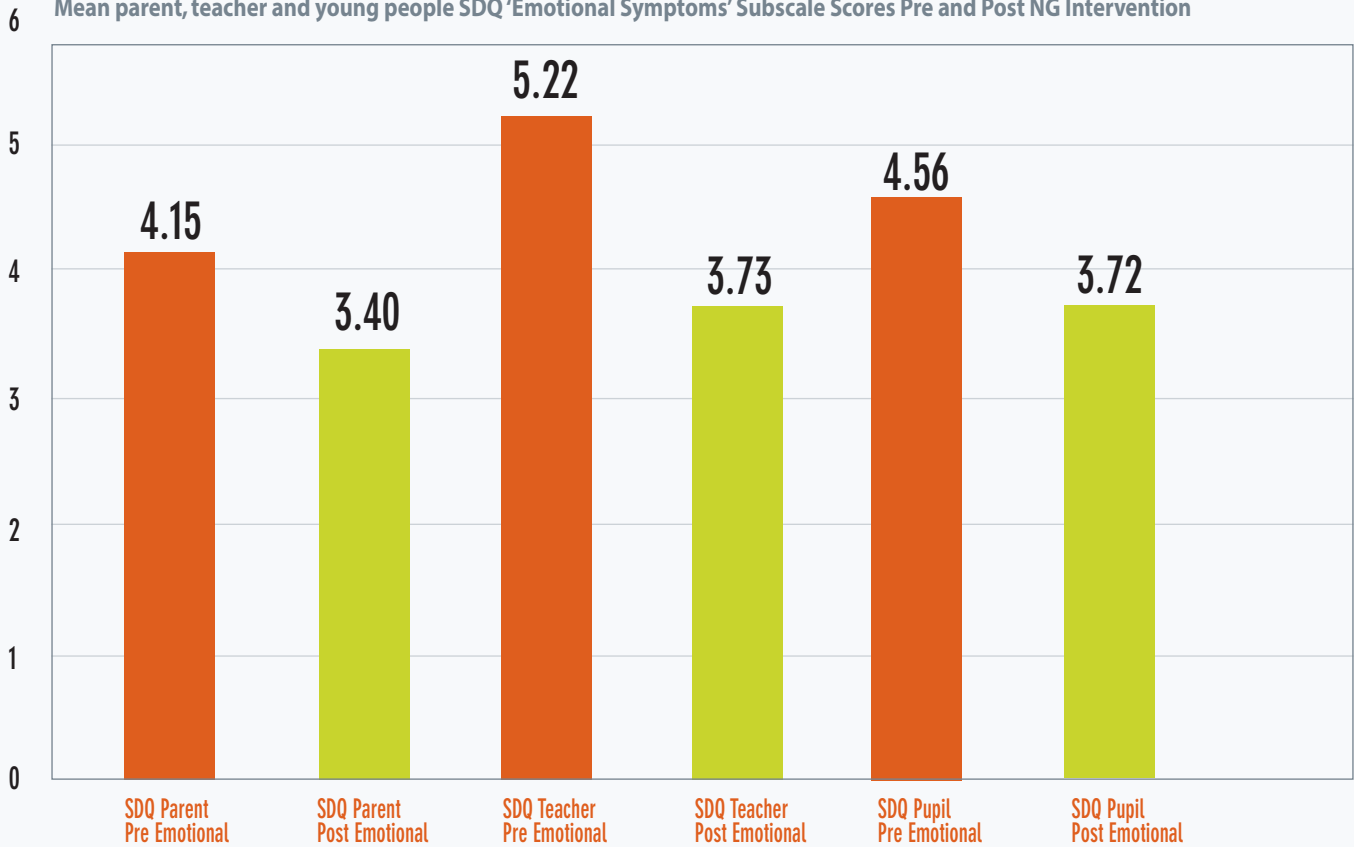
<b>SDQ Teacher</b> (n=35)	<b>Mean</b> Pre-NG (SD)	<b>Mean</b> Post-NG (SD)	<b>Median</b> (IQR) Pre-NG	<b>Median</b> (IQR) Post-NG	<b>Wilcoxon</b> Test	<b>Significance (p)</b> <b>Effect size (r)</b>
<b>Teacher total</b>	<b>15.84</b> (6.79)	<b>14.65</b> (7.50)	<b>15.00</b> (12.00 – 19.00)	<b>13.00</b> (9.50 – 20.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 2.033</b>	<b>p = 0.042*</b> <b>r = 0.24</b>
<b>Teacher emotional symptoms</b>	<b>5.22</b> (2.76)	<b>3.73</b> (2.66)	<b>5.00</b> (3.00 – 7.50)	<b>3.00</b> (1.00 – 6.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 3.231</b>	<b>p = 0.001**</b> <b>r = 0.39</b>
<b>Teacher behavioural difficulties</b>	<b>2.18</b> (2.29)	<b>2.76</b> (2.29)	<b>1.00</b> (0.00 – 4.50)	<b>3.00</b> (0.50 – 4.50)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 1.211</b>	<b>p = 0.226</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Teacher attention/hyperactivity difficulties</b>	<b>4.42</b> (3.12)	<b>4.62</b> (3.02)	<b>4.00</b> (2.00 – 7.00)	<b>5.00</b> (2.00 – 6.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 0.187</b>	<b>p = 0.852</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Teacher social difficulties</b>	<b>4.49</b> (2.68)	<b>3.54</b> (2.47)	<b>4.00</b> (3.00 – 6.00)	<b>3.00</b> (2.00 – 5.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 1.730</b>	<b>p = 0.084</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Teacher pro-social skills</b>	<b>6.42</b> (2.45)	<b>6.00</b> (2.94)	<b>6.00</b> (5.00 – 9.00)	<b>6.00</b> (4.50 – 8.50)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 0.229</b>	<b>p = 0.819</b> <b>n.s.</b>

**Table 4: Young person-completed SDQ Mean Scores and Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests**

<b>SDQ Young Person</b> (n=40)	<b>Mean</b> Pre-NG (SD)	<b>Mean</b> Post-NG (SD)	<b>Median</b> (IQR) Pre-NG	<b>Median</b> (IQR) Post-NG	<b>Wilcoxon</b> Test	<b>Significance (p)</b> <b>Effect size (r)</b>
<b>Young person total</b>	<b>16.24</b> (5.76)	<b>13.95</b> (6.21)	<b>16.00</b> (12.00-20.00)	<b>13.00</b> (10.00-20.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 2.044</b>	<b>p = 0.041*</b> <b>r = 0.23</b>
<b>Young person emotional symptoms</b>	<b>4.56</b> (2.58)	<b>3.72</b> (2.65)	<b>4.00</b> (3.00-6.00)	<b>3.00</b> (1.00-6.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 2.210</b>	<b>p = 0.027*</b> <b>r = 0.25</b>
<b>Young person behavioural difficulties</b>	<b>3.04</b> (2.17)	<b>2.53</b> (2.09)	<b>3.00</b> (2.00-4.00)	<b>2.00</b> (1.00-4.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 1.555</b>	<b>p = 0.120</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Young person attention/hyperactivity difficulties</b>	<b>5.40</b> (2.47)	<b>5.07</b> (2.36)	<b>5.00</b> (4.00-7.50)	<b>5.00</b> (4.00-6.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 0.924</b>	<b>p = 0.355</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Young person social difficulties</b>	<b>3.38</b> (2.22)	<b>2.86</b> (2.21)	<b>3.00</b> (1.00-5.00)	<b>2.00</b> (2.00-4.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>- 1 022</b>	<b>p = 0.307</b> <b>n.s.</b>
<b>Young person pro-social skills</b>	<b>7.64</b> (2.04)	<b>8.09</b> (2.16)	<b>8.00</b> (6.00-9.00)	<b>8.00</b> (6.00-10.00)	<b>Z =</b> <b>-0.585</b>	<b>p = 0.558</b> <b>n.s.</b>

**Figure One: SDQ Emotional Subscale Scores Pre and Post NG Intervention**

Mean parent, teacher and young people SDQ 'Emotional Symptoms' Subscale Scores Pre and Post NG Intervention



**Figure Two: SDQ Total Difficulties Scores Pre and Post NG Intervention**

Mean parent, teacher and young people SDQ 'Total Difficulties' Scores Pre and Post NG Intervention



**Discussion of quantitative results**

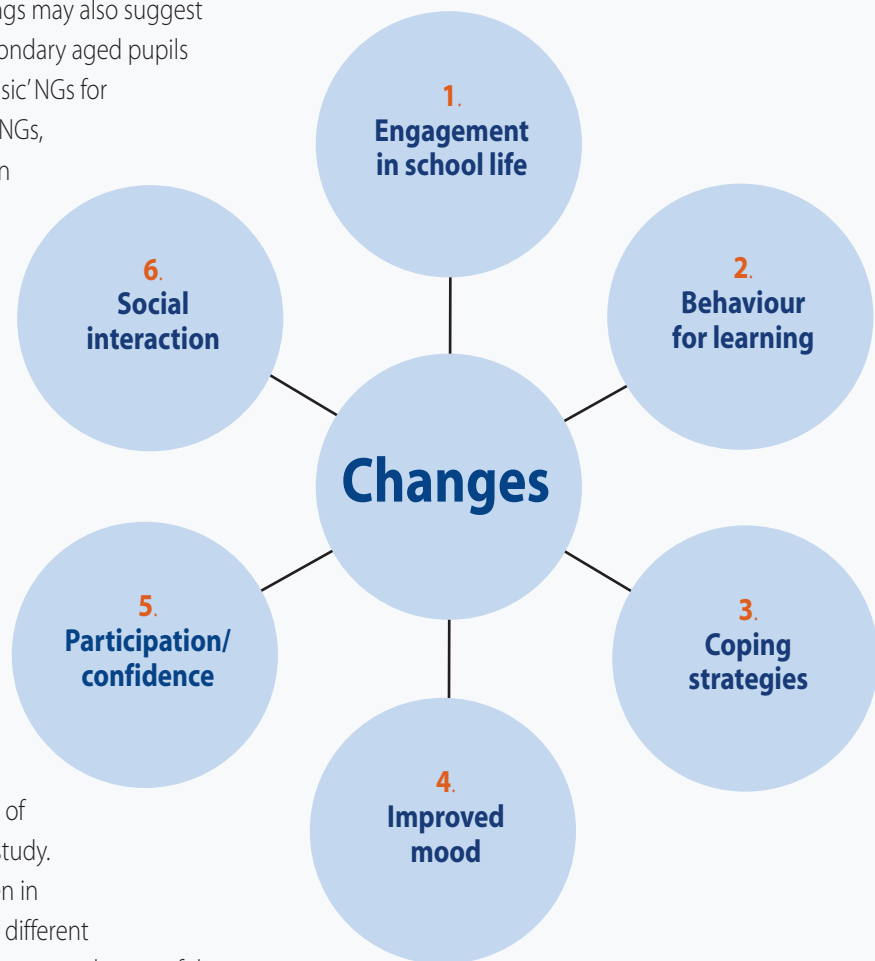
The main findings can be summarised as being that young people who participated in secondary school NGs experienced significant reductions in levels of emotional distress as well as improvements in overall levels of emotional, social and behavioural functioning as indicated by the SDQ emotional symptoms scale and the total difficulties scale. However, no improvements in social skills were found on the SDQ or SSQ measures. In addition, the BPYP strands did not show any significant changes, which could be interpreted as showing that attachment-related behaviours did not improve following the NG intervention. However, it may be that aggregating scores to produce a median means that changes observed in some individuals are lost within a group median. The BPYP are relatively lengthy questionnaires to complete and within a secondary school environment, teachers may find the behaviour ratings difficult to complete with confidence, which may reduce the likelihood of any changes being measured using this tool.

The interpretation of these findings must be done with caution, as it did not prove possible to collect data for a waiting list control group for comparative purposes. Given the consistency of findings across different respondents however, the picture of positive benefits to young people's emotional well-being are encouraging. These findings may also suggest that the impact of part-time NGs for secondary aged pupils are different from those observed in 'classic' NGs for primary aged pupils. For 'classic' primary NGs, social skills changes have been found (on SDQ social difficulties and pro-social scales) in Seth-Smith et al's (2010) study. Changes on four strands of the Boxall profile were also reported and interpreted as lending strength to the finding of improvements in social interaction skills observed using the SDQ. This finding was not replicated by the current study of part-time secondary NGs. In another study of 'classic' primary NGs, changes in social, emotional and behavioural functioning as measured by the Boxall Profile, but not the SDQ, were reported by Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney (2009). This pattern of change is different to that found in this study. The change in 'emotional symptoms' seen in part-time secondary NGs may be due to different mechanisms of change due to the developmental stage of the young people, who as adolescents undergo significant changes

to the frontal cortex, as well as other physical changes (Blakemore and Frith 2005) or due to changes in the nature of the NG as an intervention when delivered part-time to secondary school pupils.

