

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION

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What pupils say about their time in nurture group provision

Primary teachers' experiences of the effectiveness of nurture groups on children's social and emotional skills, academic attainment and behaviour.

Supporting quiet, shy and anxious children in the primary school using a targeted nurturing intervention programme called Special Me Time

Nurture in Secondary Schools – what recognition in OFSTED reports?

Nurture Groups and their Staff's Resilience. Experiences of Support and Implications for Practice

An evidence based guide to opening a successful secondary school nurture group

Renfrewshire's nurturing relationships approach: utilising nurturing approaches to support school staff and pupils during Covid-19

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF NURTURE IN EDUCATION

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Aims of the Journal

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

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

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

Review process

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

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

Author guidelines

The call for papers for the Volume 8 of the *International Journal of Nurture in Education* will be open from 1st September to 30th November 2021. A guide for authors wishing to submit their research is accessible at:

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WELCOME

Tristan Middleton, Editor of the *International Journal of Nurture in Education*

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the seventh edition of the *International Journal of Nurture in Education*.

As the new Editor of the *IJNE* I would like to thank Dr Marianne Coleman for all their work in developing the journal to from its first edition in 2015 to its current position as a well-respected contributor to the field of educational research. In addition, I would like to thank Dr Florence Ruby for their support to Marianne, as outgoing Associate editor, and Arti Sharma, Dr Angeliki Kallitsoglou and the other trustees of **nurtureUK** for trusting me to take the *IJNE* forward as Editor. I would also like to thank the Editorial Advisory Board for their positive contributions to the peer review process.

My aim as Editor is to continue to facilitate the sharing of excellent research articles with the wide education community of nurturers, including practitioners, students, academics and anyone with an interest in providing children with the opportunity to flourish and overcome barriers they experience in their lives. I also believe that it is important to nurture the adult nurturers and, as such, I have worked hard to ensure that the submission process for authors is as positive and supportive as possible. I aim to support new academic writers to reach publication in the *IJNE* by providing clear, timely and positive communication and feedback to aspiring authors. As such I invite you to consider contributing to future editions of our journal.

This edition begins with Jenny Edmunds' account of their research into the way in which primary school pupils attending nurture groups view their time within the provision. It is so important to listen to the voices of young people and this paper provides us with themes by which to understand young people's perspectives of the positives and challenges they experience as learners in a nurture group.

The second paper also considers perceptions of nurture group provision, in this case, from the perspective of teachers working with children who had attended a nurture group. Eilidh Macpherson and her colleague from Robert Gordon University report on the narrative accounts provided by the teachers, which offer a broadly positive view of the effectiveness of nurture groups, particularly in the development of emotional and social skills.

In the third paper I present findings from my preliminary research, which offers another perspective, in this case how nurture provision is reflected within

OFSTED reports. This research was limited to consider secondary school OFSTED reports over the period of 1 year. Findings show that nurture as a generic term is broadly used a positive way, however there is a lack of clarity about the use of the term and evaluative judgements about nurture group provision are broadly avoided. Please do contact me if you would be interested in developing this exploratory research to consider a wider range of provision.

Susan Davis presents the findings of her research, with her colleague at Cardiff Metropolitan University, into nurturing support for quiet, shy and anxious children in the fourth paper. This research, taking a collaborative approach with Teacher Education students, evaluated 'Special Me Time', a targeted intervention using nurturing principles. This work highlights the importance of recognising and understanding the unique needs of this group of learners and of finding ways to 'hear' these learners.

The needs of adults working in nurture groups are considered in our fifth paper. Elena Kombou and her colleague from the University of East London consider factors which foster the resilience of nurture group practitioners. They suggest that there is a key role for Educational Psychologists to play in recognising and promoting positive personal and environmental factors in order to promote practitioner resilience.

The sixth paper, from Ruth Carleton and colleagues at the Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service presents their initial findings relating to the impact of changes to their Renfrewshire Nurturing Relationships Approach (RNRA) in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Their action research approach identified the importance of digital and adaptable resources, as well as stress related to the implications of the context of the Covid-19 pandemic are key factors for providers to consider when offering nurturing programmes to schools.

Finally, we have an extended article which is the result of a collaboration between David Colley and the Mulberry Bush Organisation. This paper presents the findings of a research collaboration with nurture practitioners to identify the key elements to be considered when setting up a nurture group provision in a secondary school setting. Findings about prerequisites, operational features and ongoing challenges are identified and the authors also include a summary of considerations, within these three areas, as a short guide to setting up a secondary nurture group.

“IT FEELS LIKE THE WHOLE NURTURE GROUP IS MY FAMILY”: WHAT PUPILS SAY ABOUT THEIR TIME IN NURTURE GROUP PROVISION

Dr Jenny Edmunds

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Keywords: Nurture groups; Pupil views; Identity; Semi-structured interview

ABSTRACT

Nurture groups (NGs) were a provision first conceptualised by Marjorie Boxall in the 1960s. They have since become established in schools to support children who have experienced early attachment difficulties. There is a bank of evidence in support of their benefits to children and some evidence of the positive views of parents and practitioners. However, there is a paucity of research that this study seeks to address to explicitly consider how children view their time in the NG.

Sixteen participants at Key Stage 2 (between 7 and 10 years of age) attending ‘classic-style’ NGs were involved in the study. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule and prompt activities, such as photographs and their own completed work. The transcribed data was coded and categorised using thematic analysis.

The themes identified were developed into a model of ‘*becoming*’ and ‘*being*’ a ‘preferred self’. External factors and problem identity were further classification themes.

These findings could be used as a lens by which to understand the needs of children attending NGs, and the methods by which to support these. Further research could focus on the relevance of these findings to a wider range of students.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s nurture group (NG) interventions have become established in schools across the UK. A literature search examined the impact of NGs with particular focus on the notion of ‘pupil voice’. There is a paucity of published papers exploring pupil views in relation to their NG experiences. This study aimed to elicit pupils’ views using appropriate methods, in order to understand what children value about their NG experiences and to give them agency and empowerment to be heard. Attachment theory is the underpinning theoretical basis for the development of NGs and this review also examines the influences of this theory.

1.1 Attachment theory

The theory of ‘attachment’ provides the psychological foundation on which NG practice is based. This theory was initially developed by John Bowlby during his work with ‘maladjusted’ boys in the 1930s. Bowlby advocated a principle

of ‘monotropy’ where a child has an innate need to attach to a main attachment figure, which informs future relationships and influences wider psychological development. Further research and literature from a variety of disciplines support this theory and the notion that early relationships and experiences affect psychological health and wellbeing in adulthood (eg Bowlby, 1973; Cortina & Marrone, 2003; Slater, 2007).

The process of attachment is considered to provide the foundation for a number of competencies, such as emotional regulation, attention and behaviour (Kinniburgh et al., 2005), emotional and behavioural problems, delayed cognitive development and lower rates of self-esteem and self-worth (Geddes, 2006; Bomber, 2007). Work by Sroufe (1983, 1986) and Waters et al. (1979) provides some evidence that early attachment experiences can impact on behavioural organisation in the learning situation.

Geddes (2006) translates this theory into the

classroom setting, where she suggests that the teacher and classroom represent the educational 'safe base'. She details a notion of the 'learning triangle' that occurs between a pupil, teacher and task. Not only is trust an issue for classroom success, which allows children to test their boundaries in a safe and appropriate way but also social confidence and skill which would enable them to generalise across situations. Features of a classroom, including predictability, structure and safety, have the potential to minimise the negative impact of an insecure early attachment experience, or to exacerbate it in the contrasting state. This renders the educational setting a dominant factor in the child's experience once they reach school age.

1.2 Nurture groups

NGs were first created by educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall, in the 1960s. The intervention, based on the theory of attachment, targeted pupils who had missed out on these early attachment experiences. Boxall (2002) detailed that 'the mother is the first teacher' and the NG experience is designed to provide a restorative forum for children who had experienced a diminished early learning opportunity

with their own parent. NGs were intended to enhance the positive nurture experiences for the children rather than substitute for an early lack of these and consisted of small class groups within a larger school community. Boxall (2002) makes explicit links between the context of early childhood experiences in the home and the recreated structures in the NG.

Boxall (2002) set out criteria that would reflect a classic NG style. These criteria included a range of 10 to 12 pupils who register with their mainstream class and attend at least one afternoon session a week, increasing during the reintegration period. There should be two adults present (typically a teacher and support assistant). The daily routine is explicit, uniform and predictable; structured in line with the standard school day. Activities are recommended to be at a baby and toddler level, as well as activities that lead into the foundation stage and KS1 level of the National Curriculum. The room should be furnished to reflect both the home and school environments and is 'comfortable and welcoming, containing and protected' (p11). There should be a formal dining experience, most commonly breakfast. Playtimes should be held with pupils' mainstream peers and the targets for each student to work towards should be devised from the 'Boxall Profile®' combined with educational assessments.

Formal training for NGs continues to be provided by nurtureUK and involves a four-day certified course cited in much of the literature (eg Binnie & Allen,

2008; Cooper & Whitebread, 2007, Scott & Lee, 2009).

1.3 Pupils' views of their time in an NG

Despite the wealth of information and research on the impact of NGs and various aspects of their functioning, very little has focused specifically on the pupils' view of their time in the NG provision. A number of studies have touched on the pupil view as a by-product or subtheme of a larger study (eg Garner & Thomas, 2011; Sanders, 2007; Shaver & McClatchy, 2013) or consideration of attitudes or relationships between parent and child (eg Pyle & Rae, 2015). However, the research relating to pupils' views either lacks depth or does not focus on views of the provision. The only published studies that have specifically set out to study the impact of the NG experience from the child perspective are Griffiths et al. (2014) and Cefai and Pizzuto (2017).

The Griffiths study explored the views of a set of pupils who were currently involved in an NG provision within a school in a deprived area of Wales. Pupil views were gathered through activities presented to a focus group consisting of eight pupils from the KS2 cohort. The responses given by the students were analysed and categorised broadly into the themes of environment, learning, self-regulatory behaviour and relationships. The scale of this study limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised. However, these headings highlight some important issues surrounding the purpose of NG provision and may provide important messages about crucial components impacting on the pupils attending such provision and who are experiencing social and emotional difficulties.

The Cefai and Pizzuto (2017) study was also limited by taking participants from two NGs only (one with pupils aged 4 to 6 years and one with pupils aged 6 to 7 years) within one single school setting in Malta. The NGs only ran for four hours a week and the data was gathered by the NG practitioners through focus group activities involving cutting and sticking pictures.

This paper reported the themes of toys and games, relationships, food and breakfast, and 'feel good activities' as important to the students and although the NG could be viewed as a 'variant' model (Scott & Lee, 2009) the limited time that students spent in the NG identifies it as more of an intervention group than a model of provision. Although the findings summarised so far, go some way to understanding what is important to the students within a single NG, there is a need to explore further, both why these features are important to the students, and how comprehensive these findings can be across a wider number of NG provisions.

2.0 METHODS

2.1 Research design

To address the central question of 'What do pupils say about their time in NG provision?' a semi-structured interview schedule was considered to be an appropriate method of data collection, heavily influenced by approaches frequently used by psychologists to explore pupil views, such as personal construct psychology (Ravenette, 1999) and narrative approaches (Wong, 2008; Lunn-Brownlee et al., 2002).

Activities used to engage the students and structure the conversation included the use of photograph prompts and discussing the pupils' work with them. The discussion points targeted through each activity were those of the relationships that students have with significant adults and peers in school, the school environment and their learning experiences. These were designed to build on the findings of the study by Griffiths et al. (2014) that identified the areas of environment, learning, relationships and self-reflection as being significant to students attending NG provision. A pilot study was completed to test the interview schedule and it was adapted accordingly, specifically removing questions that included an assumption of difficulties for the student.

In an attempt to explore themes that were current across all the groups and participants involved, the use of thematic analysis was considered an appropriate method by which to analyse the data gathered. This process followed the stages of analysis detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and involved initial coding of data and subsequent organisation of codes into themes that were merged into a final summary of findings.

A number of possible approaches or ways to organise the data were considered. However, the initial codes were arranged into themes related to identity and sense of belonging, to link to the research questions and previous literature. This also reflects the social constructionist stance adopted throughout this study, asserting that each individual has their own unique view of events. Further categorisation into subthemes was considered and clusters of themes were given overarching superordinate theme labels.

2.2 Participating cohort

Due to the reliance on verbal means by which to gather data, it was considered that younger students may struggle with the discussion items. Consequently, pupils currently attending Key Stage 2 NG provisions in primary schools were identified as potential participants. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study

when interpreting the results in relation to Key Stage 1 or secondary aged students. In an attempt to expand the data set, four pupils from four separate NGs were considered an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study. Of the two groups with only four students attending, all the students were interviewed. Within the other two groups, students were selected based on their gender or ethnic status in an attempt to broaden the cohort range. Remaining students were then selected based on their language skills, maturity or ability to engage with verbal discourse. These judgements were made through discussion with the NG practitioners. The participating cohort consisted of 13 males and 3 females with a mean age of 9 years 6 months (with a range of 7 years 11 months to 10 years 2 months).

Participating NGs fitting as closely as possible to the 'classic' model were targeted, where the following criteria were applied: The NG was functioning with two adults, at least one of whom had attended NG practitioner training: it had been running for at least four sessions a week, (a session being at least a half day period): the pupils had been attending the group for at least six months: the group functioned as an integral part of the school and there were at least four pupils in the group. Although the 'classic' model identifies a group size of 10–12 students (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2007), this is considered to be an arbitrary group number, without an evidence base for justification. In the area where this study was sampled, many of the groups had a lower group number.

Although all the NGs involved in the study had been running with the same cohort of students since the start of the academic year and for at least eight months, in some cases there had been more recent changes of staff within the NG. Three NGs running within one large rural county were identified through practitioner groups, which were support meetings attended by the staff running the groups and led by the Educational Psychology Service. All practitioners who were approached agreed to participate in the project. One of the NGs was situated in a rural part of the authority and two were on the outskirts of a larger city. A fourth NG was identified via a national NG support group on a social networking site where a practitioner responded to a request for participants. This fourth NG was from a smaller unitary authority and the NG was situated on the outskirts of a large city. At the time of data collection, two groups only had four pupils attending, although one had transitioned three more pupils back into full time mainstream education. The other two groups had 10 pupils in each.

2.3 Design

The activities accompanying the semi-structured interviews were linked to aspects of the students' experiences in school and were designed to aid and direct discussion. The first involved looking at photographs of adults in school and exploring students' relationships with the adults, primarily by asking them to identify which ones were important. The second activity was the same in nature but involved looking at photographs of other pupils in their class. The photographs were used as prompts only and in an attempt to minimise assumptions around who might be important to the students in school, participants were invited to think of other adults or pupils they considered to be important to them but were not included in the photographs. These were written down on an additional prompt card as a representation, so that participants could refer to them with equal importance.

The third activity explored pupils' experiences of the environment through the use of photographs of places around the school and asking pupils to rate their favourite places. Finally, students were asked to look through some of their work completed in class and in the NG to identify pieces they felt proud of. This aided discussion around the pupils' views of themselves as a learner.

2.4 Procedure

Information sheets were sent out to participating schools, including information for head teachers, parents and pupils. As the interview topic was not considered to be emotionally upsetting or sensitive in nature, 'opt out' consent was a preference for participant involvement and ethical consent had been agreed from the University Research Ethics Committee on this basis. Previous literature concerned with gaining pupil views has also described difficulty in gaining consent from the parents of 'hard to find' students (O'Connor et al., 2011) and opt out consent therefore removed this barrier. Education and educational provision from the perspective of the child is an area of particular importance especially with reference to the rights of the child (The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, 1989), current legislation (Children and Families Act, 2014) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). As such, it was considered more important to gain consent from the participating students than signed parental consent, although parents were entitled to remove their children from the project through the 'opt out' process.

A date was agreed with settings and all four students from each provision were interviewed on the same day within the school. Necessary

photographic prompts were either obtained by the researcher or provided by the NG practitioner and pupils' work was made available by the NG practitioners.

Participants were introduced to the interviewer by the NG practitioner and interviews took place in a quiet room within the school. The pupil information sheet was revisited with the pupils and they gave their signed consent to participate in the study. Participants were reminded that they could leave at any time and did not need to give a reason for doing so. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, the questions were used as a guide only, although generally did not deviate much from the script. Interviews, which were audio recorded, took between 18 and 32 minutes to complete. Participants were thanked for their co-operation and invited to ask any questions before the interviews were ended. Interviews were later transcribed for analysis.

The research study design was developed with consideration of the standards outlined in the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2006), Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014) and HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016). The key principles outlined in the Code of Human Research Ethics include scientific integrity, social responsibility and maximising benefit and minimising harm. These were heeded during all phases of the study.

3.0 RESULTS

The data was analysed using the stages of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Atlas TI software was utilised to support with this process and the first stage of data immersion identified 58 initial codes. Data bytes were often given several code labels and as such, some of the data ultimately linked with more than one thematic heading.