An attachment theory framework is usually associated with NGs, and the improvements in emotional well-being observed might be a result of compensatory attachment relationships formed within the NG (Allen and Manning 2007, Thomas and Garner 2011). A reduction in anxiety related to social situations may be what is reflected in the SDQ results, which could be due to the social learning opportunities within the NG that have enabled the young people to challenge negative attributions and begin to feel more confident in social situations, perhaps as a result of positive feedback from other members of the NG (even if their actual social skill level is not seen to have improved) (Seth-Smith et al 2010, Lemerise and Arsenio 2000, Chiappella 2014). Without a control group, it could be argued that these improvements could have occurred as a result of maturational effects and certainly the results should not be generalised.

**Figure 3** – Thematic map of changes; six themes were identified about outcomes of NG participation



### Qualitative analysis

From the interviews with NG practitioners six themes emerged relating to changes observed in the NG participants, **Figure 3** p.20.

The first theme reflected the practitioners' perspective that the young people in the NG had changed in their level of engagement with school life. The young people were described as having improved attendance levels and greater motivation. For example:

*“she has not missed a day at school since... this girl is now engaging with her learning.”*

*“they wanted to be in and they wanted to be there... there was... more motivation in school.”*

The second theme emerging was about improved behaviour for learning; practitioners felt that the young people were more likely to comply with teacher expectations and they were less disruptive of the lessons. For example:

*“There is definitely less friction within the classroom, they are more inclined to follow what the rest of the class is doing rather than put themselves to one side and let that create an issue because they've got to be redirected into what they were supposed to do.”*

*“Certain teachers have seen an improvement in lessons; a calmer approach from them.”*

Coping strategies was the third theme. The NG practitioners felt that the young people were showing signs of being able to reflect on difficult situations and begin to problem-solve, as well as demonstrating strategies to manage negative feelings. For example:

*“They're doing that themselves, a bit more now, rather than us... having to guide them through step-by-step. They are... able to reflect on that themselves and... I am going to be in this room with this person and how can I sort this out.”*

*“She can talk about it to a certain extent but then she can put aside those feelings, even of sadness, she's learned to be able to put those aside for a little while and then continue with things.”*

The fourth theme was improved mood. The young people were perceived as being happier, less likely to cry and generally more comfortable. For example:

*“They seem much happier.”*

*“She's been smiling a lot more... when she meets you during school she'll say “Hi, Miss”, like she's more comfortable at school, more settled...”*

Increased participation and levels of confidence was the fifth theme. The NG practitioners felt that the young people were more confident, more willing to try new things and participate in the group and in lessons. For example:

*“they've just grown in their confidence...”*

*“he is willing to do that in the classroom now, whereby he's got confidence... in science he is willing to do experiments and he will take a lead on things...”*

Improved social interaction was the sixth theme. NG practitioners described how the young people's social skills had increased and that they were better able to consider other people's perspectives and needs, as well as think about the possible consequences of their own behaviour. For example:

*“Their social skills have increased... “wait your turn”, sharing...”*

*“... thinking of how people might react, being more aware of each other...”*

*“... getting on and understanding that they need to give each other an opportunity to talk and not to dominate too much...”*

As well as themes of change, the transcripts were scrutinised for themes relating to mechanisms and promoters of change in the NG. Seven themes emerged (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4** – Thematic map of change processes and promoters; seven themes were identified that described possible mechanisms of change with secondary NGs.



One of the important themes was identifying the trusting relationships that were developed within the group, with both the adult practitioners and peers. The quality of the interactions was commented on as well, with sensitive responding described, in which the young people feel cared about and listened to. This fits with the core idea of NGs as being designed and implemented in a way that replicates a positive, home-like environment and a relationship that reflects a positive parent-child one, rather than a typical teacher-student relationship, particularly that of a secondary school pupil.

For example:

*“I think somebody cared about them, that they felt nurtured, I think the idea of a family unit, that they are a little unit, not that they are a team, they see themselves as a family, they talk in terms of them as a family. They love the fact that somebody has put time aside for them.”*

*“It has given them an opportunity to see us in a different way and then to approach us more.”*

*“...they're all getting to know a little bit about each other and they are asking questions of each other when you did this and how did that go and because they're all taking an interest in each other and are bonding as a group I think that is what is building their confidence.”*

One practitioner spoke about how during every nurture session the young people completed activities with a 'beany baby' – such as relaxation with the 'beany' on their chest or circle time while holding a 'beany'. These had been brought in from the practitioner's own home to be shared with the group and the practitioner was struck by how much this gesture had meant to the young people, 'It was like I had given them gold, those 'beany babies' had become nearly a lifeline for them'. She was also struck by how much comfort and security the young people gained from these soft toys: 'it was like a comfort blanket, I suppose'. It seems as though the physical affection that might be present in a home environment, or even within NGs that are targeted at children who are just starting school, was provided through these cuddly toys in the secondary school NGs.

Within this trusted relationship, other change-promoting approaches were present. For example, the practitioners saw themselves as able to provide a scaffold to the young people's thinking and support the development of their perspective-taking capabilities. This was theme two, for example:

*“I really can see that I'm adding some sort of value to their day, even if its making them think, think for themselves about certain situations think for themselves, think from another person's perspective.”*

*“I have at first hand seen them in a very different light and I have been able to say to them hang on a minute let's pull this apart and let's look at it and I think that has been helpful in itself.”*

Practitioners also provided explicit teaching of, as well as opportunities to practise, socio-emotional skills and coping strategies. This often took the form of regular activities within the NG sessions, such as circle time and planned activities to develop a skill, such as identifying emotions, as well as the chance, particularly within the 'tea and toast' time, to learn and practise social skills. Examples of theme three were:

*“...their understanding that they need to get on and how they can meet the needs of other children and we've worked really hard you know just on things like when we are doing tea and toast, just doing things like get them to do the basics like get them to ask each other what they want and just sort of be polite and courteous and those kind of activities have facilitated that, I think.”*

*“...letting each other talk, they've actually, one of the things they've done themselves. We may have kind of set it off in a very informal way, at the beginning but they've kind of really picked up on it. Because we've got one of those beany baby toys in the room and they've started... at circle time... and they chuck it between each other and... the person who's talking holds this beany baby. And they've really done that themselves. But it's really worked for them because they've realised now not to interrupt each other and those kind of things, so that's been quite useful.”*

Theme four reflected the focus of the NG on the young people's own experiences and the activities and the way group rules are guided by the young people themselves, which allows the young people to develop a sense of ownership, feel listened to and express themselves. The atmosphere of feeling listened to was linked to the attuned responsiveness of the practitioners, who reflected on the fact that working in the NG had resulted in a greater use of active listening skills than had been the case in previous roles within school.

*“I think they've all been given an opportunity to speak and be who they are.”*

*“being more aware... what I always did anyway, which is listened, but I think I listened with half an ear and I think I have got big Dumbo ears now.”*

A fifth theme reflected the importance ascribed by practitioners to good communication with school staff and parents/carers of the NG participants.

For example:

*“...communication is good between staff...”*

*“...the liaising with parents, parents are aware of what is going on, and the support, the support of the parents that they agreed to let us do this.”*



The nature of the group as a secure, predictable setting also emerged as a sixth theme.

*“The two-hour NG is quite unique in that the setting is very much not a classroom setting, it is more a homey setting... we have built on the principles of nurture in that they trust us as practitioners, they have seen and experienced different things within the group where we have always endeavoured to resolve things and that there's no pressure on them, I guess and... it's a time for them just to be.”*

*“We have this certain routine that we follow each week”*

The final theme related to the opportunities that the NG provided for young people to observe social behaviour and problem-solving and see adults 'thinking out loud' and labelling their own and others' emotions. In addition, NG practitioners encouraged and praised young people when they noticed them engaged in positive interaction (such as taking turns) or sharing their experiences or views.

For example:

*“He's got confidence... we praise him for things because he says “I'm not good at anything”... he'll come out with such a wonderful word and I'll say, “that's such a good science word.”*

*“And I think for him, listening to how others talk about their time and the sort of language they use to explain about what they've done, I think that has helped him, because you can sometimes pick up that he has used some of those to talk about his own time, so I think that has been good for him.”*

Overall, in the practitioners' accounts, the relationships developed within the NG appear to act as a foundation for the other processes of change. The practitioners felt that the relationships formed within the NG enabled them to talk to the young people about issues or difficulties in a way that would not have been possible without the NG. For example, 'I would not have had that relationship with that girl to be able to talk to her like that without the NG. The practitioners also observed that the relationships the young people formed within the group helped them develop an awareness and acceptance of other people.

*“I think they've learned from each other as a group, without a doubt, because they are so different... levels of maturity and their own skills, I think their tolerance has increased of each other at different times and in different social situations.”*

The practitioners spoke in a way that suggested the relationships formed within the group were qualitatively different from the usual staff-student relationships. For example, they commented that the students experienced 'being able to be listened to and have their thoughts considered being given more time and given more opportunity to express themselves' and that the NG was like a family unit, 'I think somebody cared about them, that they felt nurtured, I think the idea of a family unit, that they are a

little unit, not that they are a team, they see themselves as a family, they talk in terms of them as a family. They love the fact that somebody has put time aside for them'. Another example given was when a NG were given soft toys to use within the group sessions, 'They asked me where I'd got them and I said I'd brought them from home, that my children had had them and they said "you're so kind to give us these beany babies. They're really receptive of them. They understood that I was giving it to them as a gift.'

Practitioners also commented about changes in themselves as a result of NG work. 'I think it's made me more aware and I guess, more aware of me and, I guess, more aware of the young people'. This is again suggestive that the nature of the relationship was special and that it illustrates that the relationships are dyadic and that the young people had an impact on the practitioners too.

The practitioners were talking about their own experiences within the group and were probably less likely to emphasise their own direct role in creating these change-promoting relationships. However, one NG co-ordinator who was interviewed clearly felt that the relationships between the NG practitioners and the young people were key. In response to being asked, 'How would you explain the changes you've seen? What's supported or led to those changes?' She said, 'Definitely the relationship with the ladies who run it...'

### Discussion of qualitative results

The finding that the quality of the relationships formed over time within the group, between practitioners and young people and among the young people themselves lend support to the view that even with adolescents, NGs are an intervention best understood through an attachment theory framework (Bowlby 1969, MacKay Reynolds and Kearney 2010). The members of the NG become attachment figures for the young people involved, and they are able to explore their environment from this secure base as well as better regulate their emotions with this support (Allen and Manning 2007, Garner and Thomas 2011).

Social learning mechanisms are also present, as practitioners clearly describe processes involving explicit teaching and feedback and opportunities to practise social skills as core parts of the NG interventions (Seth-Smith et al, 2010). Kourmoulaki (2012) also highlighted the role secondary NG practitioners played in teaching functional social skills, as well as the value participants gave to developing social skills and making friends.

## CONCLUSION

**In isolation, the findings from the two strands of this research study provide exploratory descriptions of the changes seen in young people participating in part-time secondary school NGs. However, when taken together the findings provide a convincing picture of NG interventions as having directly brought about the changes observed. The reduction in emotional distress levels and total stress levels observed by teachers, parents and the young people themselves on the SDQs were reinforced by the qualitative themes that emerged of 'improved mood', 'participation/confidence' and 'engagement in school life'. As well as supporting the quantitative findings, other changes were described, for example, 'social interaction' emerged as a theme and it may be inferred that these changes were linked to improved mood and confidence, resulting in greater levels of participation and engagement as well as improved social skills. A picture emerged of more confident and comfortable children who were able to sit with their friends in class and take part in conversations (see examples discussed in theme four). In other words, the qualitative findings provide us with an understanding of the processes by which the NG intervention brings about the positive outcomes observed. The trusting relationships formed within the group appear to act as a particular catalyst for change and are a particular feature of NGs compared with other school-based interventions. The integration of findings provides a strong case to suggest that the NG intervention is at the route of the changes observed in the young people.**

**Further research with a comparison group, such as a waiting-list control group, is needed to determine whether these findings can be replicated and whether they can be ascribed to the NG intervention, rather than being due to maturational effects. Including additional alternative measures would allow for the influence of NG interventions to be more completely evaluated. Follow-up data would also be helpful to determine whether the outcomes observed are maintained after the young people leave the NG provision. It would also identify whether some benefits of NG provision are only seen after more time has elapsed, for example, improvements in social interaction skills. This would help schools and educational psychologists involved in training and supporting NG practitioners to decide the ideal length of part-time nurture provision. Further research to look at whether there are differential outcomes in NG participants with different profiles of need would also be valuable.**