The initial codes were considered for commonality and the second stage of the process involved merging or re-naming several codes, resulting in 47 codes.

These codes were organised into themes that were matched against the initial data identifiers in order to ensure accuracy of meaning in the data.

3.1 Theme organisation

The notion of 'identity' links with the concept of an internal working model, which is an important feature of attachment theory on which the NG model is founded. As such, the concept of identity was used as a perspective by which to interpret and organise the final code categories. Additionally, the relevance of this category organisation was decided on with respect to Griffiths et al. (2014) and Billington's

(2012) previous work acknowledging the importance of relationships in NGs and the John-Akinola et al. (2013) study suggesting the importance of belonging for students attending school. Consequently, the categories and superordinate organisational model selected links with the notion of identity. A miscellaneous category was used to allow for codes that did not fit easily into either of these categories and was later themed as 'external influences'. It was necessary to then subdivide the categories into subordinate headings relating to identity.

The terms 'problem identity' and 'preferred identity' relate to literature in the field of narrative therapy. Chow (2015) summarises that: 'narrative therapy includes three core components: deconstructing problem-saturated stories, co-constructing alternative stories and thickening alternative stories.' (Chow, 2015, p317) Additionally, Polkinghorne (1996) explains: 'In the dominant story, people are passive and under the control of the problematic parts of their selves.' (Polkinghorne, 1996, p366). In view of the life experiences that children attending NG provision are likely to have encountered, the terms 'problem identity' and 'preferred identity' for descriptive categories when organising the initial codes were considered to be appropriate.

This stage of the process revealed a majority of codes falling into the category of 'preferred identity' and further consideration of these codes led to a decision to subdivide this category into themes of 'becoming' [the preferred identity] and 'being' [the preferred identity]. These subthemes were chosen in an attempt to conceptualise the impact of the NG experience on the process of developing a more positive self-identity and were identified by studying the codes that fitted into the theme of 'preferred identity' and consideration of how they could be organised in a manner that would make thematic sense. For example, codes such as 'challenge', 'empathy', 'future aspirations' and 'making choices' were considered to relate to possibilities or aspirations, rather than established behaviours. Codes such as 'adult approval', 'meeting needs', 'respect' and 'rewards' appeared to reflect an actual way of being in relation to current behaviours.

3.2 CODE AND THEME ORGANISATION

The codes were organised into the following thematic structure and relate to the data presented in the following sections:

Table 1: Theme organisation

Misc (later themed as external factors)	Problem identity
Focus on learning Contextual Links with mainstream class / Wider community / Holistic view / Group size Reinforcers Physical space / Physical activity/ Equipment / resources Environmental	Family difficulties / Negative emotions / Dealing with conflict / Social exclusion Unlovable Disruption / Apprehensive Managing expectations
Becoming preferred self	Being preferred self
Belonging (Identity) / shared interests Modelling / recognising possibilities Strategies for /Overcoming difficulties / Play / Repairing relationships / Helping / Enabling / Mediation / Open and honest Feedback and practice Recognising difficulties / self-reflection / Familiarity / Reliable / social rules / Challenge / Manageable workload / Need to be listened to / Future aspirations / Empathy / Making choices (control??) Exploring possibilities	Achievement / Adult approval / Respect/ Peer approval / Rewards / Kindness / Meeting needs Valuable Calm / relaxed / thinking space / Comfort / Caring / Enjoyable / Mood enhancing Contented Family support / Relationships / team work / peer support / Positive self-image / Independent learning / Progress in learning / resilience in learning Capable

3.2.1 Being preferred self

This theme related to positive remarks made by participants about their time in school or the NG and what is involved to achieve this. It encompassed themes characterised by the concept of being a way that gave pupils a sense of identity that was positive and pro-social.

Participant 6: "Well, like, I think I'm here because, well it's not really me that discussed to put it in here, it's my mum and (Family Liaison) and they decided because I get too angry at home and too angry at school, so they decided me to put into nurture and over the past couple of weeks my anger's come down and I am starting to control it."

Subthemes

Valuable: This subordinate theme was based on interpreting data as revealing a sense of value, feeling special or given a sense of worth.

Participant 13: "It's for special people only, we're the only four special people."

Participant 6: "Yeah, she always kept me and other people safe and she always like, cared about all of us and it's really helpful."

Participant 8: “Yeah and I just started to play with them. It feels like the whole nurture group is my family it is.”

Contented: These codes revealed a sense of calm and feeling comfortable, positive or happy. For example, ‘Thinking space’ related to being in a place where they could think or reflect.

Participant 14: “Yeah, we love having a laugh together.”

Participant 9: “It’s happy, it just makes you feel better than in class cos it’s more funner than in class because you got all these people around you and there’s only 10 people, and you know all these people and I don’t really know everyone in my class.”

Capable: This theme related to a sense of capability. These codes appeared to reflect feelings of competency and feeling able to achieve in any aspect of work or interaction.

Participant 7: (Interviewer: What would they say about you?) “You’re kind, you’re very kind and you’re good playing.”

Participant 10: “When I was at my maths and English, I was absolutely rubbish, didn’t do anything. Then when I started (NG) they taught me stuff and stuff, then I knew all of it and now I’m starting to learn, I’m in the middle.”

3.2.2 Becoming preferred self

This theme includes codes that suggest the participant is developing in a positive direction with respect to their behaviours or self-image.

Participant 2: “Yeah but we’re trying to not to retaliate in nurture.”

Subthemes

Modelling/recognising possibilities: where participants identified with different ways of being or have this modelled for them by others.

Participant 15: “These two, because they’re sporty and I like sports.”

Participant 5: “I thought it was going to be a little bit good because one of my friends used to come to here and they thought it was really good and they got to do lots of fun stuff.”

Feedback and practice: where feedback was shared with the participants in terms of their progress and they had an opportunity to practise or demonstrate more socially appropriate behaviours.

Participant 1: “...because sometimes we don’t take it in turns, we just grab, but we’ve learnt to take it in turns and wait our turn to speak.”

Participant 12: “...the teachers always say ignore them, so I usually always ignore them, but sometimes it might be something really hard to try and ignore, so, it’s a bit hard for me and it’s...”

Exploring possibilities: acknowledging that there are various ways of being, including negative experiences.

Participant 5: “We all had a discussion about what we think and we came here for it and if we like, get that wrong, they tell us why and how we’re making it better.”

Participant 10: “Because, (Participant 9) has changed a bit, ‘cos she used to cry for everything.”

3.2.3 Problem I identity

This theme reflects references to things that were self-negating or suggestive of negativism towards themselves and times of difficulty that reinforce a negative self-image.

Participant 10: “There is one, is one part I do not like, I like going to (NG) but on Fridays we have to go to class which I hate because it’s so hard, I absolutely hate it.”

Subthemes

Unlovable: suggestive of a negative self-image and poor opinion of themselves or situations where they feel that they are not valued.

Participant 10: “Well, it’s a bit, don’t like it... all the other children make fun of me.”

Participant 12: “(CT) because obviously, um, this year my dad’s been a bit really, really angry at me, so I, and I went to (CT) probably about five weeks ago, yeah five weeks ago, and he said ‘once you’ve finish your lunch can you come to me’ and I said ‘of course I can’ and then we talked about my dad because he broke something of mine so, yeah...”

Managing expectations: referring to expectations, disappointment or alternative preferences.

Participant 15: “Some afternoons I don’t like going because sometimes I’m like in the middle of my book and I’m, sometimes I have a really funny book and I don’t really, I don’t want to leave to go to the nurture room, I want to carry on reading my book, or if I’m like in PE, if I’m in a PE lesson and they come and get me I don’t want to leave.”

Participant 11: “I thought it would be different, I thought it would be the same teachers down there.”

Participant 8: “I was expecting like, everyone to be mean, but they was not actually mean.”

3.2.4 External factors

This theme reflects external factors impacting on the participants' time in school, including physical space, learning tasks and wider community influences.

Participant 9: "My actual classroom, because I know that, I know that a lot of people don't like classrooms but it's, it's easier to work because you can't just work on the floor, and so a classroom's better because you're in a separate place to everyone else in the school and it's just easier."

Subthemes

Contextual: how the experiences link with the pupils' own world and experiences.

Participant 1: "Because I... they talk to us and we can't concentrate when they're walking through."

Participant 11: "We do, we do like, we do maths we do, in English we talk about fidget spinners. We find out like if you do like, do you think fidget spinners are allowed in school?"

Reinforcers: experiences that were affirming for the pupil.

Participant 5: "(Peer B) came round my house and checked I was okay".

Participant 4: "Um... When we can like play really fun games and we, and if we want to like play a game and any, and another person wants to play a different game we just vote."

Environmental: physical environment, positive or negative.

Participant 4: "...this one because there's like, equipment and you can like, climb on it and stuff, this one because you get to run around and like, do stuff like that, and this one because it's like, nurture it's like a nurture place which means it's nurture pretty much."

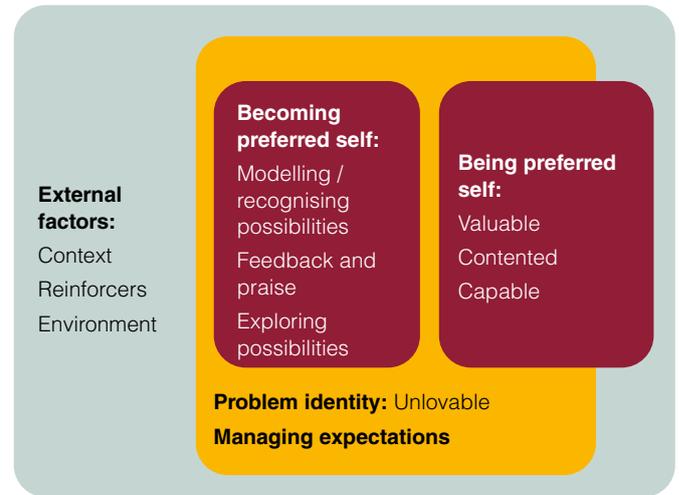
Participant 15: "We play football in that one, you do anything on there, water fights, sports day, um, you sprint round the field sometimes, you play cricket, any kind of sports or anything like that or you sometimes, if you can see that big tree up there, we normally sit underneath the trees, there."

Participant 16: "No, because the floor's too cold."

The following figure illustrates the themes and subthemes identified in Table 1, supported by the data examples presented in the previous sections. The model shows the interaction of various factors that impact on the development of an individual's identity and the processes involved in exploring

(becoming) and establishing (being) a preferred identity.

Figure 1: Organisation of themes and subthemes.



4.0 DISCUSSION

The participant responses suggest that pupils have felt supported through their time in the NG. This is particularly with reference to their ability to recognise and explore their possible identities with supportive feedback from adults and peers. In general, participants described positive experiences within the NG that resulted in feelings of contentedness, capability and being valued. This came across powerfully in comments around having fun, 'having a laugh' and the workload being more manageable so that they could complete it either more independently or with enough help. This enabled individuals to move from an 'I can't do this' perception of themselves to a more positive 'I can do this' awareness. A level of social connectedness that occurs within the NG could also be argued leads to their development of a 'preferred self'.

Relationships were, unsurprisingly, strong themes that emerged within the data and pupils referred to difficulties with relationships in and out of school in terms of family and peers. However, dealing and managing conflict were also identified topics. Sharing humour and having fun were strong themes, which suggests that time in the NG supports a sense of belonging and social identity.

The findings of this study elaborate on the conclusions made by Griffiths et al. (2014) identifying relationships, environment, learning and self-regulation as important to students attending an NG. They also support the findings of the Cefai and Pizzuto (2017) paper that reported the themes of toys and games, relationships, food and breakfast, and 'feelgood activities' as important to the students. However, the methodology employed in this study allowed for deeper exploration of

how and why these factors are important to pupils during their NG experience. Adding weight to the broad-reaching implications of these findings, links can be made with the conclusions derived from the John-Akinola et al. (2013) study that deduced that children find social relationships with teachers and peers and the school environment to be both important and valuable to their participation in the school community. This study also elaborates on the work completed by Garner and Thomas (2011), who identified that relationships and the availability of a 'safe haven' were valued by the secondary aged students involved in their research. It contextualises the findings of the Sanders (2007) study where the pupils considered that they were in the NG to 'learn more' and supports the understanding of why the pupils may have developed this perception. Closely related are the findings of the Shaver and McClatchy (2013) study that identified that what pupils liked about their time in an NG were toys, friends, the teacher, feeling happy and 'everything'. In summary, this study not only supports the findings of the research preceding it, but it elaborates and enriches the understanding of the pupil perspective, drawing a deeper meaning from the participants' responses and providing a student voice.

These findings, as presented in Figure 1, can provide a framework for adults working with pupils within NGs that could impact on their teaching and pedagogy. An understanding of what pupils need to support a developing sense of self or positive identity may help practitioners to structure their work with the pupils. For example, scenarios could be designed through planned sessions for pupils to explore possible characteristics of socialisation; have possible behaviours modelled; experiment with various outcomes and receive feedback or praise from the adults and the rest of the group. This could be done through role play opportunities, structured play sessions, circle time or literature and discussion. Practitioners could also give spontaneous feedback in relation to emerging behaviours observed in the pupils.

These findings could have wider reaching implications for general classroom practice or social skills training or interventions and could impact on the whole school community in terms of acknowledging and focusing on what creates a nurturing environment for pupils. The need to feel valued, capable and content could be promoted within a whole school ethos with respect to the behaviour policy and reward systems as well as individual teaching styles within the classroom. This could impact on pupils' mental health and feelings of worth within the school environment and improve overall academic and social development. It is

important to recognise and acknowledge these needs in pupils. These findings reveal the support processes that scaffold the development of identity. Recognising how to communicate and behave in a social situation is intrinsic for pupils through modelled adult behaviour. The feedback and praise necessary to mould these desired behaviours are also key findings and, perhaps more challenging, is the need for pupils to explore possible ways of being. John-Akinola et al.'s (2013) identification of the need for varied clubs and activities within the school community could strengthen this proposal.

Attending clubs or events could provide students with opportunities to explore potential ways of being that may support their eventual development of identity and sense of belonging. The outcomes of this study therefore are not only limited to the experiences and needs of pupils attending specialist provision but relate to good practice for all students.

Further research could consider links between these findings and those of mainstream counterparts or other pupils experiencing educational difficulties, such as learning difficulties, social communication difficulties or physical difficulties. It would be interesting to consider the wider implications of these outcomes, especially in terms of how far they can be generalised to other schools, situations or populations of young people.

5.0 SUMMARY

The overwhelmingly positive evidential claims for NG provision come principally from statistical data charting pupils' progress, which provides two-dimensional feedback regarding the value of NGs and pupils' progress (eg Shaver & McClatchy, 2013). Initial exploration into the views of pupils attending these groups included anecdotal comments within case study samples (eg Garner & Thomas, 2011; Sanders, 2007) and one small-scale study conducted in the UK that aimed to explore pupils' views of their time in an NG (Griffiths et al., 2014).

The strength of this research includes the robust methods and qualitative nature by which pupil views were gained and substantiating gaps in current understanding. The findings add depth to the understanding of what children find important during their NG experience and what factors support their development of a 'preferred identity'. This thematic model can be used as a structure by which to consider identity development processes in a variety of other areas of exploration within the field of psychology. Limitations of the study include the restrictions on possible participants and lack of NGs currently using the classic model. There were also a variety of means by which to analyse the data and this could have led to varying outcomes.

The implication for NGs include using teaching methods and evaluations to target the processes by which pupils develop a sense of self, as identified through this study. This could be adopted within a broader school system and could impact ultimately on the development of policies and practices by which to support children at risk of social and emotional or mental health difficulties across children's services.

Future research could investigate whether this model fits within a broader spectrum of challenges, larger whole school populations and wider communities.

Consideration could be paid to how these findings dovetail with other conceptual areas of psychology, such as emotional literacy and resilience. This study has sought to address the gap in current research in terms of how pupils view their time in an NG and it provides a springboard by which to explore a spectrum of related fields. The engagement of the students in this research study supports the view that they were willing and able to have their voices heard and embraced the opportunity to share their views of a provision that is important and valued by them.

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PRIMARY TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NURTURE GROUPS ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS, ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT AND BEHAVIOUR.

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Keywords: Nurture; primary school; SEBD; teachers' experiences

ABSTRACT

Current research suggests that nurture groups are an effective psychosocial intervention to support children and young people with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties. However, to date research has not examined teachers' personal opinions of nurture groups' effectiveness. The present study addresses this gap in knowledge by exploring teachers' perceptions of the nurture groups' effectiveness on social, emotional skills, behaviour and attainment. A total of 12 primary school teachers were recruited and interviewed with a semi-structured interview schedule. The thematic analysis of the transcribed narrative accounts indicate that teachers notice a positive effect of the nurture groups on children's social and emotional skills and behaviour. Specifically, with developed emotional understanding and regulation, the children's social and behavioural functioning improved. While the nurture group was not characterised as directly improving attainment, academic skills were improved through developed engagement, independence and self-efficacy. Implications for future research and practice were highlighted. This included the need for early pupil identification by a trained practitioner, as well as the potential negative impact of recent funding cuts on nurture groups' efficacy. Further research into these is suggested, alongside research into pupil attachments, self-concept and the long-term outcomes of nurture group intervention on attainment.

1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

There is much concern about social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) experienced by children and young people within the UK. Numerous contextual factors are involved in achieving improvements in wellbeing and attainment within school and children's SEBD can present a significant barrier (Goodman et al., 2015). The term SEBD has been updated in England to SEMH, following the publication of the SEN Code of Practice: 0-25 years (DfE, 2015). However, as this research was carried out in Scotland, the term SEBD will be used as this is reflective of the local legislation and guidance (Scottish Government, 2017). More specifically, for the purposes of this study the following definitions have been employed as they are in line with current research and widely used. Emotional difficulties refer

to the inability to identify, understand or regulate emotions, including anxiety and anger (Poulou, 2015). Goodman et al. (2015, p.9) describes emotional wellbeing as "the absence of internalising problems". Children in the school setting with emotional difficulties may internalise their emotions resulting in anxiety or depression or they may present with externalised behavioural difficulties, such as aggression and defiant and oppositional behaviour (Willner et al., 2016; Bornstein et al., 2013). Social skills can be defined as the ability to interact with others and form and maintain relationships (Goodman et al., 2015). This includes sharing, empathy and cooperation, and gives children the ability to make friends, play games and hold a conversation (Gresham, 2016).

SEBD all pose various challenges for children and young people throughout schooling and beyond (Ruby, 2018; Goodman et al., 2015). These SEBD have been found to be prevalent in schools in the UK. On average, one in three children in a class of 30 experiences some form of SEBD and only around half of those with significant difficulties receive any mental or wellbeing support (Ruby, 2018). This illustrates the need for effective, sustainable and affordable intervention in schools (Ruby, 2018). Findings from Geddes (2006) suggest that appropriate early interventions are vital to the wellbeing of children and young people. Early social and emotional experiences are what shape their ability to cope with the challenges they are likely to encounter during their childhood and throughout their adult life (Geddes, 2006). To address the growing concern for SEBD faced by children and young people the educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall set up the first nurture groups in London in the late 1960s (Lucas, 2019). There are currently over 2000 nurture groups across the UK, in nursery, primary and secondary schools (Sloan et al., 2019). nurtureUK (2019) claims that nurture groups provide children and young people with various early nurturing experiences they may have missed during their early life. It aims to equip them with social and emotional skills to succeed in making meaningful friendships, do well at school and be able to deal with challenges throughout life (Lucas, 2019).

Nurture groups are rooted in Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment which proposes that the nurturing and consistent relationship built between an infant and their caregiver is essential for the child's psychological and social functioning (Gillibrand et al., 2016). The impact of nurture groups is commonly measured by the paid resource called the 'Boxall Profile®' which was set up for this reason by Marjorie Boxall (Ruby, 2018). To campaign for the widescale use of the Boxall Profile® for all pupils, Ruby (2018) commenced 'The Boxall Childhood Project'. The study found the Boxall to provide a detailed assessment of children with SEBD, however, limitations of the Boxall were also highlighted. Specifically, Ruby (2018) emphasises the importance of training staff to be able to utilise the Boxall Profile® appropriately. The quality of the profile can be influenced by the lack of staff training or staff time constraints. The project also identified a potential drawback in the Boxall as significantly more boys than girls were found to have SEBD. This conflicts with evidence showing that despite boys displaying more challenging behaviour, girls often internalise difficulties such as depression (Deighton et al., 2018). This suggests that the Boxall may be failing to identify children with internalising SEBD.

Although less frequently used for nurture groups, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) can be used to assess a child's SEBD through a series of questions, again completed by parents and staff (Gerrard, 2006). This measure is widely used in clinical settings due to its reliable psychometric properties (Huskey et al., 2018). The SDQ has the advantage of being brief, comprehensive and easy to administer and score in comparison to the Boxall (Rothenberger & Woerner, 2004). High concordance was found between the Boxall and the SDQ by Couture, Cooper and Royer (2019) when completed by school staff. Both measurement tools reported similar SEBD, supporting their reliability and validity for diagnostic and research.

Bennett (2015) highlights that despite successful outcomes measured from the Boxall and the SDQ, these outcomes are not usually followed up in a qualitative way. Qualitative research allows for a more detailed, rich and in depth understanding of the subject matter, including the thoughts and opinions of those involved (Howitt & Cramer, 2014). In the evaluation of nurture groups, quantitative research identifies if children are experiencing benefits from the intervention. However, it does not provide detailed insight into why and how this is happening and what impact this is having in the everyday life of children and young people. This complex subject has benefited from qualitative research by exploring children's, parents', teachers' and other staff members' experiences of a nurture group intervention (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005; Sanders, 2007; Symeonidou & Robinson, 2018).

The Boxall Profile®, the SDQ as well as qualitative research provides data on the intervention's effectiveness, however, little research has been carried out on teachers' experiences and options regarding this. Teachers have the great responsibility to provide support for children with SEBD in mainstream schools and help those most vulnerable through prevention, identification and access to specialist support (DfE, 2018). Nurture groups aim to help children become resilient and able to overcome barriers to their learning and teachers are arguably the best placed to evaluate this impact.

Despite this, while previous research investigates the positive effect of nurture groups (Bennet, 2015; Shaver & McClatchey 2013; Cunningham et al., 2019), teachers' personal experiences and opinions have received little academic attention. The present paper addresses this gap in knowledge, by examining teachers' opinions on the effectiveness and limitations of nurture groups.

The research questions were:

1. How do teachers perceive children's social and emotional skills following nurture group intervention?
2. How do teachers perceive children's academic attainment following nurture group intervention?
3. How do teachers perceive children's behaviour following nurture group intervention.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Opportunity sampling was employed to recruit participants who were most readily available for interview. Criteria for the participants' inclusion consisted of being a qualified primary school teacher based in the United Kingdom. The participants also must have worked or be working with a child who had attended a nurture group in the past two years, to be able to compare their behaviour before and after the intervention. Sixteen participants were asked to participate through email and 12 were able to be interviewed. Eleven of the participants were female and one was male. The gender of the participants therefore reflected staffing ratios in primary schools, which in Scotland currently stands at around 9:1 females to males (National Statistics Publication for Scotland, 2019).

Table 1: Demographic data of the participants

Participants	Gender	Status	Location
1 – 7	Female	Primary teacher	Highland, Scotland
8 – 9	Female	Primary teacher	Aberdeenshire, Scotland
10	Female	Primary teacher	Oxfordshire England
11	Male	Primary teacher	Highland, Scotland

2.2 Materials

Each participant was given a Participant Information Sheet, a Consent Form and a Debriefing Sheet. An interview guide was used to ensure all topics were discussed. Open questions allowed for and encouraged detailed responses and probing questions were added if more information was required.

The interviews were recorded onto a password protected mobile phone and then stored on a password protected laptop until the transcription took place. Thematic analysis was carried out using NVivo 12, a qualitative data analysis software, and thematic maps created.

2.3 Procedure

To express interest in taking part in the study, the participants emailed the researcher. Preceding any data collection ethical approval was granted and all participants were issued with an information sheet

and provided informed consent. During the interview open questions were asked alongside any probing or clarification questions such as: "Could you describe how the pupil is any more or less disruptive following the intervention?" and "How is their ability to play well with others, such as sharing and taking turns?". Once the interview had concluded participants were provided with the Debrief Sheet and were given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the study. The narrative accounts were transcribed verbatim, transposed to NVivo12 and analysed using thematic analysis.

2.4 Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised to obtain key themes from the interviews using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps. Participants were numbered from P1-P12 granting them anonymity. A wealth of rich, in-depth data was obtained and reflected in the thematic maps (Figure 1; Figure 2; Figure 3). Following data familiarisation, the data was scanned and coded with the purpose of identifying meaning within the text. The initial coding information was conceptualised by grouping codes and eliminating any that were no longer relevant or appropriate. The resulting seven themes and subsequent 10 sub-themes were generated from this process. To obtain an overview of these themes and begin to understand how they worked together, several mind-maps were produced. Succeeding this, the next step involved refining the themes against the entire data set and producing a thematic map to detail the themes, sub-themes and the relationship between them.

3. FINDINGS

Seven themes and 10 sub-themes were identified through thematic analysis. Social and emotional skills appeared to be the overarching theme (cf. Figure 1) throughout 83.3% of the interviews (10 teachers), overlapping with topics of behaviour (cf. Figure 2) and attainment (cf. Figure 3). The experiences of 12 teachers were expressed in the participants' narrative accounts. Despite limitations and barriers such as lack of funding, staffing and training, a total of 91.7% (11 teachers) felt nurture groups were an encouraging addition to the school and provided a crucial intervention for those with a high level of need. The inter-rater reliability for these findings was checked by inviting an individual who works in the field of psychology to code the transcripts. Similar themes and interpretations thereof were identified, giving evidence for the intersubjectivity of the findings presented here.

Figure 1: Thematic map of teachers' perceptions of social and emotional skills following nurture group

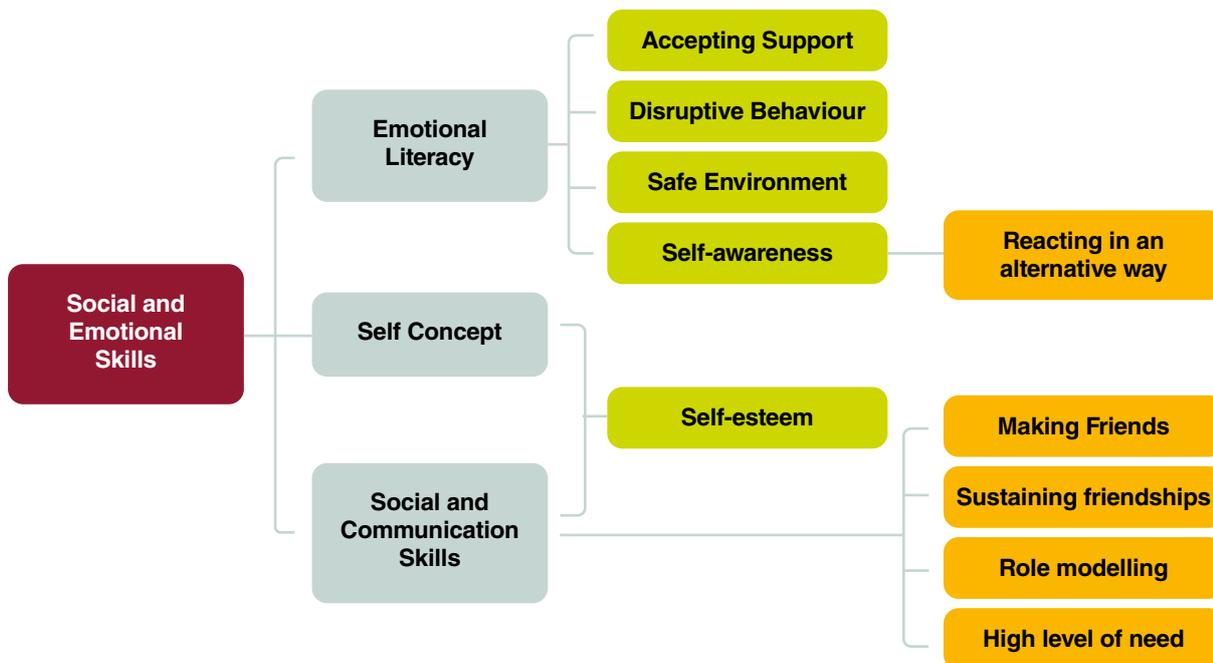


Figure 2: Thematic map of teachers' perceptions of behaviour following nurture group

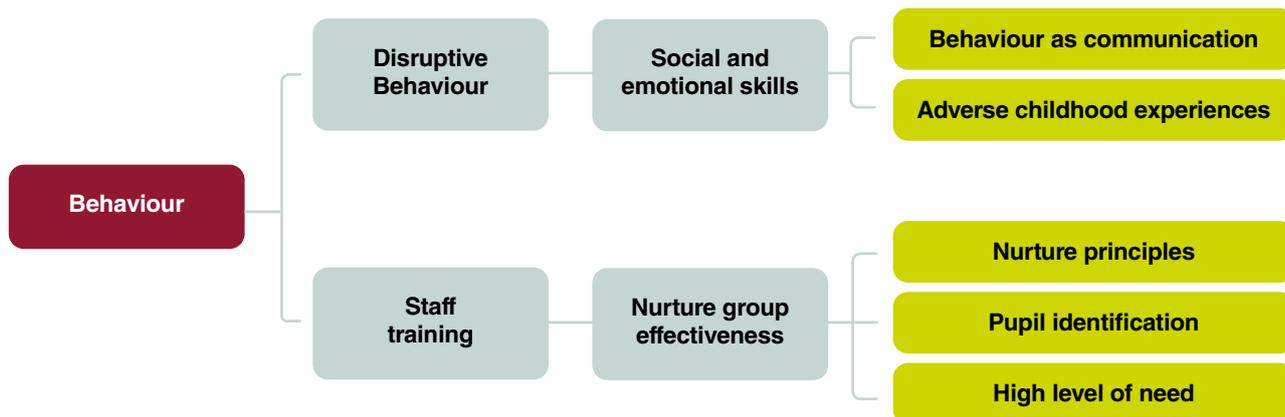
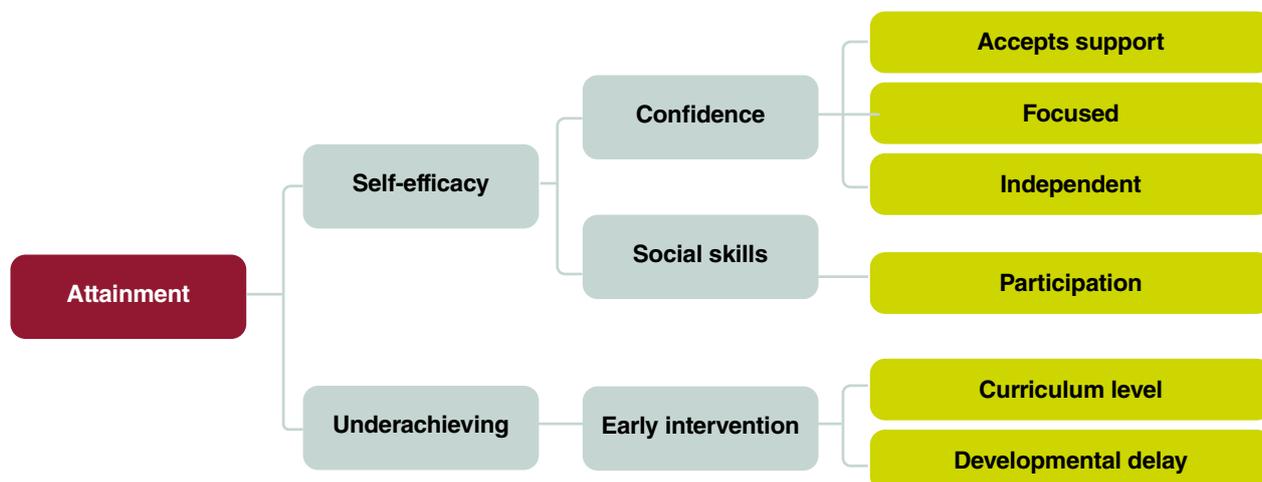


Figure 3: Thematic map of teachers' perceptions of attainment following nurture group



3.1 How do teachers perceive children's social and emotional skills following nurture group intervention?

3.1.1 Emotional literacy

Within the theme of emotional literacy four sub-themes of accepting support, disruptive behaviour, safe environment and self-awareness were identified (cf. Figure 4.1).

Teachers reported that expressing emotions of anxiety and anger following nurture intervention appeared to have significantly improved for 66.7% of pupils (eight pupils). Emotional literacy skills denoted that pupils had developed self-awareness of their feelings and were able to describe the emotions of others and themselves. Children were better able to communicate their feelings when seeking adult support or to prevent disruptive outbursts.

This move towards accepting emotional support from the mainstream teacher was reflected in 41.6% of the narratives (five teachers). This indicated the potential for continuous emotional development as the teacher is able to provide the ongoing support required by the pupil. Individuals lacking emotional regulation skills were found to be more likely to suffer from aggressive outbursts or be withdrawn and distressed. These behaviours reduced in line with developing emotional literacy skills. Twenty five per cent of participants (three teachers) highlighted the positive change resulting from pupils' improved emotional recognition, awareness and self-expression. Pupils were better able to understand emotions within themselves and begin taking steps towards building coping strategies (cf. Chiappella, 2015).

P1: (Pupil A) definitely understands simple emotions which they didn't previously. Thinking about recently in class they can now tell me how they are feeling using pictures. They have a picture board which has different emotive faces on it which they can pin their name against... importantly they can also tell me why they feel this way which is so helpful as their teacher to be able to help them.