## REFERENCES

- Allen J.P. and Manning, N. (2007). From safety to affect regulation; attachment from the vantage point of adolescence. *New Directions in Child and Adolescent Development*, 117, p. 23-39.
- Bandura, A (1971) *Social Learning Theory*. General Learning Press: New York City.
- Bennathan, M & Boxall, M (2000) *Effective Intervention in Primary Schools: Nurture groups*. Second Edition. London: David Fulton.
- Bennathan, M, Boxall, M, and Colley, D (2010) *The Boxall Profile for Young People: Assessment and Intervention at Secondary Stage*. London: Nurture Group Network.
- Blakemore, S & Frith, U (2005) *The Learning Brain: Lessons for Education*. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford.
- Boxall, M & Lucas, S (2010) *Nurture Groups in Schools (2nd Edition)*. Sage Publications: London.
- Bowlby, J (1969/1997) *Attachment and Loss*. Pimlico: London.
- Braun, V and Clarke, V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2), 77-101.
- Colley, D (2009) Nurture groups in secondary schools. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 14 (4), 291-300.
- Cooke, C, Yeomans, J. & Parkes, J (2008) The Oasis: nurture group provision for Key Stage 2 pupils. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 13 (4), 291-303.
- 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), 171-190.
- Chiappella, J (2014) *Increasing our Understanding of Nurture Groups as an Intervention for Young People with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Needs: What Psychological Processes are involved in The Observed Outcomes for Participating Pupils?* Unpublished Thesis, University College London.
- 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, 207-224.
- Goodman, R (1999) The extended version of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire as a guide to child psychiatric caseness and consequent burden. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 40, 791-801.
- Hughes, NK and Schlösser, A (2014) The effectiveness of nurture groups: a systematic review. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, DOI: 10.1080/13632752.2014.883729
- Kourmoulaki, A (2012) Nurture groups in a Scottish secondary school: purpose, features, value and areas for development. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, DOI: 10.1080/13632752.2012.693755
- Lemerise, EA & Arsenio, W F (2000) An Integrated Model of Emotion Processes and Cognition in Social Information Processing. *Child Development*, 71, p. 107-118.
- Lucas, S, Insley, K & Buckland, G (2006) *Nurture Group Principles and Curriculum Guidelines*. London: Nurture Group Network.
- MacKay, T, Reynolds, S & Kearney, M (2010) From attachment to attainment: The impact of nurture groups on academic achievement. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(3), 100-110.
- Pearce, C (2010) An integration of theory, science and reflective clinical practice in the care and management of attachment-disordered children: A Triple-A approach. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(3), 73-86.
- 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*, Vol. 26(4), 204-212.
- Seth-Smith, F, Levi, N, Pratt, R, Fonagy, P & Jaffey, D (2010) Do Nurture Groups improve the Social, Emotional and Behavioural Functioning of At Risk Children? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(1), 21-34.
- Spence, S (1995) *Social Skills Training: Enhancing Social Competence in Children and Adolescents*. Windsor, UK: The NFER-NELSON Publishing Company Ltd.

**Acknowledgements:** Thanks to the school staff and young people and their families who were involved in the Nurture Groups in Greenshire.

# Comparing nurture group provision with one-to-one counselling

## What characteristics and evidence-based components produce positive change?

Edurne Scott Loinaz

### ABSTRACT

Although several non-randomised case studies have shown that nurture groups have a positive impact under trial conditions, the outcomes of nurture group provision have yet to be compared with any other psychosocial interventions. By comparing teacher-completed SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) scores pre- and post- provision with another in-school psychosocial intervention for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), in-school one-to-one counselling facilitated by Place2Be, this paper compares the variables that produce change in each provision. Using a Boolean approach, the study concluded that at least 20 per cent of students' SDQ scores could improve into a low-risk category after three terms if they attended a provision that is (a) underpinned by attachment theory and has the facilitator(s) build affective bonds with the student; (b) has the facilitator(s) see the student every week throughout one academic year in school; and (c) has at least one session per week (although the indications are that a more frequent provision increases the chances of more students changing to a low-risk category). The study also seeks to identify how nurture groups are unique when compared with other psychosocial interventions including: (1) the high frequency of provision; (2) facilitating positive modelling with two practitioners; (3) the use of the nurture group space as a hybrid of home and school environments; and (4) the involvement of all interpersonal systems (parents/teachers/peers) as part of the provision.

### Need for study

Although it is clear from several non-randomised controlled trials that nurture groups as a child mental health treatment have an impact under trial conditions (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd 2001; Cooper and Whitebread 2007; Reynolds, MacKay and Kearney 2009; Scott and Lee 2009; Seth-Smith et al 2010), the outcomes of nurture group practice have yet to be compared with any other psychosocial interventions. The primary weakness of past case-oriented studies are that they are open to the charge of particularism ('Are these cases typical? Do they embrace the entire range of practice?') (Ragin 1987), and since nurture groups, which total over 1,500 (Colley 2011) in the United Kingdom alone, differ from school to school, a comparative study with common variables shared in all nurture groups can provide an avenue of escape from this criticism.

However, in comparing the outcomes of psychosocial interventions for children and adolescents with conduct problems, several factors need to be highlighted. First is the nature of childhood psychiatric disorders and ways of measuring change: the severity of a child's difficulties are likely to reduce with or without active intervention despite substantial long-term continuity in most types of difficulties. (Tamsin et al 2009). This is partly due to (a) the regression to the mean and (b) the result of spontaneous improvement (YouthinMind 2009). One way to calculate the impact of specialist interventions for children and young people using the SDQ is the 'Added Value Score Formula' that uses data from

longitudinal community surveys of young people whose psychiatric disorders have not been treated in specialist settings (YouthinMind 2009). At present, however, the formula can only be applied to parent-completed SDQs and since nurture group research predominantly uses teacher-completed SDQs the impact of nurture group provision cannot be assessed with this Added Value Score. This problem can be overcome in some way by using and comparing the SDQ scores of children attending nurture group provision to that of children and adolescents with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties who remain in their mainstream classroom for over three terms. Second, this paper relies on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire as a means to show clinically significant change (a statistically reliable return to normal functioning). More specifically it uses the arbitrary cut-off point of a 20 per cent improvement in students' scores to a low-risk category as a means of testing the variables of each intervention. As Tamsin et al (2014) warn: 'Cut-off points denoting clinical significance are inevitably arbitrary, a return to normal function is not expected in many children (autism for instance), and this approach may not be appropriate for individuals with comorbid problems (most of those attending child mental health services).' (p.556). This paper uses SDQ outcomes to compare the different psychosocial interventions, but there are many other positive outcomes that could be used in its place (please see recommendations at the end of this paper).

A final point that must be highlighted about comparative studies is that in some circumstances the point of the exercise is not to test provisions against each other but rather to identify the factors common to effective interventions, and to assess the limits and boundaries of each provision via their outcomes. Using Boolean analysis (an explicit algebraic basis for qualitative comparison), the empirical boundaries of the effects of the causal variables of each intervention can be tested. Here it is important to address why the outcomes of a particular psychosocial intervention were chosen, namely, those of one-to-one counselling facilitated by Place2Be (Place2Be 2014). Comparing the results of how widely-available psychosocial interventions in schools are delivered is important for both conceptual and practical reasons. As Wergeland et al (2014) concluded in their effectiveness study of individual vs. group cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety disorders in youth, group treatment tends to be more cost-effective and offers more opportunities for normalisation, positive peer modelling, reinforcement, social support, and exposure to social situations, whereas individual counselling is likely to offer more opportunities for tailored treatments to address the specific needs of each child or adolescent. Such a comparative study can address what similar evidence-based components and theories are used in both group and individual provisions and what variables result in different outcomes. Each of the three conditions compared in this study – nurture groups, Place2Be and a mainstream comparison group – are broken down into key causal variables that can be identified regarding the characteristics of the provision (though other possible variables can include the ingredients [mediation] of the provision, and the student [moderation] using the provision). The variables of each condition are then compared to those of the others to provide greater context and to highlight the variables that could be used for future comparative research.

The three conditions that are compared in this paper are therefore the following:

### **Condition A: Nurture Groups**

Nurture groups aim to improve a child or young person's detrimental cognitive, affective or behavioural styles through an in-school, teacher-led psychosocial intervention in a small group of their peers (from six to 12 students). Underpinned by attachment theory, nurture groups are facilitated by two members of teaching staff, run for at least 12.5 hours a week (average of five mornings a week of provision as determined by a 2014 study of 100 nurture groups (Scott Loinaz, 2014)) and for an average of three terms. Marjorie Boxall's nurture groups, first established in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in 1969, were developed from the intuitive understanding that some students need extra help for them to progress to the emotional maturity and social competence required for the mainstream classroom (Boxall 2013). Underpinned by John Bowlby's (1968) attachment theory, Boxall believed that it was possible to replace 'missing or distorted' early nurturing experiences by immersing students in accepting and warm environments to develop positive relationships with staff and their peers. There are currently over 1,500 primary and secondary schools with a nurture group in the United Kingdom (Colley 2011).

### **Condition B: Place2Be**

Place2Be aims to improve a child or young person's detrimental cognitive, affective or behavioural styles through in-school one-to-one counselling with weekly 80-minute long sessions for an average of three terms. The counselling sessions are run by volunteer counsellors. Though Place2Be offers other services – such as Place2Talk, a self-referral service, Place2Think, a service for school staff, and short-term group work for students – the outcomes used for this paper are from their one-to-one counselling service only. Place2Be originates from a Family Service Unit (FSU) project in Southwark, London in the early 1990s, and now provides mental health services to over 230 primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom (Place2Be 2014).

### **Condition C: Mainstream comparisons**

A child or young person's detrimental cognitive, affective or behavioural styles may improve with time by remaining in the mainstream classroom and receiving only the standard interventions offered there.

### **Literature review**

The causal variables of effective evidence-based psychosocial interventions have been extensively researched. For this literature review, searches of peer-reviewed, English language journal articles were conducted in the following electronic databases: Academic Search Premier, PsycInfo, PsycArticles, Medline, CINAHL, ERIC and Education Research Complete. The search terms used were: 'psychosocial intervention', 'psychosocial treatments', 'evidence-based psychosocial treatments', 'treatments for conduct-disordered children and adolescents', 'interventions for conduct-disordered children and adolescents', 'treatments for children and adolescents with disruptive behaviour' and 'interventions for children and adolescents with disruptive behaviour'. There were no restrictions applied in regards to publication date or place of publication and conduct problem was defined as any behaviour that is listed in the ICD-10 (World Health Organisation 1992) or a problem description such as temper tantrums, disruptive classroom behaviour or delinquency.

The literature review generated five outcome reviews of treatment for conduct problem children: Kendall (1993), Breston and Eyberg (1998), Murphy (2005), Cohen and Manarinno (2006) and Garland et al (2008) which yielded a total of 116 studies investigating treatment outcomes with conduct-disordered children or adolescents. The characteristics of effective psychosocial interventions were discussed in Breston and Eyberg's (1998) review which combined a total of 82 studies (5,272 students in total) to find that the most common psychosocial treatments for conduct-disordered child and adolescents was an intervention held in-school (43%), for a group of eight to 12 students (51%), facilitated by teaching/support staff (40.5%) and using cognitive behavioural therapy components (75.7%). A similar summary was possible in terms of the components and strategies that were used in 34 evidence-based psychosocial interventions from four reviews – Kendall (1993) for children and young adults exhibiting aggressive behaviour, anxiety, depression or ADHD symptoms; Murphy (2005) for teenagers with ADHD; Cohen and Manarinno (2006) for children and adolescents exposed to maltreatment and violence; and

Garland et al (2008) for children aged four to 13 with disruptive behaviour problems. A summary of the effective evidence-based components in psychosocial interventions are summarised in

**Table 1.**

The literature highlighted three groups of children and adolescents that are likely to improve in social and emotional functioning in psychosocial interventions: students with externalising behaviour, students with internalising behaviour and disadvantaged students.

**Students exhibiting externalising behaviour (aggression, conduct disorders, oppositional defiant disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder)**

Interventions are needed for students with aggressive behaviour due to its substantial stability into adulthood, and its tendency to put students at a significant risk of subsequent substance abuse, delinquency and school failure (Kendall 1993). Externalising behaviour and conduct disorders are likely to evince 'deficits and distortions in cognitive problem-solving skills, attributions of hostile intent to others, and resentment and suspiciousness.' (Kazdin 1997, p.162). These cognitive features result in diminished social skills, higher levels of social rejection and academic deficiencies (low grades, dropping out of school and expulsion). School-based anger coping programmes have been shown to work in the short and long-term, with aggressive boys in a three-year follow-up study maintaining 'significant improvements in self-esteem and social problem-solving skills and a markedly lower substance use rate than did untreated aggressive boys.' (Kendall 1993, p.238).

Behavioural/self-management skills have been effective in teaching students with ADHD to manage their symptoms and cope with the challenges that the disorder presents across their lifespan, including having explicitly stated goals and time frames, along with other cognitive strategies to prepare for setbacks (Murphy 2005).

**Students exhibiting internalising behaviour (withdrawn, anxiety disorders, depression, social phobia)**

Internalising behaviour and anxiety disorders are a prevalent psychopathology that significantly interferes with interpersonal and academic functioning, and just like externalising behaviour, has an unremitting course if not treated (Lansford et al 2002). Psychosocial interventions have been effective in producing clinically and statistically significant reductions in childhood social phobia (Spence et al 2000), anxiety (Lansford et al 2002) and depression (Clarke et al 2001). Cognitive behavioural approaches in particular have proved an effective treatment for childhood and adolescent anxiety disorders in comparison to a waiting list, (Cartwright-Hatton et al 2004; James, Soler, Weatherall 2005), and in treating and preventing depression (Van Zoonen et al 2014).