This narrative illustrates the pupil's new-found proficiency in naming emotions, in this case through the use of visual representations. This allowed the mainstream teacher to offer support in emotional regulation. As reflected by the participants, the ability for pupils to understand emotions was closely linked to their capability to identify their personal triggers. Specifically, the emotional regulation skills were deemed valuable to teachers who felt children became more resilient as a result.

3.1.2 Self-concept and social and communication skills

Following the nurture group interventions, 50% of participants (six teachers) noticed improvements in the children's social skills. Within the themes of self-concept and social and communication skills, one sub theme of self-esteem was identified.

Seventy five per cent of participants (nine teachers) considered the skills required to make friends were enhanced in pupils following nurture group attendance. A move towards positive self-concept is reflected throughout 50% of the narratives as participants report improvements particularly in the component of self-esteem (cf. Rogers, 1959; Vincent, 2017). This increased self-esteem was closely linked with making friends, playing in a group of peers and decreased anxious behaviour.

In addition to the enhanced self-esteem component, further social skills were identified as having developed during the course of nurture group. 75% of participants (nine teachers) shared that pupils were better able to hold a conversation with others about a shared interest and had developed capability in cooperation, sharing and following the rules of a game.

3.2 How do teachers perceive children's behaviour following nurture group intervention?

Behaviour was the most reported concern from teachers prior to nurture group attendance with 58.3% of participants (seven teachers) sharing behavioural concerns. This was due to the disruptive and destructive nature of the children's behaviour, involving refusal to partake in any learning and hurting other children and members of staff. Disruptive behaviour as well as staff training were the two themes identified, alongside the sub-themes of social and emotional skills and nurture group effectiveness (cf. Figure 4.2).

3.2.1 Emotional regulation

All four participants who expressed the greatest concern regarding pupil behaviour prior to attending nurture group subsequently experienced a reduction in disruptive outbursts. Similar to findings by Sloan et al, 2016, gradual change in behaviour was extensively intertwined with emotional literacy and regulation.

P6: (Pupil F) was much less disruptive following nurture intervention and continued to improve towards the summer holidays... When disappointments happened the child was able to be sad about them then very quickly move on and be distracted by something else. They became better at communicating in words when they were sad or angry.

Experiences of children who were calmer and more cooperative were shared. Teachers reported a significant reduction in aggressive and disruptive behaviour in line with children's ability to talk about their emotions and use emotional regulation techniques.

P6: (Pupil F) was more able to communicate with other children about what they were working on or playing with. (They) would try to talk things through with peers rather than throwing things and screaming.

P5: (They) were able to speak to children and let them know if they were annoying (them) rather than lashing out first.

These quotes illustrate the observed impact of the children's enhanced communication skills. Similar to Cunningham et al. (2019), possessing the skills to discuss conflicts and share feelings both contributed to the changes seen in behaviour with peers. More specifically, 50% of participants (six teachers) considered the combination of developed social skills and emotional literacy to be most transformative to pupil behaviour following nurture group.

3.2.2 Staff training

When teachers discussed their feelings on the limitations of nurture groups, 33.3% (four teachers) mentioned their concern regarding the efficacy of the group for children who struggled with very disruptive behaviour. Rooted in this concern was inadequate staff training.

P11: Nurture groups are not always run by people who have received the correct training. If an adult is not confident delivering the programme, then it won't work.

P1: Yes, I've experienced the nurture group not being successful. A pupil last year attended the group and staff struggled to manage his aggressive outbursts.

These quotes exemplify the link between the disruptive behaviour of pupils and the importance of nurture group staff training. A third of participants (four teachers) expressed the potential for nurture groups to become viewed as an intervention for all disruptive children, without the time being taken to assess them for suitability using the Boxall Profile® for example. This appeared closely interconnected with inadequate or no staff training.

The importance of training was echoed across all narratives. As also highlighted by Fraser-Smith and Henry (2016), nurture principles are central to the success of the intervention and it is therefore to be expected that the group may not be as effective an intervention if run by untrained staff. Participant

4 and 11 share this sentiment and experienced greater efficacy from the intervention when run by trained ASN staff in previous years.

P4: I think if a nurture group is run properly, fully planned, following all of the nurture principles it is a wonderful tool!

I feel in the beginning when it was run by our ASN teachers there was structure, purpose and progression. I was less confident in the quality of provision when the ASN teachers were not involved.

Despite concerns regarding training and child selection, participants overwhelmingly experienced positive outcomes from the nurture group intervention. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that lack of staff training was conceptualised as negatively affecting the set-up and efficacy of nurture groups.

3.3 How do teachers perceive children's academic attainment following nurture group intervention?

Prior to nurture group significant lack of engagement was prevalent across 33.3% of narratives (four teachers) with cases most acute experiencing no participation in the curriculum. Consequently, children scored under the expected curriculum level for their age. Two themes, self-efficacy and underachieving were identified with the corresponding subthemes of confidence, social skills and early intervention (cf. Figure 4.3). Across the interviews 83.3% of participants (10 teachers) all identified at least one change that has either improved or influenced attainment.

3.3.1 Self-efficacy

Two thirds of those interviewed (eight teachers) understood the nurture group's contribution to pupil's engagement to be in increased self-efficacy. This was reflected across six narrative accounts with reports of pupils as more confident to take part in activities. Pupils increased confidence coincided with their willingness to participate in classroom activities. Pupils were described as more likely to complete tasks without help and work on their own. This high self-efficacy reported by participants appeared to be foundational to the augmentation of independence and participation (cf. Sanders, 2007). A third of participants considered pupils to be more independent with classroom activities with further accounts of increased participation.

P6: (Pupil F) could now complete work on their own at their table when previously they would have refused to do it. They would still look for adult company while doing a task but could more often than not complete it without an adult. They became more confident in speaking in front of peers.

This narrative conveys teachers' observations of transformed academic behaviour following nurture group. Self-efficacy is fostered in the nurture group environment through supportive relationships and goal setting as described by Bennathan and Boxall (2000). Two teachers detailed that the encouragement provided by the nurture staff and achievement of personal goals facilitated their pupils' belief that they could achieve.

3.3.2 Underachieving

Not all participants communicated widespread positive changes regarding attainment, with 58.3% of participants (seven teachers) sharing continuing attainment concerns. Some felt that pupils were able to work better in the small and highly supportive environment nurture group provided, however they did not manage any better in their mainstream class.

P8: ...he is able to complete some tasks more independently but he still has a very short attention span and needs lots of teacher support. Before the group he couldn't do any work independently so hopefully this will now improve his attainment.

The recurrent and continued barrier to attainment for many of the pupils was their often significant developmental and academic delay. With persistent SEBD present for 75% of pupils discussed (nine teacher accounts), the attainment gap has only increased between these pupils and their peers. References were made to pupils not achieving at the expected levels across the curriculum despite being more engaged and independent in class. As highlighted by participant 8, for many of the pupils it is likely to be too early to make any concrete judgements on attainment as it will take several weeks or months to progress within the curriculum.

Impressions of a perpetual cycle between this very poor level of attainment and pupil frustration or defiance were evident and early intervention was identified as an underlying theme across the whole study. With SEBD most likely to exhibit in children's early years it is consistent with narratives of deteriorating behaviour (cf. Goodman et al., 2015).

Narratives suggest that nurture group generates the improvements necessary to benefit pupils' attainment by providing them with the resilience and self-efficacy required to be successful (cf. Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). Long-term impact of these skills cannot be determined from the narratives. However, with the significant potential stemming from an increased self-efficacy combined with a reduction in SEBD, it could be assumed that attainment will improve. This was signified within the hopeful connotations expressed by participants.

4. DISCUSSION

This study found positive experiences of nurture groups' effectiveness for promoting children's social skills, emotional regulation, positive behaviour and attainment. Differences in experience were largely due to the way the nurture group was run in each school. In line with previous research, all participants valued nurture groups as an intervention. Each research question will be discussed in turn.

4.1 How do teachers perceive children's social and emotional skills following nurture group intervention?

Following pupils' participation in the nurture group, emotional literacy skills were developed, which included the improved ability to identify, express and understand emotions. Binnie & Allen (2008) found teachers reported similar findings in the teacher SDQ that reflected an improvement in children's emotional development and functioning. More specifically the interview data findings echo the teachers' views collected by Cooper and Tiknaz (2005), who observed pupils as calmer and more able to manage their feelings of anger following nurture group intervention. This study highlighted the impact of this developed emotional literacy skill in the mainstream classroom. Furthermore, participants made references to developed emotional literacy being associate with the safe space nurture groups provide for pupils. Parents, staff and children also identified the "secure base and safe haven" (Garner & Thomas, 2011, p. 216) nurture group provided in the study carried out by Garner and Thomas (2011). Children reported feeling safe within the nurture environment to share their emotions and current difficulties. Garner and Thomas (2011) credited the safe environment and subsequent development of emotional skills to the supportive relationships nurture pupils formed with the nurture staff. These positive relationships are described by Sloan et al. (2019) as the formation of attachments between the nurture staff and pupil. Evidence of attachment theory is apparent in narratives throughout all three research questions. Geddes (2018) states that insecure attachment in the early years can impact self-awareness, confidence and the ability to communicate feelings. In this study pupils improved in self-awareness and were able to identify sources of distress. This skill enabled enhanced emotional regulation indicating a secure attachment had been formed. In participant interviews, mainstream teachers had reported improved relationships with their nurture pupil. Geddes (2006) recognises the potential for pupils to form attachments with their teacher and the positive impact this can have on their wellbeing.

Social skills developed significantly during and

subsequent to attending nurture group. Participants accredited this to an increase in self-confidence for those who were previously shy and anxious in social situations. These findings concur with Shaver and McClatchey (2013) who interviewed nurture group staff and found pupils to have increased confidence. More specifically it appears that children developed a positive self-concept, particularly concerning the component of self-esteem (Rogers, 1959). Self-esteem has been linked to interpersonal relationships, which for some pupils from this study resulted in the formation of new friends and improved relationships with their mainstream teacher. This is reflective of research that has identified nurture groups to significantly improve scores in self-esteem (Binnie & Allen, 2008) and lead to pupils making more friends and displaying enhanced social communication skills (Cunningham et al., 2019; Shaver & McClatchey, 2013). Self-concept has not yet been discussed in nurture group research as an outcome of the intervention, with only a single mention from Vincent (2017). However, the development of a positive self-concept was an identified theme across narratives in this study. Given the protective factor positive self-concept may provide against future stress and childhood depression (Jaureguizar et al., 2018) further research into the link with nurture groups would be beneficial. Furthermore, most participants reported children to have developed the necessary social and communication skills to allow them to make and sustain friendships. In line with Vincent (2017), skills lacking prior to nurture group, which subsequently improved, included conversational skills, sharing and taking turns as well as being able to participate in a group game. These developed social skills were understood to be related to improvements in children's behaviour.

4.2 How do teachers perceive children's behaviour following nurture group intervention?

Disruptive behaviour was found to be deeply intertwined with emotional regulation and social skills. Children who developed emotional literacy and regulation skills were reported as being calmer and more cooperative following nurture group attendance. Studies have frequently demonstrated similar findings of improved behaviour as a result of developed emotional literacy and social skills from nurture group intervention (Bennet, 2015; Shaver & McClatchey 2013; Cunningham et al., 2019; Vincent, 2017). Boxall (2002) describes in one of her six nurture principles that all behaviour is communication. Geddes (2018) expands on this by stating that behaviour is sometimes the only means of communications for children with underdeveloped emotional literacy and social skills.

The concerns raised from participants of the effectiveness of nurture group for very disruptive pupils was linked with staff training. The lack of training was described by some teachers as a significant limitation to the effectiveness of the nurture group and was viewed as negatively impacting the intervention. This is a concerning finding as Kearney and Nowek (2019, p.19) state that training is central to ensuring nurture is "rooted in evidence-based psychologically informed practice". Furthermore, the importance of having the sound knowledge and understanding of the six nurture principles through training has been highlighted as an important factor to the group's success (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005). Shaver and McClatchey (2013) recognised that funding is often a barrier to providing staff with the adequate training required and this was clear in many of the schools in the current study. With inconsistent staff training identified across narratives, it appears the training of both nurture and mainstream staff in the nurture principles and use of Boxall Profile® would be beneficial in improving the effectiveness of nurture groups for children with SEBD.

4.3 How do teachers perceive children's academic attainment following nurture group intervention?

Attainment sparked discussion that teachers initially felt had not improved significantly following intervention. However, despite pupils not having progressed within the curriculum, on further reflection attainment progress was made with improved engagement and independence. These findings are reflected by Sanders (2007), who reported that some teachers thought attainment had significantly improved following intervention as children were more motivated in completing classroom activities and were able to complete work independently. In this research participants observed pupils' improved self-efficacy to have facilitated the change in academic behaviour. This concurs with Adams et al. (2020) who found positive associations between attainment and the confidence pupils had in their ability to achieve their desired grades. This suggests pupils who develop their self-efficacy through nurture group may be more likely to achieve academically. Furthermore, similar to Chiappella (2015), interviews identified that developed social skills facilitated more cooperative behaviour between the classroom teacher and pupil that resulted in pupils being more willing to follow instructions as well as work with other children on group tasks and towards class goals. These positive changes observed in pupils have the potential to positively impact their attainment according to Flook et al. (2005). They found pupils' social relationships

with peers to predict academic success. With strained relationships and less peer acceptance, self-concept and mental health were negatively affected, resulting in poorer attainment (Flook et al., 2005). Gresham (2016, p. 320) refers to social skills as “academic enablers” which are behaviours and attitudes that encourage participation and facilitate learning from teaching. Teachers’ experiences of nurture groups’ effect on attainment has rarely been investigated. This study provides invaluable insight into the impact the intervention is having on pupils’ level of attainment in the mainstream classroom in relation to the development of social and emotional skills and behaviour. With attainment following nurture group usually measured by the Boxall Profile®, SDQ and curriculum measures (Binnie and Allen, 2008; Cooper et al., 2001; Reynolds et al., 2009; Sanders, 2007,) little consideration is given to the small, but potentially significant, changes improved self-efficacy and social skills could have on long-term attainment. With support from this study highlighting teachers’ positive experiences of academic engagement, motivation and independence, it could be hypothesised that nurture group intervention will increase attainment in the long term.

However, while positive changes in pupils were observed, the extent to which nurture groups have improved attainment remains questionable with pupils still underachieving within the curriculum. This identifies a limitation of the current research, which is that it was not possible to follow up pupils in a longitudinal design. Nurture groups bearing little or no direct effect on attainment has been reported in some research (Sloan et al., 2019; Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005; Symeonidou & Robinson, 2018). For example, Sloan et al., 2019 found no direct improvements in academic attainment resulting from nurture group attendance when compared to a control group. In the present study concern was shared that many pupils still required significant adult support for most classroom tasks and teachers felt this would be ongoing. Some participants believed the persistent SEBD for children had negatively impacted their attainment for many years so nurture group would most likely not result in rapid improvement. Despite these feelings, with pupil’s displaying behaviours of engagement and self-efficacy, improvements may not be immediate but these positive academic behaviours are encouraging.

4.4 Strengths, limitations and suggestions for future research

Although the present study provided essential explanative insight that allowed to further understandings of teachers’ experiences with nurture groups, caveats regarding the method

need to be taken into consideration. Essentially, the qualitative data obtained as well as the small sample size limits the generalisability of this study. A larger recruitment of teachers across a wider geographical area would provide a more reliable interpretation of teachers’ experiences. Despite this, relevant findings were obtained regarding pupils’ social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes following the nurture intervention. The current study makes a positive contribution to the nurture group literature in providing teachers’ own experiences of its effectiveness, which to date is sparse. With utilising semi-structured interviews to obtain teachers’ views on nurture groups, in-depth insight is gained into the realities of how the intervention impacts children in the mainstream classroom.

The interviews produced a wealth of data providing various avenues for future research. First, the interviews carried out identified an improvement in self-concept that appears to be a result of the intervention. With a high correlation between SEBD and poor mental health (Goodman et al., 2015; Waddell & Clarke, 2017; Richards & Huppert, 2011; Katz et al., 2011; Layard et al., 2014) the influence of nurture group on the protective factor, self-concept, should be investigated. This would offer further insight into the potential for nurture groups to promote lasting mental wellbeing and prevent the development of mental health conditions. Additionally, with recent local funding cuts across various local authorities in Scotland, it appears nurture group staffing and training is being negatively affected. It would be beneficial to research how these changes are affecting nurture groups’ efficacy and the implications that may arise. The importance of training and the barriers to its facilitation have been identified by research (Cooper & Tiknaz, 2005; Shaver & McClatchey, 2013; Ruby, 2018; Fraser-Smith & Henry, 2016) but the implications of deficient training on nurture groups’ effectiveness do not appear to have been investigated in depth. Teachers’ criticisms and the discussed barriers to the effective running of nurture groups warrants further research. This is largely due to the role teachers play as an advocate for nurture groups as a successful intervention in mainstream schools. Finally, in relation to nurture groups as an effective intervention for children with SEBD, further research is required into the long-term outcomes. This is especially the case regarding the long-term effects on attainment as this continues to be lacking within literature (Sloan et al., 2019). A longitudinal, control group study, with a focus on attainment, would offer insight into the impact nurture groups may have on enabling academic success throughout education.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative, semi-structured, interview study has contributed to the current evidence on nurture groups' effectiveness for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The study has addressed the deficiency in literature concerning teachers' personal experiences of nurture groups' effectiveness by providing rich interview data. In line with previous research, nurture groups support the development of children's emotional wellbeing and relationships. Findings of inconsistencies with staff training highlight the importance of nurture staff having a sound knowledge and understanding of how best to facilitate social and emotional development within the nurture group.