**Disadvantaged students (those whose family, social, or economic circumstances hinder their ability to learn at school)**

There is a very urgent need for psychosocial interventions for children and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. A longitudinal study conducted by McGloin and Widom (2001) found that only one fifth of abused and neglected youth

**Table 1 – Evidence-based components in effective psychosocial treatments for children and adolescents with disruptive behaviour/conduct disorders**

Component/ Strategies	Kendall 1993	Murphy 2005	Cohen and Marino 2006	Garland et al. 2008
Building affective bonds				x
Consensual goal setting		x		x
Modelling	x			x
Coping template/ Positive self- instruction/Cognitive restructuring	x	x	x	x
Rewards	x			x
Role-play exercises/Social skills training	x		x	x
Affective education	x			
In-session curriculum/ Structured tasks	x			x
Homework	x			x
Relaxation techniques			x	x
Parental involvement			x	x
Limit setting				x

experienced successful employment, only 50 per cent graduated from secondary school and over half had a psychiatric disorder. Lansford et al (2002) found that students who have experienced maltreatment have lower grades, are absent from school twice as much as their other peers, and are twice as likely to be expelled from school. It is to be noted that children and young adults who grow up in families with parental problems are a large proportion of the global population, 'International estimates indicate that 39 per cent of all children have parents with mental health problems; 40 per cent are affected by domestic violence; and 30 per cent grow up with at least one problem drinking parent' (Skerfving et al 2014, p.2). These figures were evident in a pilot study of 100 nurture groups that found three in five students had suffered significant trauma in their lives (Scott Loinaz 2014). This was also evident in Place2Be's annual report which found that a high number of children seen were coping with difficult circumstances in their home lives: 2.6 per cent of children were looked after by the local authority, 11 per cent were the subject of a child protection plan, just under a quarter (24%) had been involved with social care, nine per cent had been involved with CAMHS, and a further nine per cent with the police and criminal justice system (Place2Be 2013). Psychosocial interventions have been

effective in reducing the psychosocial dysfunction of disadvantaged students also; in one study caregivers reported reduced levels of psychosocial problems in maltreated students than did students who were randomly assigned to a delayed intervention comparison group three-months post-intervention (Cohen and Mannarino 2006).

**Method of study**

**For a Boolean analysis to be completed a five-step process must be followed:**

- (1) An outcome needs to be identified;
- (2) The variables need to be identified;
- (3) Hypothetical Truth Table with the variables and outcome needs to be completed;
- (4) A Boolean equation must be formulated;
- (5) An explicit statement of multiple conjunctural causation can be formed.

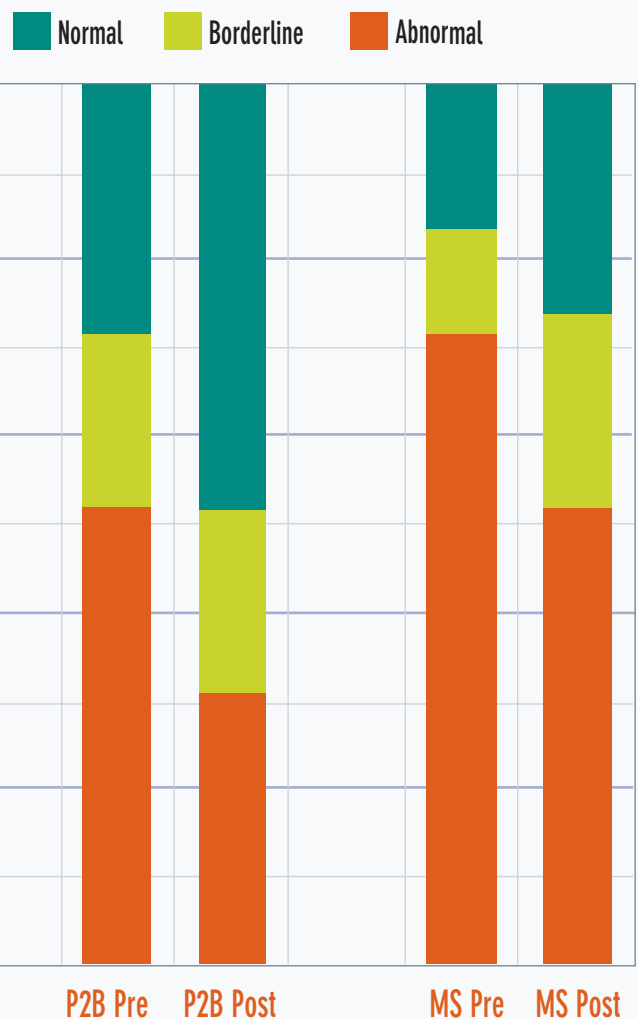
**1 Outcome**

The SDQ has 25 questions covering five domains of children’s well-being: emotional distress, behavioural difficulties, hyperactivity and attention difficulties, peer problems, and kind and helpful (‘prosocial’) behaviour. The sum of the first four domains (also called subscales) is the child’s ‘total difficulties’ score. The measure has additional questions – the ‘impact supplement’ – to assess whether children’s level of social impairment and distress may be indicative of a psychiatric disorder. Scores from the impact questions are added together to make a total impact score. The information provided by teaching staff is used to predict how likely a child is to have an emotional, behavioural or concentration problem severe enough to warrant a diagnosis according to classifications in the International Classification of Diseases 10 (ICD-10) or Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV). The scores from each SDQ domain, the total difficulties and the total impact can be classified into three diagnostic groupings/clinical categories – ‘low risk – normal’, ‘medium risk – borderline’ and ‘high risk – abnormal’. The thresholds for each grouping are based on relative level of wellbeing in the child population – about 80 per cent of children are in the normal clinical range, 10 per cent are in the borderline range and 10 per cent are in the abnormal range (Goodman 1997). Overall, there is reasonable agreement between the risk category and what an expert

would say after a detailed assessment of a child. Between 25-60 per cent of children who are rated as high risk and 10-15 per cent of medium risk children turn out to have a relevant diagnosis according to experts. Only about 1–4 per cent of low risk children would be given a diagnosis (Goodman and Goodman 2009).

All non-randomised studies on nurture groups that had used teacher-completed SDQ scores were considered for the outcome data of this paper. From these, only the studies that had split the students’ scores into normal, borderline and abnormal categories pre- and post- provision were used resulting in a total of two studies with 885 students in total (Cooper, Arnold and Boyd 2001; Cooper and Whitebread 2007). An average of the two studies’ SDQ scores were taken for both nurture group students (n=701) and mainstream students (n=159). The students in the mainstream class were matched on age, gender, educational attainment and level of SEBD. Place2Be’s SDQ scores were taken from their annual children’s outcome report 2011/2012 with a total of 1,764 students. The results pre- and post-provision (3+ terms) for the three groups are shown in Figure One – Table Two highlights the students’ scores in the normal range after three terms of provision, and Table Three highlights students’ scores in the abnormal range after three terms of provision.

**Figure One – SDQ scores pre- and post-provision for students attending nurture groups, Place2Be one-to-one counselling and mainstream classes after 3 terms of provision**



**Table Two** – Students’ scores in the normal range after 3+ terms of provision

	Before	After	Improvement
<b>Nurture Groups</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>35.2%</b>	<b>25.2%</b>
<b>Place2Be</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>15.8%</b>	<b>25.6%</b>	<b>9.8%</b>

**Table Three** – Table 4. Students’ scores in the abnormal range after 3+ terms of provision

	Before	After	Improvement
<b>Nurture Groups</b>	<b>73.1%</b>	<b>47.9%</b>	<b>25.2%</b>
<b>Place2Be</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Mainstream</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>51.3%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>

## 2. Variables

### Setting

Both nurture groups and Place2Be counselling are held in schools.

### Format

Nurture groups are run in groups of six to 12 children/young adults – this helps the pupil practice social skills which are fundamental to their reintegration into mainstream classes, and it also prevents any inappropriate attachment between themselves and Nurture Group Staff; the goal of NG is not to usurp the parent-child relationship, but to create a positive attachment to the school (Boxall 2013).

Place2Be’s counselling is run on a one-to-one basis – this allows for the counsellor to tailor the session to the student’s needs, incorporating an array of therapeutic approaches that encourage children to express themselves.

### Length

Both nurture groups and Place2Be are tailored to individual students’ needs so there is no set amount of time that children

attend each provision. Average times that students attend each provision, however, are two to three terms in Nurture Groups (Scott Loinaz 2014), while half of students attend counselling for seven to 12 months (a mean 24 sessions, SD 5) in Place2Be (Place2Be, 2013). This is different to other psychosocial interventions, which Garland et al (2008) reported as having an average length of at least 12 sessions (three months).

### Frequency

The frequency of nurture group intervention varies significantly from to school to school. Though the 2014 pilot study found five mornings a week (12.5 hours) to be the most popular provision (resulting in 195 sessions after three terms of provision, or 487.5 hours), full-time nurture groups can run for 312 sessions after three terms of provision.

Place2Be counselling service averages at 51 hours a year (36 sessions at 1.4 hours a session) (Place2Be, 2010).

### Theory

The theoretical models that underpin nurture group practice are John Bowlby’s (1965) attachment theory that argues that children acquire age-appropriate behaviour through interactions with significant others. These relationships allow the child to locate themselves as distinct individuals in relation to other people – a fundamental psychological base required for learning. If a child’s early experiences were characterised by missing or distorted nurturing, it can lead to stunted social, emotional and cognitive development. By providing another opportunity to internalise models of effective relationships and form attachments to supportive and caring adults, nurture groups develop vulnerable children’s social and emotional functioning in order to reintegrate them into mainstream schooling in the long term. Another theoretical model that underpins nurture group practice is Lev Vygotsky’s social-cultural theory of learning that argues that effective learning strategies are dependent on the internalisation of functions experienced through social interaction. Individual learning thus takes place when a competent helper guides the pupil via

**Table Four** – Variables for different conditions

Characteristic	Condition A:	Condition B:	Condition C:
	Nurture groups	Place2Be	Mainstream comparisons
<b>Setting</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>School</b>
<b>Format</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Individual Treatment</b> (Child Only)	<b>Group</b>
<b>Length</b>	<b>3 terms</b>	<b>3 terms</b>	<b>3 terms</b>
<b>Frequency</b> (weekly)	<b>12.5+ hours</b>	<b>1.4 hours</b>	<b>27.4+ hours</b>
<b>Theory</b>	<b>Attachment Theory</b>	<b>Attachment Theory</b>	<b>Not Explicit</b>
<b>Participants</b>	<b>Child/Adolescent, Parents, Teachers, Peers</b>	<b>Child/Adolescent, Parents</b>	<b>Child/Adolescent, Parents, Teachers, Peers</b>
<b>Facilitators</b>	<b>School Staff</b>	<b>Volunteer Counsellors</b>	<b>School Staff</b>
<b>Additional cost</b> (per child, per annum)	<b>£1,883</b> (£2.61 an hour)	<b>£954</b> (£18.71 an hour)	<b>None</b>

direct cues, allowing them to use their existing knowledge to acquire new knowledge.

Place2Be's underlying theory for its provision is also attachment theory. It is also influenced by person-centred and psychoanalytic approaches, with some counsellors using other related forms of therapy (e.g. transactional and Gestalt) (Place2Be 2014). True to Breston and Eyberg's (1998) review that concluded 75.7% of psychosocial provisions use cognitive behavioural therapy components, both nurture groups and Place2Be apply cognitive behavioural approaches where appropriate.

### Participants

Nurture groups focus not only on the student, but on improving the relationships between the student and his or her teachers and peers. Parents are involved in nurture group provision by the staff providing ideas/equipment for home activities, as well as supporting parents to develop appropriate interaction strategies and management for home.

Place2Be has its own programme for parents in some parts of the country called A Place for Parents, 'specifically designed to help parents in a school who have been referred for particular problems which they face in bringing up their children.' (Place2Be 2014). Each parent using the service is seen for around 25 hours per annum at an extra cost of £556 per case.

### Facilitators

Because both interventions are underpinned by attachment theory, the adults serve to build affective bonds in both nurture group provision and Place2Be counselling. This means the adults are responsive to individual needs, are affectionate, attentive, provide reassurance and early basic experiences.

Nurture groups always have two practitioners present in the room, and at least one of the NG practitioners is qualified in the theory and practice of nurture groups. Because there are always two adults in the room they can serve as role models for positive interactions, co-operation and coping-skills.

Place2Be counsellors possess at least a Level 2 Award in Counselling Skills for Working with Children. In 2013 more than 270 individuals undertook one of Place2Be's professional qualifications.

### Cost

Evaluations from the Enfield Local Authority of individual schools estimated nurture group cost at £1,883 per child in an established, classic nurture group that has up to 30 children throughout the year (Boxall 2013), bringing the price of provision to £2.61 an hour.

Cost per child per annum of one-to-one counselling in Place2Be was £954, with each child receiving on average 51 hours of service over a year (Place2Be 2010), or £18.71 an hour.

## 3. Hypothetical Truth Table

Only the intervention variables that were different were taken into account in the Truth Table, thus the length of the provision and the setting were not used. Table Five shows the remaining relevant variables that affect the specific outcome of an improvement of at least 20 per cent of students' scores after 3+ terms of provision into a low-risk category:

**Table Five**

	Condition				Outcome
	A	B	C	D	
<b>Nurture Groups</b>	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Place2Be</b>	0	0	0	1	1
<b>Mainstream</b>	1	1	1	0	0

1 = Variable Present / 0 = Variable not present

**A**= Facilitated by school staff [includes teachers in provision]

**B**= >1 hour a week

**C**= Group based [includes peers in provision]

**D**= Underpinned by attachment theory

## 4. Boolean equation

A Boolean equation was formulated on the basis of the above variables (upper case means the variable is present, lower case means the variable is not present) as follows:

$$Y = ABCD + abcd$$

**ABCD** combines with **abcd** to become **abc**

$$Y = ABCD + abc$$

## 5. Statement of causation

Improvement of at least 20 per cent of students' scores after 3+ terms of provision into a low-risk category can take place both in a school provision run by teaching staff, for more than an hour a week for three terms, with a group provision underpinned by attachment theory; and in a school provision not run by teaching staff (volunteer counsellors), for at least an hour a week, with one-to-one support underpinned by attachment theory.

Thus for an improvement of at least 20 per cent of students' scores into a low-risk category after three terms, a psychosocial provision will most likely:

- Be underpinned by attachment theory and have the facilitator(s) build affective bonds with the student;
- Have the facilitator see the student every week throughout one academic year in school;
- Run for two to three terms for at least an hour (although the indications are that a more frequent provision – in the case of nurture groups of at least 12.5 hours a week – increases the chances of more students changing to a low-risk category).



## Discussion

### Other nurture group variables

By highlighting the similarities and differences between nurture group provision and Place2Be one-to-one counselling (and other psychosocial interventions as identified in the literature review), it is possible to propose the specific variables that could account for the successful outcomes of nurture groups in general and for the indications of better scores for nurture groups in this study.

**Frequency of provision:** Nurture group provision is made available nearly every school day (be it full-time or part-time) while allowing students to still be a part of their mainstream class. The average provision in other psychosocial interventions, in comparison, is one session a week. Because nurture groups are integrated into the school, the provision can be a reliable and permanent fixture of a whole-school nurturing ethos.

**Modelling with two practitioners:** Nurture groups always have two teachers present in the room to model co-operation and positive social skills. At least one of the teachers has also attended a three-day course on The Theory and Practice of Nurture Groups.

While other interventions identify key people in the student's life they can use as role-models, (e.g. 'Facilitate a discussion that identifies people who the children see as good coping models, and helps them to specify the coping skills that they employ.' (Barrett 2005)), nurture group practitioners serve as role models for positive interactions, co-operation and coping-skills themselves.

**Hybrid of home and school environments:** A typical nurture group has soft furnishings, kitchen and dining facilities, along with other school items such as a whiteboard, desks and computers. Some nurture groups also start their day with breakfast providing a valuable link between home and school. It is 'a group occasion and helps the students relate to each other...having food together may at first be the only thing they are able to participate in and enjoy as a group. Breakfast early in the day is essential if the group includes children who actively resist forming an attachment and have severe behaviour problems.' (Boxall 2013). Breakfast is also widely promoted to improve cognitive function and academic performance (Hoyland et al 2009).

**Involvement of all interpersonal systems:** Part of the efficacy of any psychosocial intervention is the ability to involve all the student's interpersonal systems – teachers, parents and peers ideally. As Kendall (1993) concluded: 'When significant others (peers, teachers, and parents) provide positive feedback for a child's efforts and change their perceptions and attributions about the child, the child's behavioural change is likely to be maintained. However, if these interpersonal systems are not accepting of the child's recent behaviour changes, then the child's behaviour and cognitions can easily revert to earlier maladaptive levels.' (Kendall 1993, p.243).

### Limitations

There were multiple limitations to the findings of this study. The retrospective data available did not allow as close matching of the

three conditions as would have been wanted – be it sample size or pre-test scores. Even labelling two different conditions (nurture groups and mainstream) as 'group' rather than 'individual' provisions could not take into account that the actual size of the group may be a significant causal factor. There is a fairly full discussion of this issue in MacKay et al (2010). The outcome measures were also limited due to (a) the use of the teacher-rated SDQ as the sole outcome measured (this is the only outcome that is made public by Place2Be and also used in nurture group research for the time being), and (b) the emphasis in the Boolean Truth Table of an outcome from high-risk to low-risk, rather than high-risk to medium-risk (where, for example, the mainstream condition saw a vast improvement in as can be seen in Figure One). The study was also unable to answer cost-benefit questions. On the one hand, Place2Be is very much more costly per hour of intervention. On the other hand, it costs only half as much per child per annum as nurture groups. The indications are that the nurture group outcomes are better overall – especially since more children moved out of high risk in mainstream (20.7%) than in Place2Be (20%) – but the study cannot say how much better nurture group provision was or test significance.

### Recommendations for future comparative studies

Prospective rather than retrospective studies are required that could take into account other variables of mediation and moderation as highlighted in the literature review, including what components are used within the provision (out of the 10 identified from the five reviews), or which subgroups of children and adolescents show optimal response to current intervention strategies. Different outcomes can also be used including various student outcomes (greater academic achievement; increased attendance; reduced exclusions) or school-wide outcomes (decreased use of support programmes/external sources for students with SEBD; reduced staff turnover). All these outcomes would need their own metrics to test the pre-post change.

## CONCLUSION

**Using a Boolean approach, this study concluded that at least 20 per cent of students' SDQ scores could improve into a low-risk category after three terms if they attended a provision that is (a) underpinned by attachment theory and has the facilitator(s) build affective bonds with the student; (b) has the facilitator(s) see the student every week throughout an average of three terms in school; and (c) has at least one session per week (though a more frequent provision of at least five sessions a week may increase the chances of more students changing to a low-risk category). The study also proposed the value of unique features of nurture groups compared with other psychosocial interventions which could explain its better outcomes including: (1) the high frequency of provision; (2) facilitating positive modelling with two practitioners; (3) the use of the nurture group space as a hybrid of home and school environments; and (4) the involvement of all interpersonal systems (parents/teachers/peers) as part of the provision.**

## REFERENCES

- Barrett, P M (2005) FRIENDS for life group leaders' manual for youth. Sidney: Australian Academic Press
- Barrett, P, Turner, C (2001) 'Prevention of anxiety symptoms in primary school children: Preliminary results from a universal school-based trial.' *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 40 pp.399-410
- Bowlby, J (1968) *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Boxall, M (2013) *Nurture Groups in Schools*, London: SAGE
- Brestan, E, Eyberg, E (1998) 'Effective psychosocial treatments of conduct-disordered children and adolescents: 29 years, 82 studies, and 5,272 kids.' *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 27(2) pp.180-189.
- Cartwright-Hatton S, Roberts C, Chitsabesan P, et al (2004) Systematic review of the efficacy of cognitive behaviour therapies for childhood and adolescent anxiety disorders. *Br J Clin Psychol*, 43:421-36.
- Clarke, G N, Hornbrook, M, Lynch, F, Polen, M, Gale, J, Beardslee, W, O'Connor, E, Seeley, J (2001) 'Depression - A randomized trial of a group cognitive intervention for preventing depression in adolescent offspring of depressed parents.' *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 58 pp.1127-1134.
- Cohen, J A and Mannarino, A P (2006) 'Psychosocial Interventions for Maltreated and Violence-Exposed Children.' *Journal of Social Issues*, 62(4) pp.737-766.
- Cooper, P and Whitebread, D (2007) 'The Effectiveness of Nurture Groups: Evidence from a National Research Study.' *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 12(3) pp.171-190.
- Colley, D R (2011) *The Development of Nurture Groups in Secondary Schools*. PhD. University of Leicester.
- Cooper, P, Arnold, R and Boyd, E (2001) 'The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings.' *British Journal of Special Education*, 28 (4), pp. 160-166.
- Eyberg, S M, Nelson, M M, Boggs, S. R (2008) 'Evidence-Based Psychosocial Treatments for Children and Adolescents With Disruptive Behavior.' *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 37(1), pp. 215-237.
- Ford, T, Hutchings, J, Bywater, T et al (2009) 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Added Value Scores: evaluating effectiveness in child mental health interventions.' *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 194:552-558.
- Garland, A F, Hawley, K M, Brookman-Frazee, L, Hulbert, M S (2008) 'Identifying Common Elements of Evidence-Based Psychosocial Treatments for Children's Disruptive Behavior Problems.' *J. Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*, 47(5)
- Goodman, A, and R Goodman, Strengths and difficulties questionnaire as a dimensional measure of child mental health. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry*, 2009. 48(4): pp.400-3.
- Hoyland, A, Dye, L, Lawton, C L (2009) A systematic review of the effect of breakfast on the cognitive performance of children and adolescents. *Nutr Res Rev* 22(2), pp.220-43.
- James, A, Soler, A, Weatherall, R (2005) Cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 19(4)
- Kazdin, A E (1997) 'Practitioner Review: Psychosocial Treatments for Conduct Disorder in Children.' *J. Child Psychol. Psychiat.* 38(2), pp.161-178.
- Kendall, P C (1993) 'Cognitive-Behavioral Therapies With Youth: Guiding Theory, Current Status, and Emerging Developments.' *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61(2) pp.235-247
- Lansford, J E, Dodge, K A, Pettit, G. S, Bates, J E, Joseph Crozier, M P, Kaplow, J (2002) 'A 12-year prospective study of the long-term effects of early child physical maltreatment on psychological, behavioral and academic problems in adolescence.' *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*, 156(8), pp.824-830.
- MacKay, T, Reynolds, S & Kearney, M (2010) From attachment to attainment: the impact of nurture groups on academic achievement. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(3), pp.100-110.
- Mcgloin, J M, Widom, C S (2001) 'Resilience among abused and neglected children grown up.' *Dev Psychopathology* 13(4), pp.1021-38.
- Murphy, K (2005) 'Psychosocial Treatments for ADHD in Teens and Adults: A Practice-Friendly Review.' *JCLP/In Session*, 61(5), pp.607-619.
- Place2Be (2010) 'Cost Effective Positive Outcomes for Children and Families.' [online] <https://www.place2be.org.uk/media/1845/Cost%20Effective%20Positive%20Outcomes%20for%20Children%20and%20Families.pdf> [Accessed 10 December 2014]
- Place2Be (2013) 'Children's outcomes 2011/12 Primary schools.' [http://www.place2be.org.uk/media/5687/Childrens%20outcomes%202011-12%20primary%20schools\\_web.pdf](http://www.place2be.org.uk/media/5687/Childrens%20outcomes%202011-12%20primary%20schools_web.pdf) [Accessed 1 December 2014]
- Place2Be 2014 <http://www.place2be.org.uk/> [Accessed 10 December 2014]
- Reynolds, S, Kearney, M and MacKay, T (2009), 'Nurture Groups: a large - scale, controlled study of effect on development and academic attainment.' *British Journal of Special Education*, 36 (4), pp. 204 - 212.
- Scott, K and Lee, A (2009) 'Beyond the 'classic' nurture group model: an evaluation of part-time and cross-age nurture groups in a Scottish local authority.' *Support for Learning*, 24(1) pp.5-10
- Scott Loinaz, E (2014), Pilot Study. [online] <http://nurturegroups.org/what-we-do/research-and-evidence/pilot-study-summary> [Accessed 10 December 2014]
- Seth-Smith, F, Levi, N, Pratt, R, Fonagy, P, Jaffey, D (2010) 'Do nurture groups improve the social, emotional and behavioural functioning of at risk children?' *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(1) pp.21-34
- Skerfving, A, Johansson, F, Elgan, T (2014) 'Evaluation of support group interventions for children in troubled families: study protocol for a quasi-experimental control group study.' *BMC Public Health*, 14.
- Spence, S, Donovan, C, Brenchman-Toussaint, M (2000) 'The treatment of childhood social phobia: the effectiveness of a social skills training-based, cognitive-behavioural intervention, with and without parental involvement.' *J. Child Psychol. Psychiat*, 41(6) pp. 713-726.
- Stein, B D, Jaycox, L, Kataoka, S, Wong, M, Tu, W, Elliot, M, Fink, A, (2003) 'A Mental Health Intervention for schoolchildren exposed to violence.' *JAMA*, 290(5) pp.603-611.
- Van Zoonen, K, Buntrock, C, Ebert, DD, Smit, F, Reynolds, C, Beekman, A, Cuijpers, P (2014) Preventing the onset of major depressive disorder: a meta-analytic review of psychological interventions. *Int J Epidemiol*, 43(2) pp.318-29.
- Wergeland, G J H, Fjermestad, K W, Marin, C E, et al (2014) An effectiveness study of individual vs. group cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety disorders in youth. *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 57 pp.1-12
- World Health Organisation (1992) *The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders*. [online] <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/GRNBOOK.pdf> [Accessed 10 December 2014]
- YouthinMind (2009) <http://www.sdqinfo.com/c5.html> [Accessed 10 December 2014]

# Future directions for nurture in education

## Developing a model and a research agenda

### Professor Tommy MacKay

Professor at the National Centre for Autism Studies, University of Strathclyde,

Director of Psychology Consultancy Services and an educational psychologist with Argyll & Bute Council

### ABSTRACT

**This paper examines the challenges facing research on nurture groups and on the wider field of nurture in education. A four-level model is proposed based on severity of need, ranging from universal applications in nurturing schools and communities, through to addressing the needs of children and young people whose needs are so great that a nurture group will provide only part of the solution. Consideration is given to the need for alternative provisions in situations where nurture groups are not feasible, such as in areas of low population density and providing for children with a lower threshold of needs. The paper concludes by proposing a coherent research agenda articulating with each of the four levels in the model.**

It is now more than 40 years since the first experimental nurture groups were established in London by Marjorie Boxall (Boxall 2002). Since then, and especially from the late 1990s onwards, nurture groups have spread throughout the UK. They have also been subject to a wide range of research investigations, ranging from single case studies (Doyle 2005) through parent, teacher and pupil perceptions within a single nurture group (Bishop & Swain 2000), to small quantitative studies without controls (for example, Sanders 2007), to large controlled quantitative studies of social, emotional and behavioural gains (for example, Cooper & Whitebread 2007), to large controlled studies which also included quantitative measures of academic attainment (Reynolds, MacKay & Kearney 2009). Over the same period a wider interest has developed in nurture in education at a more general level, with the effects of a school nurture group on school organisation and ethos leading to the idea of the 'nurturing school' (Lucas 1999) and attempts to evaluate this concept using quality indicators (Glasgow City Council 2011). There have also been reports of alternative structures to nurture groups within schools, designed to provide for pupils with different needs or to address contexts where a nurture group was not seen to be the answer (for example, King & Chantler 2002). At the same time there has been a significant expansion of research on evidence-based therapies, including the raising of specific concerns regarding the evidence for various attachment therapies for children with a more severe level of need (Chaffin et al 2006).