Most significant for teachers was the reduction of disruptive behaviour in class. Improved emotional regulation skills as well as social skills were both involved in enabling this change. With such remarkable improvement for most pupils with these difficulties following nurture group attendance implications for practice are evident. For some teachers they found it very distressing that pupil behaviour had escalated to such a high level before nurture group intervention was offered. It would therefore be beneficial for pupils and staff to be able to offer nurture group to pupils as early as possible before such behaviour escalates. Barriers to this are apparent due to a reduction in funding and staffing in many local authorities. This may limit the capabilities of schools being able to facilitate the number of nurture groups required and run these with a consistent evidence-based approach.

Furthermore, consistent with previous research, teachers reported little or no change in educational attainment following nurture group intervention.

Despite this, with improvement in both social and emotional development, alongside increased self-efficacy, pupils have the potential to achieve academic success. Due to the short-term nature of this study it was not possible to conclude improved academic attainment and longitudinal research on attainment have been recommended. Findings do however indicate the wider benefit that nurture groups may provide for pupils with SEBD by giving them the opportunity to engage in classroom lessons and achieve academic success. Academic attainment should therefore not be viewed by teachers as an expected outcome of nurture group but view the intervention as providing pupils with the foundation to achieve academic goals.

In conclusion, teachers' experiences were predominantly positive towards the effectiveness of nurture groups for supporting children with SEBD. Those critical of their effectiveness in certain circumstances were still positive about the intervention's goals and potential. These schools were experiencing barriers and limitations to the groups' success, and therefore the intervention was not able to achieve its full potential. Teachers felt the emotional and social skills gained in nurture group improved children's emotional wellbeing and provided them with the foundations to build lasting friendships and attain educational success. While further research would be beneficial to provide deeper understanding of the raised issues, the study achieved its aim and provided a comprehensive analysis of current experiences of nurture groups from the perspective of primary school teachers.

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SUPPORTING QUIET, SHY AND ANXIOUS CHILDREN IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL USING A TARGETED NURTURING INTERVENTION PROGRAMME CALLED SPECIAL ME TIME

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ABSTRACT

Quiet, shy and/or anxious children are found in every classroom and in every school and by their nature, tend to go 'under the radar'. These children present a variety of behaviours, such as being inhibited, lacking confidence, or appearing socially anxious. For some children, their shyness can be severe and may affect their access to learning, thus further understanding, support and nurture is needed. This study employed a targeted six week intervention programme entitled 'Special Me Time' (SMT) that supported the children with: vocalising their feelings; accessing classroom opportunities; communication, and developing friendships. The premise of the approach is that the children are withdrawn from the mainstream classroom and the session is led by a trained practitioner in a small group situation. The programme is aligned to and followed a nurture based approach. The SMT programme was conducted by school staff and Initial Teacher Education students in primary schools predominantly in South Wales, UK. Findings from the implementation of the programme highlighted that it benefited all children's personal and social development in a range of ways such as improving their confidence and self-esteem. Boys with English as an additional language (EAL) responded especially well to the programme. The results of this research study demonstrated the importance of using an intervention designed to understand and support quiet shy and/or anxious children and to develop their unique abilities in a medium where they were both seen and heard.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Shyness and anxiety do not necessarily go hand in hand, but often one perpetuates the other. There is an established body of research into children's shyness, mostly from a psychological viewpoint (Beidel & Turner, 1999; Chen et al., 2006; Crozier, 2014, 2016). However, it seems that everyday issues and experiences of quiet, shy or anxious (QSA) children in primary school are less well documented, along with concrete findings relating to their educational progress. For instance, Egonu-Obanye (2013), an assistant head teacher in a London primary school, asked her colleagues to engage in a simple exercise; were they able to write down the names of their whole class, purely from memory? The premise being that teachers will normally forget between two and four of the

children in their class. These children, she argued, are most likely to be the so called 'invisible children' who cause no trouble, may be quiet or introverted, and coast under the radar, because they make a minimum of fuss. In effect, they were the pupils who were most likely to be overlooked. For the purpose of the present study, the term 'invisible children' will be avoided as it has negative connotations, and instead the term quiet, shy and/or anxious (QSA) will be employed. Being quiet or shy is not an undesirable quality, nor should it be categorised as one. It is pertinent to highlight that not all shy children are introverts, as many people think that shyness and introversion are the same thing, and again, society often sees this as a negative (Zimbardo & Radl, 1981; Cain, 2016; 2020).

The term 'shyness' is most commonly used to

describe children who may be tentative in social situations, avoid participation in social interactions, or who could be perceived as being socially withdrawn (Beidel & Turner, 1999, Schmidt and Poole, 2018). Most young children are likely to experience some level of shyness or anxiety in their early years. Unfortunately, it seems that as part of this process of initial social participation, certain children may be reticent to engage with others and are thus labelled in a negative way. They may be thought of as 'anxious, quiet and behaviourally inhibited, particularly in unfamiliar social situations' (Schmidt & Tasker, 2000, p30). This may lead to people behaving differently towards them, and putting negative behavioural expectations on them. In an educational context, it is apparent that teachers' attitudes and beliefs can both directly and indirectly influence children's social, emotional and academic development (Fang, 1996; Vartuli, 1999). In their research on quiet children in elementary school, Coplan et al., (2011, p940) found that 'teachers were more likely to respond to exuberant/talkative children with high-powered, social learning strategies and to employ peer-focused and indirect strategies for shy/quiet children' targeting the talkative children, while engaging less directly with the quiet ones. More worryingly Coplan et al., (2011) also found that the teachers assumed that shy, quiet children were less intelligent and would achieve less academically than exuberant, talkative children. Another factor related to the involvement of other children in this equation, who diminished and marginalised quieter children. QSA children who display as shy, or what may be termed socially awkward, and anxious are more likely to be observed by their peers as less attractive playmates and may be excluded from social activities within and outside the primary school (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003; Chen et al., 2006). Also, as Coplan et al. (2013) found shy children, when compared to their peers, spent more time alone even while in the vicinity of other children, and tended to induce more negative responses from peers. Furthermore, research evidence (Kalutskya et al., 2015) highlights implications for educational practice. Research on shyness demonstrates that it is indeed a risk factor for children's academic and social adjustment in their early years. Such children may present as being socially withdrawn, sometimes unresponsive, uncommunicative or living in a 'dream world' (Brophy, 1996).

Evans (2010) worries about the 'unique' academic and social challenges faced by shy children, and Leary and Kowalski (1995) have suggested that shy and anxious children, performing everyday classroom activities can experience additional stress due to their negative self-perception. Developing self-esteem and self-confidence has its roots in our earliest engagement with others. Young children

build their own self-view, and world view, mostly from the interactions they have with others and the extent to which these are positive or negative experiences. It is therefore, particularly important for QSA children to possess well-developed self-esteem (Siraj-Blatchford, 2006). Supporting children in building their confidence can help all children, but this is especially so with QSA children. Sensitive practitioners working with these children, in a caring and nurturing setting is key. The central principle of the 'Special Me Time' (Davis, 2012) programme employed in the present study is that it is designed to specifically support QSA children and nurture their confidence. The programme is aligned to The Six Principles of Nurture (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006). The use of a nurturing approach is a central tenet of the research, especially in relation to offering a safe space for the children and the importance of nurture for the development of wellbeing. Consequently, the aims of this study were to explore the benefits of employing this six-week intervention programme for QSA children and the implications for teaching pedagogy in this area.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and context

The Special Me Time (SMT) programme was developed as a result of doctoral study (Davis, 2012) looking at how Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students could facilitate a nurture intervention within their placements. SMT was devised and used as this intervention. Through networks within ITE partner schools practitioners were also keen to undertake the intervention, so the research participants became student teachers, school staff and children. The importance of supporting QSA learners who are often overlooked within a busy classroom was also at the heart of this research. The SMT programme was delivered to 24 children between the ages of three to seven years (nursery to year 2) in South East Wales and a year 1 classroom in England. The SMT programme was a six week long intervention and the research was implemented in five different settings within a time period from March 2017 to June 2018. A practitioner in each setting facilitated the programme, practitioners were either early years teachers or ITE students. All practitioners were trained in the SMT approach prior to delivery of the programme. Data collection involved undertaking a baseline pre and post intervention and then scrutinising the QSA children's involvement during the SMT sessions; looking at research output such as lesson evaluations; reflective diary entries and practitioner observations. Over the course of the programme, children took part in the specific taught sessions that had a child-focused, social and emotional emphasis.

Table 1: SMT programme activities (Davis, 2012, pp287–303)

Activities (6 in total)	Area of development	Brief explanation of activity
'Quietly appreciating beautiful things'	Moral and spiritual development/emphasis on calm/quiet times.	The children will be given a beautiful object and questions will be posed to learn their responses. They can touch and hold the object. To experience quiet times and develop creativity in their reflections.
'Jam sandwich tea party'	Personal development/social skills/friendship	The children will be asked to make 'jam sandwiches' for a tea party. They will then be allowed to 'invite' friends from their class to the party. An emphasis on sharing and social activities.
'Tent adventure'		The emphasis here on taking a tent outside or making a den, reading stories and eg toasting marshmallows or drinking hot chocolate while talking about journeys and experiences etc.
'Special me'	Wellbeing	Developing a positive self image/sense of belonging. The children will be making a display/year book/other medium to celebrate eg their pets; favourite food; book etc.
'I'm proud of you'		Being able to celebrate their own achievements and that of others in the group. Awarding each other rosettes they have made.
'What's in the box'	Social development	Developing a positive self image. The children will explore a range boxes containing various items. One contains a mirror to 'reflect' on their achievements – and also finding something 'special' inside.

All activities had an emphasis on taking place outdoors where possible. Activities focused on making children feel 'special'. Sessions were designed to be flexible and practitioners had autonomy in relation to delivery and length of session/materials used etc.

Session content was based on the Welsh Government Foundation Phase framework (2015). The SMT programme was designed specifically to help the children to:

- i) vocalise their feelings and needs,
- ii) support them in accessing general classroom opportunities,
- iii) help them to engage with everyday communication,
- iv) develop and maintain friendships.

The sessions were delivered to small groups (maximum six children). Each group facilitator was given a handbook of planned activities that had a social and emotional dynamic and activities were related to developing a range of personal and social developmental skills, eg planning a 'tea party' for peers. The use of baseline assessments were employed, based on the Welsh Government's Foundation Phase (for children aged 3-7) Personal Social Development/Wellbeing and Cultural Diversity, Foundation Phase Skills (2007). Children were

scored on the baselines from 0-5 (with 5 being the highest score); baseline assessments were taken at the start and on cessation of the programme. An example of a child baseline assessment proforma is set out in Figure 1. below.

Data collection and analysis

Qualitative research data were gathered from practitioner evaluations and observations and an evaluation of the implementation of the SMT programme. The research study adopted a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, using: pre- and post-SMT intervention baseline assessments (Welsh Government, 2007), semi-structured interviews with school staff and student teachers; lesson evaluations and observation material were also scrutinised. Ethical approval was granted by the authors' University and ethical considerations were adhered to throughout. Participants were recruited through purposive opportunity sampling, and included teachers or teaching assistants, ITE students or children at an ITE placement school. The settings selected were located in a variety of areas in South East Wales, within areas of both socio-economic disadvantage and more affluent areas. One setting, a year 1 class, was located in London as the teacher (a newly qualified teacher) was a former PGCE student from the researchers' university who had expressed an interest in being involved in the study.

Qualitative data were the subject of thematic analysis

Table 2: Information on involvement and data collection SMT.

Settings involved	Numbers of children	Gender		Children with EAL	Practitioners (staff or ITE student)	Data collection/Research outputs
		Male	Female			
Nursery 1F	6	4	2	3	2	Pre and post intervention baselines. Practitioner observations/field notes
Nursery 2G	4	2	2	2	2	
Nursery 3W	6	5	1	4	1	Audio interviews recordings with staff/ students
Reception class 1	4	1	3	2	1	Session evaluations and programme evaluations
Yr 1 class 1	4	2	2	0	1	

Figure 1: An example of a completed pre- and post-SMT intervention baseline proforma, showing improvement in a range of areas following engagement with the SMT programme

Welsh Government – PSD/WB/CD skill (FP framework, 2007) Child's name: Child A; Age: XX years	Initial baseline score (out of 5) Date: 06.03.18	Final baseline score (out of 5) Date: 17.04.18
Express & communicate different feelings and emotions – their own and those of others	0	3
Show curiosity and develop positive attitudes to new experiences and learning	1	3
Take risks and become confident explorers of their indoor and outdoor environment	1	3
Experiment with new learning opportunities, including ICT	0	2
Become independent thinkers and learners	0	2
Develop an awareness of what they are good at and understand how they can improve their learning and use feedback to improve their work	0	2
Value the learning, success and achievements of themselves and other people	1	2
Form relationships and feel confident to play and work cooperatively	1	2
Develop an awareness of different cultures and the differing needs, views and beliefs of other people in their own and other cultures	0	2
Respond to ideas and questions enthusiastically, sensitively, creatively and intuitively	0	3
Communicate about what is good and bad, right and wrong, fair and unfair, caring and inconsiderate	0	3
Respond personally to simple imaginary moral situations giving reasons for decisions made	0	2
Use stories or situations to raise questions about why some things are special	1	3
Express ideas and feelings creatively, explaining why they are significant	0	2
Talk about choices available to individuals and discuss whether the choices available make a decision easier or more complex	0	1
Ask questions about how and why special things should be treated with respect and respond personally	1	3
Ask questions about what is important in life from a personal perspective and from the perspective of others	1	2
Value and contribute to their own wellbeing and to the wellbeing of others	1	2
Be aware of their own feelings and develop the ability to express them in an appropriate way	0	3
Develop a growing interest in the world around them and understand what their environment has to offer when playing alone and with others	1	2
Ask for assistance when needed	1	2

(Braun & Clark, 2006), The qualitative data gathered consisted of practitioner observations, reflections and opinions, thus a robust method of analysis was needed to reach justifiable conclusions. The approach to analysis was grounded (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) as the data process, analysis and further development of any theories happened after the data was collected. The use of a framework was used as a justification for the use of qualitative research to expand theoretical analysis, extracting meaning from data gathered in a systematic and integrated way. Thus a 'practical analysis framework' (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used for data interpretation. This framework worked to offset some of the difficulties of quantifying qualitative data, as it helped to identify a range of patterns and themes within the data. The data was used reflectively and then ultimately reflexively (Warin et al., 2006), in relation to practice. An example here being it was found that SMT especially suited boys and EAL learners, this was not something that was originally hypothesised or was considered by the researchers prior to commencement of the study. Triangulation of data was a key consideration and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1970) was employed in relation to reflections on and use of several data collection methods such as baseline data, observations and lesson evaluations. The

resultant process of interpretation of data looked at regular or reoccurring patterns, within the findings, which were then organised into themes, as table 3 below shows:

Table 3: Five point analysis system used to analyse qualitative SMT data gathered

Numerical code	Pre-determined themes	Colour Code	No. of references to themes
1	Vocalise feelings and needs e.g 'I want to' ' Give me that'	Yellow	
2	Confidence/autonomy, eg Doing this on their own; taking charge of situations	Blue	
3	Changes/growth, eg speaking without being prompted. Giving opinions and suggestions;	Brown	
4	Self-esteem/self worth, eg pride in achievement; pointing out achievements	Pink	
5	Other / miscellaneous	Black	

Themes were designed to give an overall view of the way that children responded to and engaged with SMT activities and sessions. Thematic analysis was based on practitioner feedback and reflections within these areas. Because of the ordinal nature of the pre and post baseline scores, statistical analysis

of a quantitative nature was achieved by employing the Wilcoxon signed-rank test (Wilcoxon, 1945). This was employed in analysis of pre and post baseline scores.

RESEARCH DESIGN

At each school the lead practitioner had responsibility for the implementation of the SMT programme. They decided which children should be included, based on their own criteria reflecting the aims of the study. Many of the children were selected by the practitioners to participate in the SMT programme as they often played alone, or were deemed to be QSA children. Practitioners ran the SMT sessions and undertook the pre- and post-SMT programme baseline assessments, observations and session evaluations. Each SMT session was unique in that the practitioners were able to tailor the session material to their own and the children's needs. Each session lasted approximately one and a half hours. The student teachers were overseen by a permanent member of staff at each school and by their university tutor.