In these circumstances two things become clear. First, there is a need for a coherent model that may be applied to the field of nurture in education, embracing the importance of nurture groups as an evidence-based intervention, but also encompassing a much wider range of interventions both at a more severe level of need and as a universal application of benefit to all children and young people. Second, there is a need for a coherent research agenda to correspond with such a model and to provide a basis for a programme of research at all levels of the model. It is these two

requirements that this paper seeks to address in providing a template for future directions in the field of nurture in education.

### When nurture groups are not feasible

Despite the contribution nurture groups can make to addressing the needs of vulnerable children and young people, there are situations where it is not feasible to provide them. Two such situations are outlined here: rural schools with low density populations and other areas where there is an insufficient pool of target children.

In relation to rural schools with low density populations, this may be illustrated by the example of Argyll & Bute Council, where the author undertakes a contract for the psychological service. It is the second largest Council area in Scotland by land size and has more coastline than the whole of France. However, it is the third smallest Council in Scotland by population density. There are 74 primary schools with an average roll of 31. Many schools have a single figure population. This situation has parallels not only in the rest of Scotland, where 20 per cent of primary schools have fewer than 50 pupils, but also in England and Wales where over 1,000 primary schools have fewer than 50 pupils.

In relation to other areas where there is an insufficient pool of target children, the example may be given of East Dunbartonshire where the author has provided services at other times. It is the wealthiest local authority in Scotland, and most schools are similar in size to the large Glasgow schools that formed the sample for the Reynolds et al (2009) study.

This raises significant issues for traditional nurture group models, which are best suited to school populations with sufficient numbers of vulnerable children and young people to constitute a nurture group within the school's own pupil intake. However, what happens to the child who is the only individual in the school needing a nurture group? Consortium arrangements may be proposed in which children are transported each day to a selected school to be

part of a nurture group, but this raises issues regarding how a child is fully included as part of the school and as part of the local community. In some rural areas the distances involved would require very lengthy travel times. This raises both economic and practical issues in addition to wider questions about the extent to which such arrangements are equivalent to the usual structure of nurture groups and their identity with the host school as the establishment to which the child belongs and where full inclusion in mainstream classes is later expected to take place.

This points to the need for a consideration of alternative structures to nurture groups in situations where they are not feasible, and also to the need for a research agenda as to which structures are most effective in meeting the needs of children and young people in these circumstances.

### **When nurture groups are not enough: the needs of the most vulnerable**

Some children with attachment disorders or similar needs at a severe level require additional specialised interventions that would normally be beyond the scope of a nurture group to provide. The report of the APSAC task force on attachment therapy, reactive attachment disorder and attachment problems (Chaffin et al 2006), which was endorsed both by the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children and by the American Psychological Association, stressed that both assessment and intervention for attachment problems at this level require the type of expertise found among mental health professionals with specific experience of working in this field. In terms of therapeutic interventions, it was noted that many characteristics of effective attachment interventions are the same characteristics found among effective child interventions in general. These include caregiver qualities such as environmental stability, parental sensitivity, responsiveness to children's physical and emotional needs, consistency, a safe and predictable environment and a patient, non-threatening and nurturing approach. In their meta-analysis of attachment interventions in early childhood Bakermans-Kranenburg, van Ijzendoorn & Juffer (2003) identified common characteristics found among the most successful approaches and noted that those which most increased parental sensitivity were also the most effective in improving children's attachment security. Shorter term, focused and goal-directed interventions that included both fathers and mothers yielded better results than broad-based and longer term interventions.

In their position statement, the APSAC task force recommended that assessment should include samples of behaviour across situations and contexts (Chaffin et al., 2006). It should not be limited to problems in relationships with parents or primary caretakers but should include information regarding the child's interactions with multiple caregivers, such as teachers and peers. Intervention services should be founded on the core principles suggested by attachment theory, including caregiver and environmental stability, child safety, patience, sensitivity, consistency and nurturance. They should be based on shorter term, goal-directed, focused, behavioural interventions targeted at increasing parental sensitivity and should involve both fathers and mothers where possible.

To provide an example of the application of these principles to

addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children, for the purposes of this paper the author interviewed Sue Reynolds, lead author of the Reynolds et al (2009) study, who is a psychologist and therapist working in the field of attachment within both educational and clinico-legal contexts. There were two circumstances in relation to the child she describes which determined that his severe needs were not going to be addressed through a nurture group. The first was that he attended a school in a rural area where geographical factors relating to population density precluded the possibility of a nurture group. The second was that even if he had been in an area where there was a nurture group, his needs were of a type that demanded a specialist level of individual input that would not normally be available to nurture group staff working within education authorities.

A detailed excerpt from the interview is provided in Appendix 1. By way of summary, a description is given of a six-year-old boy with a significant insecure attachment disorder who had been referred by the Court in a family law action. His needs had to be addressed urgently and with a high level of expertise to prevent breakdown of both his home and his school placement. As a result of skilled, short-term intervention with parents and school, and individual therapeutic work with the child, positive changes were effected at a level that averted placement breakdown and laid a stable foundation for the child's positive future development in both home and school.

There are resource implications for meeting the needs of children at this level of severity. Specialist therapeutic services are required from psychologists or other therapists with skills in attachment interventions, using cognitive behaviour therapy or other evidence-based approaches. However, in terms of cost effectiveness, service provision at the level required costs considerably less than the cost, in the short to medium term, of providing a highly specialised school and residential placement and, in the longer term, of dealing with the outcome of enduring impairments in social, emotional and behavioural functioning. Specialist resources are already available to education authorities and to health boards in the provision of educational and clinical child psychologists. However, there is often a lack within these services of the required level of expertise in terms of attachment disorders and attachment interventions.

Within the UK, further opportunities for delivering psychological therapies have also been created by the expansion in the number of therapists trained in cognitive behaviour therapy and other evidence-based therapists, through the Government's flagship mental health programme for England, No Health Without Mental Health (HM Government 2011), which included a focus on increasing access to psychological therapies. Although the central focus has been on issues of anxiety and depression in adults, the programme has been widened to include children and young people, and to extend the range of mental health issues being addressed. In summary, a commitment to providing the training required within existing services to offer short term, targeted attachment interventions where they are crucially needed would represent a valuable investment in cost benefit terms.

### A model of practice for nurture in education

There is now therefore a need for a coherent model of practice for nurture in education within which nurture groups are located, but which also embraces contexts where nurture groups are not feasible and where the needs of the most vulnerable children require supplementary approaches. It is then necessary to develop a research agenda to map on to that model. MacKay et al (2010) stated that it was 'of crucial importance to investigate different models in comparison with traditional nurture group structures' (p.106). This was partly for economic reasons, as nurture groups are a costly intervention, albeit they are cost-effective for children with a high level of need who might otherwise have required a still higher tariff of specialist provision (Bennathan 1997; Iszatt & Wasilewska 1997). However, for children with needs at a less pronounced level, the economic reality is that education budgets are frequently subject to sudden and often draconian cuts, particularly in times of economic uncertainty. It is therefore important to ensure that the social, emotional, behavioural and academic gains offered by nurture groups are delivered in the most effective and economical way. In addition to the economic arguments it is also necessary to address current gaps in knowledge and practice by establishing clear pathways for a coherent research programme for nurture in education.

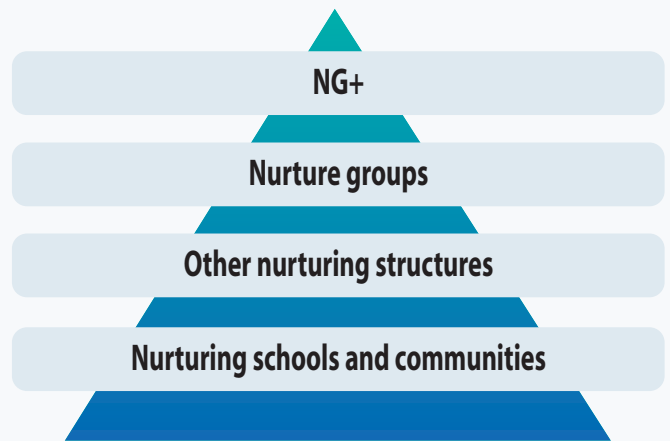
MacKay et al (2010) proposed a model of practice aimed at encompassing the needs of vulnerable children and young people, not all of whom would have sufficiently pronounced issues to need to attend a nurture group. This was intended to serve as a guideline in supporting education authorities to best meet the needs of such children and was based on three levels. For those whose needs were not severe it was expected that they could be catered for within their mainstream classes provided there was a sufficiently nurturing educational environment, with scope for additional support within the classroom as required. For those at the next level, who could not be fully accommodated in mainstream classrooms, a range of possible supports offering more structure within the school setting was proposed. For those with needs at the level of severity originally described by Boxall it was proposed that they should have support of the type offered by a classic nurture group.

It is proposed in this paper that the principles underpinning that model may be developed further to provide a coherent overall model for nurture in education. In order to be fully comprehensive two additional issues need to be addressed beyond considering those with needs at nurture group level or in a less severe range.

First, structured proposals need to be made for those described above whose needs are so great that a nurture group is not enough. Second, there needs to be more explicit recognition that the concept of nurture in education is of a universal nature and should involve a stated commitment to addressing the needs of all children and young people and not just those who are vulnerable.

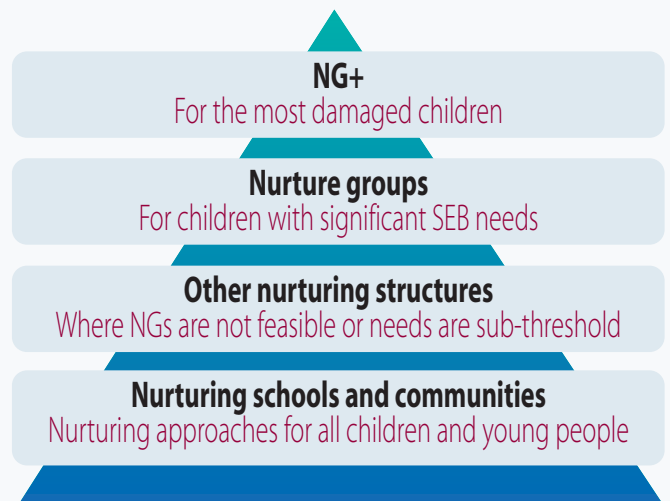
**Figure 1** shows a proposal for a comprehensive model, using a pyramidal structure based on level of severity.

**Figure 1: A model for nurture in education**



This addresses nurture in education at four levels, with the universal provision of 'nurturing schools and communities' at the first level at the bottom of the pyramid, with differentiated provision described as 'other nurturing structures' at the second level and with nurture groups at the third. These three levels correspond to those previously outlined by MacKay et al (2010). To that is added a fourth level of 'nurture group plus', to indicate the level of provision with the highest intensity. **Figure 2** indicates which children and young people would represent the target population for each level of provision.

**Figure 2: Target populations for different nurturing structures**



At level one, in addition to schools and communities that aim to address those whose needs are least severe, but who may still require some additional classroom support, there is explicit recognition that nurturing principles should be of universal application to all educational contexts, and that they are likely to be of benefit to all children irrespective of whether or not they are seen to be vulnerable. At level two it is necessary to have alternative provisions for children who are educated in contexts where it is not feasible to have nurture groups. In addition, there is a need for alternative approaches for children and young people whose needs are not at the threshold of requiring provision at the level of intensity of a classic nurture group, but who nevertheless are not able to cope fully with the demands of the mainstream classroom. Nurture groups are located at level three, and their target

population is already well defined in terms of the criteria by which their needs are assessed. Finally, at level four are the children and young people who have sustained the greatest degree of psychological damage and whose needs are most severe. They require provision at the level of a classic nurture group where available, but they also require specialised mental health interventions.

This model then provides a template on the basis of which a research agenda for nurture in education may be developed, with the key research needs being mapped on to each of the four levels.

**Figure 3** seeks to provide a starting point for such a research agenda.

**Figure 3: A research agenda for nurture in education**



## A research agenda for nurture in education

### Level 1: Nurturing schools and communities

The resurgence of interest in nurture groups in the late 1990s and their subsequent widespread development led to an examination of some of the underlying concepts and the promotion of a wider vision of the 'nurturing classroom' or the 'nurturing school'. However, the idea in itself is not new. Landsman (1979) wrote about creating a nurturing classroom environment, and although she was speaking mainly of older students she noted that her ideas grew from her own experiences of kindergarten, where fear of her first teacher had made her physically ill, while a new teacher helped her to feel good about school and about herself and to start learning. However, it was Lucas (1999) who promoted the idea of the 'nurturing school', noting that 'when the principles inherent in the Nurture Group approach to teaching and learning are applied more widely in mainstream schools which have a clear curriculum focus, teaching becomes more effective' (p.14). The concept was based on valuing not only the pupils but also staff and parents and seeking to understand and respect them as unique individuals, placing their personal development as the highest priority. Indeed, the idea was sufficiently inclusive to define relationships in the family, the group and the wider community as being 'integral to the educational process' (p.14). This theme was further developed by Doyle (2001,

2003, 2004), who wrote of spreading nurture group principles and practices into mainstream classrooms, and by Binnie and Allen (2008), who noted that schools with a nurture group reported an improved school ethos and an increased capacity to support children with social and emotional difficulties.

Cooper and Whitebread (2007), referring to the fact that the 'nurturing school' may still not be able to cater effectively for certain pupils who do well in the nurture group and then return to mainstream classes, spoke of 'the need for mainstream classrooms to be reconceptualised in a way that is informed by an understanding of educational nurturing' (p.189). Some attempts have been made to formalise a reconceptualisation of this kind. These have largely grown out of existing successful practice in nurture groups and the broader application of nurturing principles to the whole school environment. Doyle (2003, 2004) provided a template for a 'social development curriculum' for mainstream classes. The success of nurture groups in Glasgow led to the production of *How Nurturing is Our School? (HNIOS)* (Glasgow City Council, 2011), a self-evaluation tool based on nurturing principles. This provided quality indicators utilising an established evaluation framework used throughout Scottish schools (HMIE 2007).

However, there has been little by way of direct research into the actual effectiveness of applying nurturing principles to a whole-school context. Doyle (2003) provides a persuasive account of how the school where she worked as nurture group teacher was transformed from being described by Her Majesty's Inspectorate as 'a wasteland of violent and disruptive behaviour', 'a bear-pit' and having 'a deeply entrenched school ethos of directionless, unmotivated and underachieving classes' to obtaining a positive Ofsted report three or four years later. The central contribution of the nurture group and the embedding of a culture of nurture throughout the school was clear. However, this was in some ways an exceptional case of a school that required to be placed in 'special measures' and in which there were major issues relating to school leadership. What is now required is more general investigation of the effectiveness of applying nurturing principles with a view to identifying the specific features that contribute most successfully to outcome variance.

### Level 2: Other nurturing structures

A range of additional structures designed to be of a nurturing nature as an alternative to remaining full-time in mainstream classes is described in the literature. These include 'nurture corners', a number of which have been set up in nursery schools in Glasgow. These are dedicated spaces where children have the opportunity for more intensive interaction with nursery practitioners. Evaluation by Stephen, Stone, Burgess, Daniel and Smith (2014) indicated that in the experience of parents and educators, time spent in a nurture corner can support children to overcome language and communication difficulties, develop appropriate social skills and begin to regulate their own behaviour and expressions of emotion. Several cross-age studies in primary schools have been reported. Spalding (2000) reported on a small pilot initiative that shared common aims with nurture groups and that offered primary school children a 'Quiet Place', a room within the school with soft furnishings and items designed to promote a sense of peace and

relaxation. Children could attend for an agreed number of sessions using a holistic therapeutic approach over a six-week period, with parents invited to attend also. Positive reports were obtained from parents and school staff, but quantitative results did not reach significance level in comparison with controls. However, a subsequent larger study with 54 children showed significant gains for the children participating (Renwick & Spalding 2002). Similarly, King and Chantler (2002) reported positive results in a small study without controls using a 'Quiet Room' staffed by a suitably experienced half-time support assistant. The children admitted had significant emotional and behavioural issues and required a nurturing approach, but this was not because of a lack of early nurturing but from other issues such as divorce and bereavement. Cullen-Powell and Barlow (2005) delivered a programme aimed at 'promoting inner stillness', with a small intervention sample of nine children. Gains were shown by the intervention group compared with a matched non-intervention group following 45-minute sessions each week over a school term. Cheney, Schlösser, Nash and Glover (2014) conducted a systematic review of UK group-based interventions in schools designed to promote emotional well-being. Of 16 papers selected, nine were nurture group studies. Nurture groups were the most extensively researched intervention and showed positive emotional gains, with results of alternative interventions being less clear. However, the review clearly highlighted the need for a higher quality research agenda for all programmes of this kind. Problems with the studies reviewed included inadequate descriptions of the intervention, lack of assessment of programme implementation and failure to report all outcomes. The reviewers concluded that while many UK schools are providing services to support pupils' well-being, programmes are currently delivered on an understanding of best practice extrapolated from guidelines rather than on scientific knowledge of effectiveness. A coherent research agenda is therefore required to identify the types of structure and programme components that may most effectively meet the need for nurture in contexts where nurture groups are not feasible.

### Level 3: Nurture groups

The evidence for the beneficial effects of nurture groups has developed through increasing levels of formality over a period exceeding 40 years. It was the success of two experimental nurture groups in 1970 that led to their spread throughout the Inner London Education Authority during the following two decades (Boxall 2002). An analysis of retrospective data by Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997) pointed to encouraging outcomes for nurture group children in terms of later school placements, and indicated that the groups were cost effective when set against placement outcomes in two comparable schools without nurture groups. Since that time one systematic review (Hughes & Schlösser 2014) and several individual studies have consistently reported a range of positive results, both without control groups (Binnie & Allen 2008; O'Connor & Colwell 2002; Shaver & McClatchey 2013) and with control groups (Cooper, Arnold & Boyd 2001; Cooper & Whitebread 2007; Gerrard 2005; Reynolds et al 2009; Sanders 2007; Scott & Lee 2009; Seth-Smith, Levi, Pratt, Fonagy & Jaffey 2010).

The focus of most nurture group research has been on social,

emotional and behavioural gains. Later studies introduced reference to cognitive and educational impacts, but without formal measures of these. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) referred to improvements associated with 'cognitive engagement in learning tasks' based on the Boxall Profile strand of 'organisation of experience', which includes features such as 'connects up experiences' and 'engages cognitively with peers' (Boxall & Bennathan 1998), but no comparison with controls was available to isolate nurture group effects from improvements over time. Sanders (2007) and Binnie and Allen (2008) reported favourable impressions by teachers on academic progress of nurture group children.

In a large-scale, controlled study across 32 schools, Reynolds et al (2009) used a formal measure of academic attainment, a baseline assessment of early literacy skills (MacKay 1999) which had proved to be a sensitive instrument of change in other large-scale research studies (MacKay 2006, 2007). Children in nurture groups showed significant gains in comparison with controls. This was of particular relevance to the status of nurture groups as an attachment intervention. There is an established relationship between attachment and academic achievement. This has been demonstrated for all age groups from the primary school stage through to school leaving age and beyond (Jacobsen, Edelstein & Hofmann 1994; Pianta & Harbers 1996; Teo, Carlson, Mathieu, Egeland & Stroufe 1996). This is wider than attachment to a primary caregiver but applies also to secondary attachments to teachers (Learner & Kruger 1997) and to peers (Marcus & Sanders-Reio 2001). However, there remains an absence of randomised controlled trials, comparing nurture groups not only with non-intervention controls but also with different types of intervention. The difficulties of conducting randomised controlled trials in educational settings is recognised, and they are not exclusive as a source of evidence-based practice. However, until such trials have been successfully conducted nurture groups will be seen as falling short of widely accepted standards for 'well established' interventions (Silverman & Hinshaw 2008).

Many of the key aspects of nurture groups still require to be systematically investigated. These include the effects of class size, the key components of teacher behaviour (for example, Bani 2011; Colwell & O'Connor 2003), the nature of parental involvement (for example, Kirkbride 2014) and the longer-term outcomes for children placed in nurture groups compared with others at a similar level of need. Further research is also needed on the age at which children are admitted to a nurture group. In relation to primary schools, Scott and Lee (2009) in a cross-age study reported gains for children admitted to nurture groups in the first three years of primary schooling but not for those admitted later. However, this was a small study with only 10 children admitted in the later years. The study of nurture groups in secondary schools is still in its infancy and supported only by a few descriptive and exploratory accounts with no controls (Colley 2009; Cooke, Yeomans & Parkes 2008; Garner & Thomas 2011; Kourmoulaki 2013).

A further key issue in terms of both cost effectiveness and being closer to inclusive practices in keeping children as closely linked to the mainstream as possible, is the question of part-time nurture groups as opposed to the 'classic' full-time model. In the study by Binnie and Allen (2008) the maximum attendance at nurture group

was four mornings a week and, while their study was a small one (36 children across six schools), they argued that 'this model offers a greater degree of inclusion within schools without compromising the gains in functioning for the children involved and the benefits afforded to schools demonstrated in previous research' (p.203). Certainly, Boxall herself (2002) emphasised that 'school-based provision for disturbed and distressed children ranges from part-time individual support in the mainstream class to full-time help' in the nurture group (p.191), depending on level of need, but there remain issues in determining what the differential thresholds of need actually are. Hughes and Schlösser (2014) concluded that there did not appear to be significant differences between classic and part-time nurture groups in terms of effectiveness.

#### **Level 4: Nurture groups plus**

Research into psychological therapies both for adults and, to a much lesser extent, for children has increased significantly in recent years, and specific therapies have been identified as having the best evidence base for a range of specific disorders (see, for example, the review by the Australian Psychological Society 2010). Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) has a strong evidence base as an effective intervention for addressing a wide range of issues in children and adolescents (see, for example, Chapman, Forman & Beck 2006; Hoffman, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer & Fang 2013). Its underlying principles, as well as the common features of other evidence-based therapies, provide a starting point for attachment interventions, together with expertise in relation to attachment theory itself. However, while the evidence base for therapy in general is a robust one, there is much more limited academic evidence specifically relating to attachment. This is clearly highlighted in the APSAC report (Chaffin et al 2006) and in the systematic review by Bakermans-Kranenburg et al (2003). The review by Cornell and Hamrin (2008) concluded that 'there are few studies addressing therapeutic interventions for attachment disorder' (p.35). A particularly concerning feature of the lack of good evidence for attachment interventions has been the rise of controversial and at times harmful theories and interventions without any evidential support. Much of the APSAC report is devoted to addressing these issues, to the extent that six out of its seven recommendations on treatment focus wholly or partly on what should not be done rather than on what should be done. There are programmes available that draw from established theoretical frameworks and some of these, such as the approach developed by Hughes (2004) referred to above, have been found to have considerable clinical utility. However, the challenge for attachment interventions is to move on from agreed good practice to the establishment of an evidence base.