Two further sources of data supplemented the research design. These included audio recordings of interviews with staff/students involved in the delivery of the project. These were unstructured and used purposive sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015). Practitioner observations were used along with lesson evaluations and feedback acquired from the children to help enrich and inform the pre- and post-intervention quantitative baseline assessments collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rich and varied data were gathered as a result of the SMT implementation. As well as generic findings, the data also revealed individual progress, gained from child participation in the programme. For example, the baselines results in Table 3 identified that following their involvement with the SMT programme Child A1 was more able to 'Express & communicate different feelings and emotions – their own and those of others' having been initially scored as a 0 in this category, but reaching a score of 3 by the end of the programme. Indeed, child A1 demonstrated improvement in a range of descriptors, as a result of SMT programme engagement. Again, the results showed that child A1 had also improved from 0 to 3 in relation to item 10 (Respond to ideas and questions enthusiastically, sensitively, creatively and intuitively). While these changes cannot unequivocally be evidenced as being the result of the SMT intervention alone, the data does point to the potential for individual change over a short period of time (six weeks). This individual progress was noted more widely. For instance, a Nursery Teacher in Nursery 1F noted that:

Evidence from baseline scores at the beginning of the

programme and at the end showed that every child had become more confident and was becoming more curious to develop and explore. They were more able to work cooperatively rather than on their own.

It became apparent that the children involved in the SMT programme did become more confident during the SMT implementation. Students and staff involved with the programme also received input from parents on changes in the home environment. The parents of child A1 in Nursery 1F thanked practitioners for their support and reported on him talking more. Child A1 was the youngest in a large family, where siblings 'talked for him'. He became more confident and vocal as a result of his SMT sessions and this transferred to his home life.

PRACTITIONER FEEDBACK

More general findings were obtained from practitioner reflections and observations aimed at demonstrating how the implementation of the SMT programme benefited pedagogy, the QSA children's classroom experiences, and development that aligns with the research aims of this study. It also provides evidence on how the programme supported children in relation to boosting their levels of engagement and confidence, and their ability to access classroom opportunities and in developing friendships. For example a teacher in Nursery 2G noted that:

The sessions were really 'special' it gave the children time to chat with each other and staff... they were very engaged and enthusiastic. The children were asking... when is it SMT?

This is supported by Student C in Nursery 3W who noted that:

All children contributed at their own level. R was confident and quite chatty in the small group – where he is not in whole class. P was giggling and hiding the shells with and wanted to put the shell to her ear. N was relatively quiet, but did contribute. All children engaged and discussed the features of the shells to varying levels of confidence and sharing. N was more reserved, and chose to leave the session first. The rest of the children really enjoyed the session and stayed longer than required. N is probably the most quietest and shy of all the children. N had chosen to stay with the other children to talk and play. I need to encourage him to talk more openly, in front of peers and other adults. He seemed uncomfortable to talk in front of me. Targets for their learning would be to share more of what is important to them with the rest of the class. Daily show and tell for all to talk about special things.

This illustrates that all children were more confident in the small SMT group than in a whole class

situation and all contributed well at their respective level.

Similarly a newly qualified teacher in Reception class 1 reported:

I have 13 children in the class, some were very shy. Mainly girls. Many of them would play alongside others and not join in or were led by others. Two children are EAL – K was the child that I noticed got the most out of SMT. After the programme, she played with other children in the class much more. Now she will initiate, eg games with the others, where she would not do this before. She really bonded with E (also EAL) during the SMT programme – they had not in any way been friends before, but they both grew in confidence, due to the programme.

From this statement, following SMT input, children were seen to engage more fully and also initiate games with others, where previously this was not the case. The two children who had forged a firm friendship within the group, transferred this friendship to a whole class situation. They had not been friends pre-intervention.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS: PRE-SMT INTERVENTION VS POST-SMT INTERVENTION

The tables presented below summarise the pre- and post-SMT intervention baseline data collected during the study (see Figure 1). The purpose was to establish whether there were statistically significant differences between the group pre- and post-intervention scores that might provide specific information with which to quantitatively monitor and assess the effect of implementing the SMT programme and to gauge its effectiveness.

Table 4: Nursery 1F pre- and post-SMT intervention stats from baseline data

Pupil (sex)	Pre-SMT	Post-SMT	Difference (post-pre)	Observations
A1 (♂)	33	46	13	EAL
B1 (♀)	32	39	7	EAL
C1 (♂)	29	37	8	
D1 (♂)	27	38	11	EAL
E1 (♂)	8	15	7	
F1 (♀)	33	39	6	
Median (η)	30.5	38.5	7.5*	

Key: SMT = special me time programme; ♀ = girl; ♂ = boy; η (eta) = median value; EAL = English as an additional language; * = test of the null hypothesis (H_0): $\eta_{diff} = 0$ using Wilcoxon's signed-rank test (W_n) = $W_6 = 21.0$, $P = 0.036$.

This result sets out that the median score ($\eta = \text{eta}$) for the group differences ($\eta_{diff} = 7.5$) between the pre-SMT intervention measurement and the post-

SMT intervention measurement was statistically greater than zero (computed $P < 0.05$). We can therefore reject the H_0 : $\eta_{diff} = 0$ and accept the alternative hypothesis (H_1 : $\eta_{diff} \neq 0$). Thus, the SMT programme produced a small but statistically significant improvement in Nursery 1F children's overall personal and social development (PSD). Indeed, this set of results also supports wider research on the benefits of nurture interventions for QSA children (Brophy, 1996; Aaron, 2015), where boys improved the most from this intervention, with one EAL boy improving by a difference of 13.

Table 5: Nursery 2G pre- and post-SMT intervention stats from baseline data

Pupil (sex)	Pre-SMT	Post-SMT	Difference (post-pre)	Observations
A2 (♂)	19	38	19	EAL
B2 (♂)	13	40	27	EAL
C2 (♀)	10	47	37	LAC
D2 (♀)	17	36	19	
Median (η)	15	39	23*	

Key: SMT = special me time programme; ♀ = girl; ♂ = boy; η (eta) = median value; EAL = English as an additional language; LAC = looked after child; * = test of the null hypothesis (H_0): $\eta_{diff} = 0$ using Wilcoxon's signed-rank test (W_n) = $W_4 = 10.0$, $P = 0.100$.

The median score for the group differences ($\eta_{diff} = 23$) between the pre-SMT measurement and the post-SMT intervention measurement was not statistically greater than zero (computed $P > 0.05$) in this setting. We can therefore accept the H_0 : $\eta_{diff} = 0$. In Nursery 2G, while there were large improvements in PSD scores across the board, it is likely that because of the small group size, the differences that the SMT programme made were statistically non-significant. However, the girl who was looked after (LA) showed an exceptional gain, when compared to the rest of the group. This demonstrated that for some children, the SMT engagement really resonated with them and they especially benefited from it. As this pupil was a LA child, discussion with the practitioner who facilitated the intervention, suggested that individual care and attention, particularly supported this particular girl's needs. (Vartuli, 1999; Olsen Laney, 2005).

Table 6: Nursery 3W pre- and post-SMT intervention stats from baseline data

Pupil (sex)	Pre-SMT	Post-SMT	Difference (post-pre)	Observations
A3 (♀)	21	36	15	EAL
B3 (♂)	34	71	37	
C3 (♂)	19	51	32	
C4 (♂)	27	54	27	EAL
C5 (♂)	10	31	21	EAL
C6 (♂)	52	62	10	EAL
Median (η)	24	52.5	24*	

Key: SMT = special me time programme; ♀ = girl; ♂ = boy; η (eta) = median value; EAL = English as an additional language; * = test of the null hypothesis (H_0): $\eta_{diff} = 0$ using Wilcoxon's signed-rank test (W_n) = $W_6 = 21.0$, $P = 0.036$.

The median score for the group differences ($\eta_{diff} = 24$) between the pre-SMT programme intervention measurement and the post-SMT programme measurement is statistically greater than zero. We can therefore reject the H_0 : $\eta_{diff} = 0$ and accept the H_1 : $\eta_{diff} \neq 0$ (computed $P < 0.05$). The scores from this nursery saw bigger PSD improvements, but from a higher overall pre-SMT programme intervention baseline. Interestingly, Nursery 3W was the most multicultural of the educational settings in this study and the children were also used to working in small groups. As a consequence they engaged well with the SMT approach. Once again boys, and EAL boys in particular, gained most effectively from intervention. It is also noteworthy that boys were over-represented in this group; this was because boys in this nursery were seen by practitioners as especially needing support.

Table 7: Reception class 1 pre- and post-SMT intervention stats from baseline data

Pupil (sex)	Pre-SMT	Post-SMT	Difference (post-pre)	Observations
Ar (♀)	55	77	22	EAL
Br (♀)	48	61	13	
Cr (♂)	56	77	21	EAL
Dr (♀)	32	48	16	
Median (η)	51.5	69	18.5*	

Key: SMT = special me time programme; ♀ = girl; ♂ = boy; η (eta) = median value; EAL = English as an additional language; * = test of the null hypothesis (H_0): $\eta_{diff} = 0$ using Wilcoxon's signed-rank test (W_n) = $W_4 = 10.0$, $P = 0.100$.

The median score for the group differences ($\eta_{diff} = 18.5$) between the pre-SMT intervention measurement and the post-SMT measurement is not statistically greater than zero (computed $P > 0.05$) and we can therefore accept the H_0 : $\eta_{diff} = 0$. Even though in Reception class 1, we see the biggest improvements in PSD scores from the two EAL children, but while the changes appear large, the

non-significant result is, once again, likely due to the small sample size. Another interesting aspect is that the two EAL children in this sample, became firm friends during the SMT intervention and the class teacher reported that their progress was then 'in tandem' with them supporting each other. They had not been friendly pre-intervention.

Table 8: Year 1 class 1 pre- and post-SMT intervention stats from baseline data

Pupil (sex)	Pre-SMT	Post-SMT	Difference (post-pre)
Ay1 (♂)	34	68	34
By1 (♀)	36	62	26
Cy1 (♂)	31	57	26
Dy1 (♀)	34	57	23
Median (η)	34	59.5	26*

Key: SMT = special me time programme; ♀ = girl; ♂ = boy; η (eta) = median value; EAL = English as an additional language; * = test of the null hypothesis (H_0): $\eta_{diff} = 0$ using Wilcoxon's signed-rank test (W_n) = $W_4 = 10.0$, $P = 0.100$.

This data set shows the best overall PSD improvements recorded in any of the educational settings investigated. However, the median score for the group differences ($\eta_{diff} = 26$) between the pre-SMT programme intervention measurement and the post-SMT measurement was not statistically greater than zero (computed $P > 0.05$), and so we have to accept the H_0 : $\eta_{diff} = 0$. Once again, the non-significant result is likely due to the small sample size. It is interesting to note however, that the year 1 teacher responsible for this class, and who facilitated the implementation of the SMT programme in this school, was a mature PGCE student teacher and was particularly receptive and knowledgeable in relation to the SMT ethos, as her own child was QSA.

Generally, across the study, while the statistical Wilcoxon analyses were often disappointing, overall consideration of the observed scores shows that in all individual pupil cases, the SMT programme input did have a positive impact on the QSA children in relation to improving a range of PSD factors. To clarify, if we view this through a 'human lens' a particularly noteworthy example would be in relation to child C4 at Nursery 3W who was an EAL boy, and showed an exceptional change as a result of following the SMT intervention programme. This is demonstrated in the reflection recorded by student teacher D who noted that:

Child C was an elective mute. He was the youngest child in a family of 8 and the other children did the talking for him. At the beginning of the SMT programme, he would only speak to me in a whisper, if at all. As the weeks went on he became more confident, other practitioners commented on this.

In the last week, he was playing with some other children in the yard, a group of boys threw a teddy bear over the nursery wall, C went and found the caretaker and explained what had happened and that he wanted the bear back. Staff and his parents were amazed at his progress. Also, at the end of the SMT programme, he did not talk to me in a whisper anymore.

CONCLUSION

In relation to child development and wellbeing, it became apparent that the SMT programme employed in this study led to positive outcomes for the QSA children's social and emotional development. It supported the QSA children, either by improving their engagement and confidence or enabling them to access activities both in and out of the SMT group, it also helped them to forge friendships. The practitioners interviewed, explained that as a result of the intervention, children were more able to vocalise feelings and needs. For example, Teacher A reported that: *'Prior to SMT, T barely spoke in nursery. As the programme went on, he became more vocal.'*, and Student B identified that: *'D was reserved and shy and had a negative attitude to her abilities, SMT gave her confidence and showed her that her contributions were valid.'* It became apparent that SMT especially supported boys. Over the whole study, it also became evident that EAL boys particularly, showed improved social and emotional skills. However, girls and non-EAL children improved, but less markedly.

In considering why this might be, the evidence supports Crozier's (2014) notion that small intervention groups are especially effective for QSA children. Indeed, all practitioners mentioned the fact that the QSA children seemed to thrive in the small group situations and the small groups also enabled the children to become more confident and vocal. This was also apparent when the children transitioned back into their whole class situations, with many children taking friendships made within the SMT setting into the wider classroom. Children were also able to use oracy skills developed in the SMT group into the main stream classroom with practitioners noting that the children were able to engage, eg in circle time sessions, putting across ideas, whereas before they would have remained silent.

In addition, time was an important factor as practitioners consistently reported the importance of time and space to undertake the programme. They especially highlighted the benefits of focusing on quiet and calm within the sessions, supporting the work of Benson et al., (1994, 2000) and Foret

et al., (2012). This suggests the importance of QSA children needing quiet calm spaces. It is imperative that staff are sensitive to the QSA children's needs and appreciate the fact that they do not always like working in large groups. Cain (2016, 2020) echoes this and suggests that grouping can cause anxiety to quiet learners and there is nothing wrong with facilitating solo projects within the classroom and this will in fact benefit QSA children. We suggest that the provision of an SMT context, using a nurturing small group approach leads to social and emotional benefits, skills and attributes such as self-esteem and confidence for QSA children. We acknowledge however, that this is not always possible, due to staff or budgetary constraints to provide continual small group teaching. However, it should be a feature where possible. Practitioners also need to be aware of how to deal with highly sensitive QSA children in the classroom. Aaron (2015) suggests that QSA children can be exceptionally responsive to their environments, picking up on visual and non-visual cues, noise and the moods and behaviours of others. Thus QSA children easily home in on adult conversations. Adults need to be mindful of this, and especially so when discussing anything in relation to children's performance or abilities within the classroom, or when comparing them to others. A limitation of the SMT approach is that it didn't employ a 'control group' of children, who were QSA and were not included in the SMT programme and activities. In this first research round, it was felt that this would be detrimental to leave out any children thus identified. However, this is acknowledged as a limitation and the use of a 'waiting group' as a way of identifying 'control group' data will be looked at during roll out of phase two of this research. Further input relating to the longitudinal study of research participants is also envisaged.

We suggest that the role of the teacher is paramount, both in understanding the QSA child and supporting them and this was highlighted during the research. This is also echoed by

Sette et al., (2021) who suggest that shyness in young children results in less social play. It is vital therefore, that practitioners understand the needs of the children who display quiet, shy or anxious behaviours. This is especially important now in light of the current COVID pandemic, with children's anxiety and mental health being affected. (Ritz, O'Hare and Burgess, 2020; Waite et al., 2020). The provision needed may be as simple as taking the time to listen and explain; employing strategies that give them access to classroom groups/peers' games. Allowing them quiet time, eg in the book corner of a classroom, letting them work alone or in pairs rather than in large groups. If a QSA child

is in a classroom where practitioners are unaware of, or unresponsive to, their specific needs, or their teachers provide only low levels of social and emotional support, it is unlikely that the QSA child will thrive. Whereas in a supportive classroom, with a high level of emotional support and with an intuitive and emotionally literate practitioner, this study suggests that the QSA child will flourish.

Although this study was small-scale and geographically limited, it suggests that it is important to underpin young QSA children's early learning experiences within a supportive emotional context, and to appreciate the holistic aspects of their needs. Maslow (1943) indicated that the ability to find self-fulfilment and to realise one's own potential, could not occur until various other physiological and psychological needs were met. QSA children may

still find navigating their course in the complicated social world of the primary school, or nursery, more difficult than other children, and may need a little more help, nurture and targeted support. Phase two of the research is currently ongoing and will also gauge the additional dynamic of the subsequent effects of COVID 19 on young children's anxieties. Thus, we reiterate that the key concepts of the SMT programme, that is, small groups, time, quiet calm spaces and an emotionally literate teacher, will continue to provide them with significant support on their learning journey.

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NURTURE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: WHAT RECOGNITION IN OFSTED REPORTS?

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ABSTRACT

This explorative study analysed a selection of school OFSTED reports to answer the research question, 'how are nurture and nurture group practice represented in OFSTED reports?' This study sampled secondary school OFSTED reports over a period of one year and analysed the reports for reference to nurturing and nurture group practice.

Findings showed 176 reports, within the sample of 935, identifying practice related to nurture and 34 schools with nurture groups. An analysis was made of the use of these terms and the context within which nurture groups are discussed. There was a significant lack of clarity relating to the meaning of nurturing practice and the discussion of nurture groups in the reports lacked precision around language, tended to omit evaluation of the practice, and did not include the views of the parents of nurture group attendees. Findings also suggest that if the methodology used in this study were replicated with a wider range of schools and time-frames, significant learning about nurturing and nurture group practice would emerge. Implications for the development of OFSTED reports and the work of nurtureUK are suggested.

INTRODUCTION

The vocabulary of nurture groups and 'nurture' in education has developed significantly since the first established nurture groups in Hackney, England, in 1972 (Lucas, 2020). A nurture group is a targeted psychosocial intervention (Hughes and Schlösser, 2014), first developed by Bennathan and Boxall (2000), with a strong foundation on the attachment needs (Bowlby, 1969) of children and young people. Nurture groups provide a safe base (Lucas, 2010) from which to support the social, emotional and mental health needs of learners who struggle to learn effectively in a mainstream classroom. Following a growth in prevalence of nurture groups in the late 1990s, an organic evolution has taken place (Middleton, 2020, p34), with their nature and organisational structure becoming more diverse, and the defining features now being determined through adherence to the six principles of nurture (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006), rather than the structural features of the classic nurture groups (Boxall, 2002). The current model for enacting nurturing approaches in schools, with many

similarities to the whole-school approach introduced in this journal (MacKay, 2015), identifies nurture groups as part of a five-stage 'Graduated nurture approach' (nurtureUK, 2018a, p17). This approach, exemplified in recent research by Warin (2017) and Coleman (2020), emphasises a broader whole-school application (nurtureUK, 2019) of the six principles of nurture (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006). A growing body of research evidencing the effectiveness of nurture group practice (eg Sloan et al., 2016) and whole-school nurturing approaches (eg McNicol and Reilly, 2018), is currently available and continues to grow.

In 1993 a new national approach to school accountability through school inspection was introduced, with the creation of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). This removed the responsibility of monitoring inspections from Local Education Authorities and moved to a system of inspectors being contracted by tender (Davis, 2018). Following UK devolution in the late 1990s, OFSTED's remit was limited to English schools, with

the responsibility for school inspection resting with ESTYN in Wales, Education Scotland in Scotland, and ETI in Northern Ireland. English schools are inspected under the OFSTED Education Inspection Framework (OFSTED, 2019).

The research outlined within this article sought to understand how nurture and nurture group practice are represented within OFSTED inspection reports. This is an exploratory study seeking to identify the scope and potential usefulness for practitioners, academics and supporters of nurture group practice of closely analysing OFSTED reports, as a way of understanding nurturing and nurture group practice. While the vocabulary of nurture has uses beyond that of practice linked to nurtureUK and nurture groups, the prevalence of this use within OFSTED reports could have significant impact upon the dissemination and promotion of the importance of this practice. At present an understanding of the perspective of OFSTED reports, that recognises and discusses this practice, is a gap in research. As such, while the analysis of reports may not help to further the understanding of the practice of nurture, it offers the potential to understand how this practice is perceived by stakeholders who are not allied with nurtureUK and nurture groups, many of whom use OFSTED as a primary source of information. As a consequence it offers the potential to understand how the practice can be disseminated more widely. As a preliminary study, the scope of the research was deliberately limited. The decision was made to focus on OFSTED reports relating to secondary schools over a period of one year, published prior to the first Covid-19 lockdown period which began at the end of March 2020. Secondary schools, as a more recent area where nurture practice has developed, were chosen as the focus as a way of limiting the size of the data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

OFSTED Reports

The consequences of OFSTED reports are a contested area. Undeniably, schools are judged by a broad range of stakeholders according to the OFSTED grading they achieve in their most recent report. Research shows a positive perception of OFSTED inspections on the part of parents, who felt that their views were valued and that it served as an opportunity for positives about the school to be communicated (Ouston and Klenowski, 2018). For schools fortunate enough to achieve a 'good' or 'outstanding' grading, it is common to see the rating prominently positioned as a marketing tool. The overall cost of one year of the OFSTED inspection process has been estimated to be £44m (National Audit Office, 2018, p4) and the process of OFSTED

inspection is seen to present significant financial and emotional costs to schools (Russell, 2018), being widely perceived by school practitioners as stressful, exhausting and demoralising (Hopkins et al., 2016). There is evidence of the influence of inspection agendas pushing school leaders towards 'suboptimisation' and teaching to inspection (deWolf and Janssens, 2007, p22), enacted through actively working towards ensuring favourable outcomes for forthcoming inspections (Perryman et al., 2018).

OFSTED has been portrayed as reflecting contemporary concerns about education in schools that are broadly held by practitioners, academics and policy makers (Brighouse and Moon, 1994), but also as part of the system by which a centralised, international, standardisation of education is enforced (Kamens, 2013), or policed (Bates, Lewis and Pickard, 2019), at the expense of localised contextual approaches (Cullingford, 1999). A further critique is that the process reflects 'enframed managerialism' (Flint and Peim, 2012, p.194), with the demands of performativity enshrined by the discourse of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1991) which distracts the focus of leaders away from what effective practice is, towards a checklist mentality. As a consequence of this marketised discourse, teachers are placed within a wicked context (Middleton, 2019) where the energy and drive for innovation is lost (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009). With the publication of a new inspection framework (OFSTED, 2019), it is hoped that a more holistic assessment of schools may lead to a positive change in the field (Boddison, 2019).

The robust nature of OFSTED judgements has been challenged, with criticism directed towards the fact that, while there is clear guidance for inspectors relating to evidence they should collect, the subsequent use of this evidence to make judgements is frequently less than robust (Wilkins and Antonopoulou, 2020). This lack of clarity may have been further compounded due to the nature of the outsourced inspection regime (Baxter and Clarke, 2013). In 2015 OFSTED took action to mitigate inconsistency in the quality of inspection reports, bringing school inspection in-house, however, as part of the assessment of inspectors, fewer than half of the existing inspectors were offered new contracts (National Audit Office, 2018).

Further criticism of OFSTED judgements has identified a correlation between lower OFSTED inspection ratings and both pupil intakes from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and intakes of pupils with low prior attainment (Hutchinson, 2016). In addition, the academic, social and

emotional outcomes of learners at age 16, are poorly represented by OFSTED ratings once selection criteria have been considered (Von Stumm et al., 2020). The process of accountability in which OFSTED plays a key part was charged as no longer working in the interests of stakeholders (NAHT, 2018) and appeared to culminate a year later with the commitment to reform OFSTED within the manifestos of the Labour Party (2019), the Liberal Democrats (2019), and the Green Party (2019).

OFSTED reports can be perceived as a key part of the enactment of government policy leading to the reproduction of this policy at school level (Cushing, 2020) and the language contained within as a legitimising tool, introducing a particular discourse through which to conceptualise effective education (Trowler, 2003). The high stakes nature of OFSTED inspections points towards the significance of the content and language used within reports, and it is suggested that the inclusion, or lack thereof, of references to nurture groups and nurturing practice not only reflects the significance assigned to this area of practice, but may also hold significance as a driver for future practice.

The first OFSTED-published recognition of the positive impact of a nurture approach is reported by Lucas (2019) as being in the 1997 OFSTED Annual Report, however on close inspection this report does not specify nurture practice, but rather discusses pastoral support (p22), describes general secure and caring environments (p25), and offering learners opportunities to take responsibilities (p25). The first explicit recognition of primary school nurture groups by OFSTED was in 2005 (p14). Six years later OFSTED (2011a) published a research paper that gave a favourable summary of the potential impact of well-run nurture groups in primary schools. In the same year, OFSTED (2011b, p16) identified a secondary nurture group as an example of good practice in re-engaging disaffected learners. Most recently, OFSTED (2020, p22) recognised that the use of a nurture group was a successful way of consolidating support for pupils with SEND and reducing costs. It is also significant to note that this publication referred specifically to a secondary-age nurture group. There are some examples of the positive recognition of nurture groups within individual OFSTED school reports, that have arisen following the first recognition in 2005. Examples include, Hawkley High School in 2006 and Shevington High School in 2008. There is, however, no current published research that analyses OFSTED's responses to nurture groups in school inspection reports.

A very small number of contemporary research

articles that analyse OFSTED reports have been identified as part of this project. Mogra (2016) carried out textual analysis, identifying key-words used relating to radicalisation in schools, concluding an absence of systematic radicalisation in the schools that were studied. Chatzifotou (2019) examined the relationship between Eco-school practice and OFSTED, identifying that OFSTED reports failed to recognise the importance of the work and ethos of this approach within their reports.

METHODOLOGY

OFSTED school inspection reports are publicly available on the OFSTED website (<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>), with a search and filter function. The website was initially searched using the option, 'Education and training' combined with 'Secondary'.

This search included the following types of secondary schools, as identified by OFSTED: Secondary, Comprehensive, Special, Girls, Hospital, Modern, Through, Grammar, Technical, Alternative Provision, Muslim, Jewish and Other Schools, and the following categories of school: Maintained, Independent, Foundation, Academy, Free, Community, Voluntary Aided, UTC and Studio schools. Residential or boarding secondary schools were excluded from the sample, as these establishments are inspected under the Social Care Common Inspection Framework.

The search was filtered to include reports published from 21 March 2019 to 20 March 2020.

The status of the reports was filtered to include three inspection types, School, Standard, and Short, while rejecting Monitoring Visit, Additional Inspection, Pre-registration Inspection, and Emergency Inspection reports. Where more than one report was available as an output of the searches and filters, only the most recent report was included. A total of 985 reports were downloaded as a result of this filtered search process.

These 985 reports were then individually searched for the inclusion of the terms, 'nurture' and 'nurturing'. This produced 176 reports that used these terms with reference to the practice in the school, with four additional reports using the terms within recommendations for improvement and two using the terms to describe horticultural activities.

Through reading and rereading the elements containing the terms, 'nurture' and 'nurturing' within the 176 reports, and inductively refining the emergent themes, the following emerged:

- a)** Specific reference to nurture group provision.
- b)** A whole-school nurturing or nurture ethos.

- c) A nurturing approach linked to specific ethical or spiritual identities.
- d) A nurturing approach on the part of the staff.

The paragraph(s) containing the terms were copied and analysed to provide qualitative evidence of the representation of nurture adopted within the reports.

No significant ethical challenges are identified related to this project, as all the data used within the research is available in the public domain and no schools from the primary research activity have been directly identified within this report.

Where quotes are used from the reports, they are coded to individual schools from the initial sample of 985 using the format, 'S###'. The data table is available to readers on direct application to the author.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 985 reports for secondary schools published by OFSTED within the year from 21 March 2019 to 20 March 2020, 182 reports contained the terms 'nurture' or 'nurturing'. six reports were removed, four of which used the terms as part of the recommendations for improvement, and two that used the terms to refer to horticultural activities taking place as part of the curriculum, leaving a total of 176 reports to be analysed.

Figure 1 [insert fig 1 near here] identifies the context within which the terms 'nurture' and 'nurturing' were used in these 176 reports. It should be noted that some reports used the terms within more than one context. nurtureUK (2018a) identifies that over 2000 UK schools have nurture groups, which represents 16.4% of the total number of UK schools (BESA, 2019). With 34 schools identified as having a nurture group within the sample of 985, this represents only 3.45%. These two percentages are not expected to triangulate as the nurtureUK figures do not separate primary and secondary schools. The long history of nurture groups is related to primary schools and the relatively recent publication of the adapted Boxall Profile® for use with secondary aged pupils (Bennathan, Boxall and Colley, 2010) implies a proportionately smaller distribution of nurture groups in secondary schools, which is reflected in the percentages within this research.

Of the 34 schools identified as having a nurture group, 20 reports did not use the term 'nurture group'. As such, it may be reasonable to question whether nurture group provision is not routinely identified within OFSTED reports. Seven of the schools with nurture groups were classified as 'Special', while six other schools classified as 'other' may also provide specialist provision. Two schools

with nurture groups also had a dog as therapeutic support. Just one school was identified as having a nurture group as well as a general ethos of nurture combined with a nurturing approach by staff.

Figure 2 [insert fig 2 near here] identifies the inspection rating received by those settings without a nurture group and Figure 3 [insert fig 3 near here] shows the inspection rating of those settings identified as having a nurture group. The ratings scale has four classifications, outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

As can be seen from Figure 1, the majority of schools recognised by OFSTED for nurturing practice were identified as having a general, whole-school, nurturing approach or having a nurturing ethos. An example of this recognition for a school with a rating of 'outstanding' states:

Pupils flourish in this nurturing school. (S124)

Just over a fifth of schools were seen to have staff who employed a nurturing approach to their relationships with the learners in the setting:

Staff nurture and teach pupils to develop their self-confidence and resilience (S279)

Within the school there are many highly skilled staff who know how to nurture young people to become independent and successful. (S702)

...relationships between adults and children are warm and nurturing... (S710)

Some reports identify the staff's nurturing approach as a positive within the context of a negative report, as the following quote from a school rated as 'inadequate' illustrates:

Adults are successful at providing a nurturing environment where children behave well. (S418)

In other settings where the rating is below 'good' and the staff are recognised as nurturing, particular reference has been made to inclusion groups such as children in care or those on the SEND register, for example:

Nurturing relationships are built with pupils who are looked after or in care (S978)

while reference to SEND and SENCOs is made in connection with nurturing practice in 14 reports.

Where schools' intake crossed beyond traditional secondary aged learners, of which there were 74 within the 176 reports, and where provision for younger age groups was specifically discussed, this tended to be an area linked to nurturing practice, for example:

In the early years, children settle quickly into the nurturing environment... (S592)

Parents say that their children are nurtured well through their early years. (S812)

These examples reflect the legacy of the historic development of nurture groups and nurturing practice, which began as practice within primary-aged schooling (Bennathan and Boxall, 2000) and the much more recent move to develop nurture groups within secondary settings (Colley, 2012).

In none of the 176 reports was nurture or nurturing associated with negative practice, indeed, nurture was part of required improvement of the additional four reports, exemplified by the following:

Leaders should ensure that the school nurtures, develops and stretches pupils... (S208)

Closer analysis of the way in which the terms 'nurture' and 'nurturing' were used in reports that did not identify nurture groups, indicate that the use of the terms was not related to whole-school nurturing practice as exemplified by nurtureUK's (2018a) 5-stage 'Graduated nurture approach'. Instead, the majority of these reports use the terms generically, with 'nurture' and 'nurturing' equating to notions of care, development of talents and support, for example:

They provide a warm and nurturing environment where pupils feel safe and cared for well. (S862)

These enhance and nurture their skills and interests. (S310)

The voice of parents within the reports reflects the generic use of 'nurture' and 'nurturing', relating to ethos and approach, exemplified by the following quote from a parent:

"This is a nurturing environment, that enables my child to flourish." (S421)

However, there are no examples of parents' views within the reports for schools with nurture groups.

The comparison of Figures 2 and 3 highlights a significant difference in the OFSTED ratings for schools with and without nurture groups. Seventy four per cent of schools without a nurture group achieved a positive rating (Outstanding or Good) in comparison to 45% for those with nurture groups, where the proportion of Requires Improvement ratings was significantly higher. Consideration of the reasons for this disparity may link to issues of the attainment focus of inspections, rather than a focus on achievement and progress of learners (Von Stumm et al., 2020). Consideration of the socio-economic demographic of the school intake (Hutchinson, 2016) may also be an

important element through which to understand these ratings.

Within the reports for 34 schools identified as having a nurture group, 15 reports are descriptive of practice relating to the nurture group, for example:

...nurture groups work to give pupils a safe space alongside mentoring support. (S688)

Eighteen reports offer a positive judgement of the nurture group provision, for example:

Pupils in the nurture unit make good academic and social progress. Pupils in the nurture class are supported well to gain confidence and develop their social skills. (S345)

While three reports offer a partial or qualified positive judgement, for example:

The school provides a 'nurture' facility, ... this aspect of the school's provision is an emerging strength. (S918)

For schools with nurture group provision, evaluative OFSTED comments can be extremely important in terms of accountability and justifying the funding for such a provision, for parents who seek to understand the effectiveness of the provision, as well as for other schools and those who support them, by acting as examples of positive practice. A welcome development to reports would be that a larger proportion moved beyond simple description to clearer comment about the contribution that nurture groups make to the learning of those children and young people within the provision as well as to the whole school. A model of this approach is seen here:

...targeted therapeutic support in specialist classes, such as in the nurture group. All of this weaves together very well. The school is a happy, calm and welcoming environment. (S196)

There are a number of comments within the reports that point to their authors' understanding of nurturing practice and nurture groups being limited or misunderstood. In 19 of the 34 reports, the term 'nurture group' is not used to describe this practice. Examples of mis-naming this provision include 'nurture provision' (S823), 'nurture unit and nurture class' (S345), 'carefully considered support for a small group of pupils' (S569) and providing the familiar name-label used within the school, without clearly naming it as a nurture group (S134 and S209). It would be useful to understand whether the authoring inspector made a choice not to name the provision as a nurture group because they were committed to the Boxall (2002) classic model of nurture group provision, whether they were

unfamiliar with nurture group practice or for some other reason. Further examples include the apparent misrepresentation of the essence of nurturing practice:

They are nurtured well because the number of pupils in classes is low. (S479)

This appears to focus on adult to pupil ratios rather than the pedagogical understanding of the six principles of nurture (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006), and a further example identifies nurture group practice only in terms of reading improvement opportunities:

Younger pupils in the nurture group regularly practise phonics. (S428)

One report also appears to imply a child-care approach to nurture group practice:

Pupils who find school more challenging are looked after well in the nurture classes. (S519)

A significantly concerning comment in one report appears to combine the use of nurturing practice with behavioural sanctions:

The inclusion unit provides both a sanction for poor behaviour and a nurturing base for pupils who struggle to meet the expectations staff have of them. (S763)

Which exemplifies an approach that contradicts the principles of the classroom as a safe base and that all behaviour should be seen as a form of communication (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006, p10). It is, however, unclear whether the wording in the report reflects the school's perspective of the provision or the inspector's conclusion.