## **CONCLUSION**

**The spread of nurture groups throughout the UK, the development of alternative interventions for addressing emotional and behavioural wellbeing and the wider issues relating to nurture in education renders it imperative that a coherent model of practice should be available. The pyramidal model offered here covers the field of nurture in education at four levels, ranging from universal applications in nurturing schools and communities to addressing the needs of the children and young people with the most severe level of difficulties. The research agenda outlined in relation to each of the four levels seeks to provide a basis for developing a coherent research programme for nurture in education.**



## REFERENCES

- Australian Psychological Society (2010). Evidence-based psychological interventions in the treatment of mental disorders: A literature review. (3rd Edn). Melbourne: Author.
- Bakermans-Kranenburg, M, van Ijzendoorn, M, & Juffer, F (2003) Less is more: Meta-analysis of sensitivity and attachment interventions in early childhood. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 195-215.
- Bani, M (2011) The use and frequency of verbal and non-verbal praise in nurture groups. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 16(1), 47-67.
- Bennathan, M (1997) Effective intervention in primary schools: What nurture groups achieve. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 2(3), 23-29.
- Bennathan, M & Boxall, M (1998) *The Boxall Profile: Handbook for teachers*. London: Nurture Group Network.
- 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), 201-216.
- Bishop, A & Swain, J (2000) 'The bread, the jam and some coffee in the morning': Perceptions of a nurture group. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 5(3), 18-24.
- Boxall, M (2002) *Nurture groups in school: Principles and practice*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Butler, A, Chapman, J, Forman, E & Beck, A (2006) The empirical status of cognitive-behavioral therapy. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 26, 17-31.
- Chaffin, M, Hanson, R, Saunders, B, Nichols, T, Barnett, D, Zeanah, C, Berliner, L et al (2006) Report of the APSAC task force on attachment therapy, reactive attachment disorder and attachment problems. *Child Maltreatment*, 11(1), 76-89.
- Cheney, G, Schlösser, A, Nash, P & Glover, L (2014) Targeted group-based interventions in schools to promote emotional well-being: A systematic review. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 19(3), 412-438.
- Colley, D (2009) Nurture groups in secondary schools. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 14(4), 291-300.
- Colwell, J & O'Connor, T (2003) Understanding nurturing practices: A comparison of the use of strategies likely to enhance self-esteem in nurture groups and normal classrooms. *British Journal of Special Education*, 30(3), 119-124.
- Cooke, C, Yeomans, J & Parkes, J (2008) The Oasis: Nurture group provision for Key Stage 3 pupils. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 13(4), 291-303.
- Cooper, P, Arnold, R & Boyd, E (2001) The effectiveness of nurture groups: Preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(4), 160-166.
- 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), 171-190.
- Cornell, T & Hamrin, V (2008) Clinical interventions for children with attachment problems. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 21, 35-47.
- Cullen-Powell, L & Barlow, J (2005) Promoting inner stillness: The value of a self-discovery programme for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. *British Journal of Special Education*, 32(3), 138-144.
- Doyle, R (2001) 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.
- Doyle, R (2003) Developing the nurturing school. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 8(4), 252-266.
- Doyle, R (2004) A social development curriculum: Applying nurture group principles and practices to support socially and emotionally vulnerable children within mainstream classrooms. *British Journal of Special Education*, 31(1), 24-30.
- Doyle, R (2005) 'I hate you, please help me': A case study from a classic Boxall nurture group. *Pastoral Care*, 23(1), 3-11.
- 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), 207-224.
- Gerrard, B (2005) City of Glasgow nurture group pilot scheme evaluation. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 10(4), 245-253.
- Glasgow City Council (2011) *How nurturing is our school? (HNIOS)*. Glasgow: Author.
- Golding, K & Hughes, D (2013) *Creating loving attachments: Parenting with PACE to nurture confidence and security in the troubled child*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- HM Government (2011) *No health without mental health*. London: Department of Health.
- HME (2007) *How good is our school? (HGIOS)*. Edinburgh: Author.
- Hoffman, S, Asnaani, A, Vonk, I, Sawyer, A & Fang, A (2012) The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy Research*, 36(5), 427-440.
- Hughes, D (2004) *Building the bonds of attachment: Awakening love in deeply troubled children*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hughes, N & Schlösser, A (2014) The effectiveness of nurture groups: A systematic review. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 19(4), 386-409.
- Iszatt, J & Wasilewska, T (1997) NGs: 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.
- Jacobsen, T, Edelstein, W & Hofmann, V (1994) A longitudinal study of the relation between representations of attachment in childhood and cognitive functioning in childhood and adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 30(1), 112-124.
- King, A & Chantler, Z (2002) The Western Primary School 'Quiet Room' project. *British Journal of Special Education*, 29(4), 183-188.
- Kirkbride, R (2014) 'They were a little family': an exploratory study of parental involvement in nurture groups - from a practitioner and parent perspective. *British Journal of Special Education*, 41(1), 82-104.
- Kourmoulaki, A (2013) Nurture groups in a Scottish secondary school: Purpose, features, value and areas for development. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 18(1), 60-76.
- Landsman, A (1979) Creating a nurturing classroom environment. *Educational Leadership*, 37(3), 259-261.
- Lerner, D & Kruger, L (1997) Attachment, self-concept and academic motivation in high-school students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(3), 485-492.
- Lucas, S (1999) The nurturing school: The impact of nurture group principles and practice on the whole school. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 4(3), 14-19.
- Macdonald, A (2011) *Solution-focused therapy: Theory, research and practice*. London: SAGE.
- MacKay, T (1999) Baseline assessment in Scotland. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 2(1), 81-88.
- MacKay, T (2006) *The West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative: The design, implementation and evaluation of an intervention strategy to raise achievement and eradicate illiteracy. Phase I research report*. Dumbarton: West Dunbartonshire Council.
- MacKay, T (2007) *Achieving the Vision. The final research report of the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative*. Dumbarton: West Dunbartonshire Council.
- MacKay, T, Reynolds, S & Kearney, M (2010) From attachment to attainment: the impact of nurture groups on academic achievement. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(3), 100-110.
- Marcus, R & Sanders-Reio, J (2001) The influence of attachment on school completion. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 16(4), 427-444.
- Moss, E & St-Laurent, D (2001) Attachment at school age and academic performance. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(6), 863-874.
- O'Connor, T & 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 & Harbers, K (1996) Observing mother and child behaviour in a problem-solving situation at school entry: Relations with academic achievement. *Journal of School Psychology*, 34(3), 307-322.
- Renwick, F & Spalding, B (2002) 'A Quiet Place' project: An evaluation of early therapeutic intervention within mainstream schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, 29(3), 144-149.
- 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.
- Scott, K & Lee, A (2009) Beyond the 'classic' nurture group model: An evaluation of part-time and cross-age nurture groups in a Scottish local authority. *Support for Learning*, 24(1), 5-10.
- Seth-Smith, F, Levi, N, Pratt, R, Fonagy, P & Jaffey, D (2010) Do nurture groups improve the social, emotional and behavioural functioning of at risk children? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 27(1), 21-34.
- Shaver, I & McClatchey, K (2013) Assessing effectiveness of nurture groups in Northern Scotland. *Support for Learning*, 28(3), 97-102.
- Silverman, W & Hinshaw, S. (2008). The second special issue on evidence-based psychosocial treatments for children and adolescents: A ten-year update. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 37(1). Whole issue.
- Spalding, B (2000) The contribution of a 'Quiet Place' to early intervention strategies for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, 27(3), 129-134.
- Stephen, C, Stone, K, Burgess, C, Daniel, B & Smith, S (2014). Nurture corners in nurseries: Exploring perspectives on nurture approaches in preschool provision in Glasgow. Glasgow: Glasgow Centre for Population Health.
- Teo, A, Carlson, E, Mathieu, P, Egeland, B & Stroufe, L (1996) A prospective longitudinal study of psychosocial predictors of achievement. *Journal of School Psychology*, 34(3), 285-306.

## APPENDIX 1

# Addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children

An interview with Sue Reynolds

I am going to talk about a child called Michael, age six, a young boy with a significant insecure attachment disorder. This child was referred to me by appointment of the Court in a family law action. It was becoming increasingly clear that he was going to have to leave the family he had been living with since he was two and a half, where his parents were his father and his stepmother. This was because of his extremely challenging behaviour at home. In addition he had very serious behavioural problems in his primary school. The only placement options available to him were a return to his birth mother, from whom he had had to be removed because of lack of care and protection and who had an ambivalent relationship with him. In terms of her being able to offer him any consistent care in the future she was not at all well placed. The only alternative was to seek a foster care placement.

When I became involved I was given the opportunity to carry out three sessions with his family, so very early on I had to decide how I was best going to use that time. What I decided was essential was to build an attachment for this child between himself and his stepmother. His stepmother was a warm and nurturing woman, but had actually been very rejecting of Michael because she had two little children of her own to Michael's father, a four month old baby and a two year old boy. Some of Michael's aggressive behaviour had been so concerning to her that she was really worried that he might get up in the middle of the night and seriously harm her children. This all added to the general feeling of uncertainty about Michael's future within the family. Michael was very much on the margins of the family, and one of the things I had observed early on when I went to the house was, for example, that when Michael came home from school, nobody greeted him except the two year old, who would shout, 'Hello, Michael', but the stepmother and the father did not even greet him with a hug. This was important and something that needed to be dealt with straight away.

The plan I developed was as follows. I started off with a 'psycho-educational' component – the provision of information for both the stepmother and the father. There can be a temptation to assume in a kind of way that people understand what attachment disorder means but, of course, this is not the case. I used a series of videos explaining this in a clear way. Both stepmother and father found this a great relief, and they were very interested to look at the typical difficulties shown by children with attachment disorder. They felt it explained Michael's behaviour very fully, and for the first time I think they were able to step back and view him as a little boy who had had a difficult start in life, which was indeed the case. They began to realise that in some ways they were compounding his difficulties by viewing him just as a badly behaved child.

Each time I went I followed a protocol. The first part of each session was a de-briefing, to find out how Michael had been since I last saw him. That was followed by information for the parents, which would be on basic aspects of attachment disorder. This included using the work of Dan Hughes on 'PACE' – playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (Golding & Hughes 2013; Hughes 2004). The final part of the session with the parents was giving both of them homework to do. That was a very important part, and I would check on how they had carried this out when I came back for the next session.

After I had done the work with the parents I then went to get Michael from school, and the next very important part of the plan was to work with Michael and his stepmother together. I had asked her about behaviours that had particularly worried her over the summer holiday period, and in response she mentioned several behaviours that had really upset her. One of these is used here by way of example. When Michael went out to play with the neighbour's four year old girl he took down her pants and sniffed her bottom. The stepmother was extremely upset about this and it caused a lot of friction between her and her neighbour. This, however, became the beginning of a friendship between them because the stepmother went next door, apologised and said she had recently learned that Michael had an attachment disorder, and

this brought about a much more friendly understanding and relationship between the two of them.

The stepmother told me that if I was going to deal with an event then it was with this issue that she would like me to start. When I brought Michael back from school therefore we immediately got into the position recommended by Dan Hughes, where a child is very physically close to his caregiver and the PACE protocol is then followed. The starting point is playfulness. We went through a little play routine, involving things like counting freckles and tickling. Then, in pursuing the rest of the protocol in relation to acceptance, curiosity and empathy, we got straight into the behaviour itself. This was really interesting because when I spoke to Michael I said, 'Now, we are going to talk about things that make you not such a good boy inside and make you feel worried and upset afterwards'. He immediately looked really anxious. When I mentioned the event itself there were tears rolling down his cheeks and he looked very anxiously at his stepmother.

This is the crucial point of this work, where we are looking at emotional connection, and I was able to say to Michael: 'I'm sure at that time you thought that Mummy [his stepmother] was going to send you home,' and he started crying and said: 'Yes, I did. I thought she would send me away.' This then was an opportunity for his stepmother to engage in repair. She held him close and soothed him. Emotional growth in these circumstances involves concepts about the rupture and repair of a relationship. This was a turning point in this case. From that point we moved on to looking at homework the two of them would do. For example, the father was to spend special time with Michael and the stepmother was to find opportunities to be close physically and also to devote time to him on his own.

On the second visit, I began by speaking to the stepmother again, and she reported a huge change not only in Michael's behaviour but also in her own behaviour. She said she felt far more confident in handling issues as they arise, and in addition she felt closer to Michael. Overall she felt that the situation at home was as good as it could get and she was amazed at the difference.

I then went to the school, where the problems were still very significant. School issues therefore became the focus of the next discussion. Michael was not keen to talk about that, and we went through another tearful episode. I then moved on to using some solution-focused approaches (Macdonald 2011). We did the 'miracle question' ('Suppose that one night, while you are asleep, there is a miracle and everything changes for you. When you wake up in the morning, what will be different that will tell you that the miracle has taken place?..') We talked about what differences we would like to see and who would see it first. An important aspect was that Michael's father used to get very angry with him because he was always late for school, so we agreed that one of the things he would notice was that Michael was in time for school.

On the third and final visit we again began with de-briefing. Both the stepmother and the father reported further marked improvement at home. His father was seen to hug Michael, which he had never done before. One of the crucial things was that the parents had acted on every single suggestion I had made. For example, with children who have an attachment disorder it is of benefit for caregivers to find chores for them to help with and to find other ways of keeping them close. The parents had gone out and had bought some poultry for keeping outside in the garden and Michael was given a sense of ownership of this aspect of things in terms of looking after them.

When I went back to the school I found that there had been a marked improvement. I had given Michael a little 'golden book' and in this he had stars for good behaviour from the school and from his stepmother. Finally, in my last session with Michael I spoke to him about the progress he felt he had made. I also met with his parents for an overview of where we had reached on the journey with Michael. It was, of course, a work in progress, but already the significant foundations had been laid for repairing the attachment and ensuring the security of Michael's home and school placement for the future.

**Postscript:** Over three months after this interview Sue Reynolds received a letter from the parents that stated: 'Michael has come on leaps and bounds. You would not recognise the little boy we have now. He has matured and is very settled and happy both at home and at school.'

# 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](http://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 FIRST 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.

Initially this journal will be 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](mailto:edurne@nurturegroups.org). Please note that all entries are subject to peer review.

### SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS

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

### ORDER FORM

### SUBSCRIPTION OPTIONS PRICES INCLUDING P & P

International Journal of Nurture in Education	<b>A</b> <b>£45</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>B</b> <b>£15</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b> <b>£60</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>D</b> <b>£25</b>	<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](http://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](mailto:melisa@nurturegroups.org)

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION



ISSN 2059-0466

Published by The Nurture Group Network



[www.nurturegroups.org](http://www.nurturegroups.org)

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

## National Office

t 020 3475 8980

e [info@nurturegroups.org](mailto: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