As stated earlier, the voice of the parents in relation to nurture group practice was a significant omission from reports. The single reference within the 34 reports was where nurture group provision was evaluated for a school with the rating of Requires Improvement, and a distinction was made between the effectiveness for different age groups and as evidence, the following was stated:

This is having some impact on improving the progress of pupils, but is less compelling at key stage 4. Many parents and carers express their dissatisfaction with the level of support provided for their children. (S802)

The importance of parents as key stakeholders in nurture group provision and their perceptions of its impact on their children and their families is an important area of consideration (March and Healy, 2007). The overall omission of the parent voice for learners in nurture groups reflects the work of Pyle

and Rae (2015), who identified a lack of research in this area.

CONCLUSION

There is a strong body of academic literature evidencing the positives of nurture and nurture group practice, however evidence from OFSTED reports has significant impact on practice and reaches a significantly different audience. This exploratory research offers an approach that can complement research literature as a way of understanding the use and value of nurturing and nurture group provision in schools, and the perspectives of stakeholders. The use of this methodology with a wider sample may also be useful as a way of confirming the prevalence and spread of nurture groups in England. The sample would need to include primary and secondary schools, while Early Years settings may also be relevant to include, and if a wider time frame were encompassed, it would be possible to bring in data from reports covering the majority of English schools. A similar approach could also be used with ESTYN, Education Scotland and ETI reports to triangulate national figures and provide UK-wide information. This use may, to some extent, be compromised in the light of the findings related to the misnaming of nurture groups and the potential that not all nurturing and nurture group practice is recognised within OFSTED reports. The author would welcome feedback from researchers and practitioners about the usefulness of this methodology and whether widening the sample and scope may be useful as a future project.

This exploratory research has identified that OFSTED reports offer a broadly positive perspective relating to nurturing provision, and a tendency against the practice of providing evaluative comments about nurture groups. It has been found that the terms 'nurture' and 'nurturing' are widely employed in a generic way in OFSTED reports, with the link to educational conceptions of nurture in Lucas, Insley and Buckland's (2006) six principles of nurture being frequently omitted. The views of the parents of children and young people attending nurture groups have been identified as missing from OFSTED reports. There is a significant disparity between the identification of nurture groups in OFSTED reports and other statistical sources such as nurtureUK.

The findings point to a need for schools to be more overt about the use of nurture in their provision, both through a whole school nurture approach and nurture groups, to promote the clear identification of this practice in OFSTED reports. Furthermore, positive development opportunities for nurturing

provision may be facilitated if organisations such as nurtureUK were able to successfully use their voice to encourage OFSTED reports to provide explicit recognition of nurture group practice, to include it in their evaluation of school outcomes and to seek the views of parents of nurture group attendees. This is likely to have implications for the unpublished OFSTED inspector training materials. As such, nurtureUK should consider the development of their role in educating and informing key organisations about nurturing practice. The explicit recognition of nurture group practice would help to develop a

clear record of the number of English nurture groups and if greater clarity were achieved through this approach, it may also help understanding of the reasons nurture groups have been identified in a significant proportion of schools rated as Requires Improvement, rather than being evenly spread across schools rated both positively and negatively. Further research, analysing the demographics of schools with nurture groups and how this relates to the rating is an area for the development of this research.

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

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ABSTRACT

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

INTRODUCTION

What are nurture groups and how do they work?

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

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

The daily routine is explicit and predictable. Activities like emotional literacy, group activities, turn taking and the nurture breakfast are designed

to help children develop trust, greater self-awareness and awareness of the feelings of others, communication and language skills and the growth of confidence, resilience and self-esteem (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Colley, 2009).

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

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

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

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

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

Legislation and national context

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

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

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

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

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

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

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

RESEARCHER'S RATIONALE AND THEORETICAL POSITION

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

LITERATURE REVIEW

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

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

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

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

to mainstream school teachers and support staff in primary settings.

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

ORDER OF EXPLORATION

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

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

THEME 1. EXPERIENCE OF BEING IN AN INTERVENTION

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

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

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

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

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

THEME 2. LIVED EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOL STAFF

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEME 3. EXPERIENCE OF SUPPORT

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

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

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

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE LITERATURE

At an individual level, self-efficacy, resilience and feelings of control are found to be related to

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

JUSTIFICATION AND METHOD

Research questions and design

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

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

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

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

Sampling and recruitment

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

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

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

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

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

Method and data analysis

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

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

Quality of the research

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

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

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

Ethical considerations

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

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

Findings

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

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

Table 1: Superordinate themes and subthemes

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

SUPERORDINATE THEME 1: RESILIENCE AS A CONCEPT

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

Figure 1: Understanding of resilience as a concept



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

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

The theme of 'Feelings related to resilience' refers

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

“...kind of thinking ‘right okay, can I keep going?’ you know, ‘have I got the strength to keep going for this child?’.” (p8, 285-286).

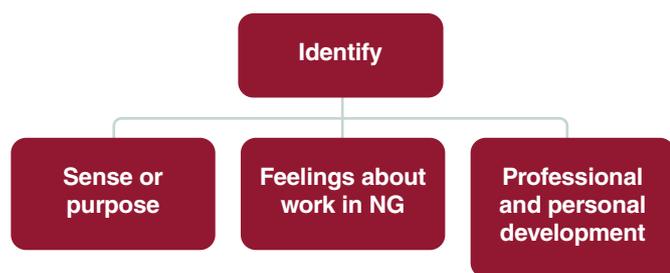
Participants’ perception of their own resilience was mentioned or implied by all who took part in the study. Some participants described their level of resilience in the present moment and discussed how it has changed over time, while other participants reported their resilience as more constant and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

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

SUPERORDINATE THEME 2: IDENTITY

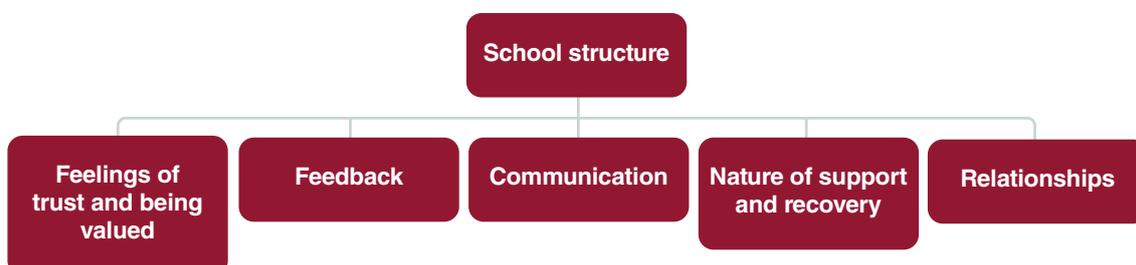
The second superordinate theme, related to a sense of identity to the NG community, appeared to be determined by several factors, placed under three themes: *a sense of purpose, feelings about work in NG and professional and personal development* (Fig 2).

Figure 2: Components of identity



Most of the participants discussed their own views about the *purpose of their work* in an NG or reasons for working in an NG. Some participants hinted to

Figure 3: Components of school structure



a sense of purpose streaming from the work they do, while others discussed how the role itself felt as though they had a sense of purpose.

“I don’t know what would be next for me. That’s my thing,” (p4, 154).

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

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

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

SUPERORDINATE THEME 3: SCHOOL STRUCTURE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Superordinate theme 4: Navigating the challenges of the NG role

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

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

Figure 4: Components of navigating the challenges of the NG role



The ability to be *flexible and adaptable* in the role were discussed by the majority of participants and were important contributors to resilience.

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

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

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

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

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

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

LINKS TO PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THEORY

Feelings related to resilience

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

Identity

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

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

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

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

According to SDT, individual motivations for engaging in specific behaviour are influenced by both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2008). From the current research, a sense

of purpose was different for each participant and suggested that each participant's motivation to work in NG comes from an internal drive to meet the needs of their pupils. Similarly, Syrnyk (2012) found that nurturing teachers were intrinsically motivated by the desire to see positive changes in their pupils. Furthermore, findings by Middleton (2019) highlighted that NG staff appeared to possess certain emotional characteristics that allowed them to navigate the challenges of the job and their belief that their role had value. This is also consistent with findings from the current study.

School structure

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

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

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

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

Navigating the challenges of the NG role

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

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

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

STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

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

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

LIMITATIONS

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

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

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

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

IMPLICATIONS FOR NG STAFF AND SCHOOL STAFF IN GENERAL

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

- Adopt a whole school approach to resilience and

wellbeing and develop a resilience and wellbeing policy for staff.

- Improve systems around effective communication between NG and other school staff so that there is a clear understanding of the work being carried out, as a lack of communication can lead to a lack of understanding of NG and impact on resilience.
- Integrate NG staff more within school life so that they are more present within school, to reduce feelings of isolation.
- Allow systems for giving positive feedback and recognition of strengths in line with a positive psychology approach, which also contributes to feelings of being valued.
- Consider emotional support for school staff as part of standard practice, such as regularly checking in with staff to make sure they are okay.
- Focus professional development for staff on resilience, to help to equip them with the skills needed to succeed in their role and improve their self-efficacy

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

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

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

- Individual support for NG staff consistent with the emotional support they stated they required.
- Offering training and advice to equip NG staff with the skills needed to improve their resilience or maintain their ability to be resilient.

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

- Help NG staff develop their skills in self-reflections and their current way of reflecting on incidents with a model for reflection.
- Develop a peer support group that all NGs have access to, such as Jackson's (2008) Work Discussion Group. Offering a space for NG staff to be able to confide in each other can empower them to work through the difficulties

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

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

CONCLUSION

This study has contributed to the research on teachers' wellbeing and resilience and provided a unique insight into the wellbeing and resilience of

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

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AN EVIDENCE BASED GUIDE TO OPENING A SUCCESSFUL SECONDARY SCHOOL NURTURE GROUP

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ABSTRACT

Models of nurture group best practice at primary level are now well established. In secondary schools however, best practice models are less clearly defined and guidance on establishing a successful nurture group in a secondary school is currently lacking.

This research project aimed to create an evidence-based guide to opening a secondary school nurture group based on the experiences, opinions and ideas of professionals working in the field. The research sought to capture the views of 29 professionals on the prerequisites, operational features, and the challenges to anticipate once the secondary school nurture group is up and running.

A qualitative research methodology was employed where data derived from eight focus group interviews were thematically analysed at Phase 1. At Phase 2 the emerging findings were member checked through a process of semi-structured interviews with four nurture teams. Phase 1 and 2 data were then combined through a recursive process to answer the research questions.

Results found that commitment from the senior leadership team and training for mainstream staff on the principles of nurture and attachment informed practice were important prerequisites. Operationally, the nurture group needed a dynamic and flexible curriculum that prioritised social and emotional development at regular points each week. Support for staff wellbeing and supervision sessions were highlighted as key features of a successful nurture group as well as taking opportunities to raise the profile of nurture across the school. Once open, the challenges to anticipate included managing parental perceptions of nurture and planning appropriate cover for absent nurture staff.

Based on the findings of this project, a succinct guide to opening a secondary school nurture group is included as Appendix 3.

INTRODUCTION

A nurture group is a form of educational provision that supports the social, emotional and mental health needs of pupils struggling to function constructively in the mainstream classroom environment.

Developed by Marjorie Boxall in the 1970s (Boxall, 2002), the nurture group philosophy understands that behaviours such as defiance, aggression, negativity or withdrawal are a communication of how the pupil perceives the world and their place in it. Rather than resort to punishment, suspension and exclusion, the nurture group will provide a safe environment where trained staff will prioritise the

wellbeing and mental health of pupils above all else.

The 'classic' nurture group is part-time and time-limited (Boxall, 1976). Pupils will attend for regular periods each week but will retain their contact with mainstream classes and staff. In the nurture group sessions, trained staff will help pupils with their feelings of self-worth, mastery and control over events. Specific targets will be generated for each pupil through the Boxall Profile® assessment instrument that identifies gaps in social-emotional functioning and guides staff to appropriate activities and experiences that help to address a pupil's

missed early learning experiences (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998; Bennathan, Boxall and Colley, 2010).

The six principles of nurture are closely associated with practice in the 'classic' nurture groups and these are set out below:

Figure 1: *The six principles of nurture (Lucas, Insley and Buckland, 2006)*



The six principles of nurture have been central to the development of nurturing practices in Scotland and in 2017 Education Scotland published a framework to support the self-evaluation of nurturing approaches in schools that also provides a rationale for the approach and a range of quality indicators. This framework, entitled 'Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach', is highly recommended and is both free to access and free to use (see Reference List).

Nurture groups in secondary school

During the 1970s and 80s, the main setting for nurture groups was the primary school. But nurture groups began to evolve in secondary schools because evidence suggested that they worked (Colley 2012b). Early examples such as the Diamonds group at Shevington High School, Wigan were receiving accolades (Ofsted 2008), while empirical research projects were reporting positive and at times dramatic changes in individual and group functioning. For example, Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) evidenced the significant progress made by a cohort of Year 7 students (aged 11-12) following access to nurture but also an example of how a student described as 'an emotional time bomb' was able to recover following a series of sessions that focused on self esteem

and self image. Colley (2009) identified improved school attendance and improvements in socio-emotional functioning as key outcomes of secondary school nurture group practice, along with a positive impact on the whole school ethos, thereby supporting the earlier findings of Cooper and Tiknaz (2005).

The work of Cooke, Yeomans and Parkes (2008) also offered a practical, working model for secondary school nurture groups developed through their implementation of the 'Oasis' nurture group. Small groups of students from Key Stage 3 (aged 11-14) attended the nurture group based on assessment data generated through the Boxall Profile®. Both parents/carers and students were consulted over the referral to nurture and consent was required before the intervention was implemented. Sessions would typically begin with a 'meet and greet' activity followed by a directed activity that might focus on team building, language development or problem solving. The nurture breakfast would follow with positive interactions supported and modelled by the two staff leading the nurture group. Negotiating the timetable for nurture presented difficulties with staff striving to accommodate the views of students regarding the sessions from which they were to be withdrawn.

Current research into secondary school nurture group practice suggests that when students access nurture group support their emotional stress levels reduce (Chiapella, 2015) while their emotional, social and behaviour functioning improves (Chiapella, 2015; Lyon, 2017). Hilton (2014) has found that nurture group attendance increases the students' sense of belonging and relationship formation improves along with their motivation and achievement (Perkins, 2017; Garner and Thomas, 2011). Transitions between primary and secondary schools were found to have been enhanced by nurture group support (Kourmoulaki, 2014) while the views of students themselves have been summarised by Gates (2010) rather succinctly – 'Fantabulosa!'

Despite these positive markers, the challenges of establishing a nurture group in a secondary school have also been highlighted in the literature. Colley (2009) argues that the size and complexity of the secondary school creates immediate barriers in terms of timetabling sufficient nurture group access as to be meaningful and effective, while Hilton (2014) highlights issues around stigma and bullying as a result of the student's association with the nurture group. Garner and Thomas (2011) go on to question whether the secondary nurture group actually conforms to the classic model when

support goes beyond the ‘part time and short term’ structure that was first advocated by Boxall (1976). Kourmoulaki (2014) makes reference to the systemic gaps in whole school communication, monitoring and reintegration processes in her study of two secondary school nurture groups and these challenges are confirmed by Hilton (2014) in terms of the sadness and loss felt by some young people when their formal placement in nurture comes to an end.

AIM OF THE STUDY

Explicit, evidence-based guidance on how to prepare for, set up and run a nurture group in a secondary school setting is not currently available. The aim of this research project was to create an evidence-based guide to opening a secondary school nurture group based on the experiences, opinions and ideas of professionals working in the field.

The three research questions were:

1. What are the prerequisites for a successful secondary school nurture group?
2. What are the operational features of a successful secondary school nurture group?
3. What are the ongoing challenges to anticipate?

METHODOLOGY

The research outlined in this paper is qualitative and explores the ideas, experiences and opinions of professionals working in the field of secondary school nurture group practice.

The research has been located within the pragmatic paradigm that advocates a relational epistemology (where knowledge is an insight developed between people and between all that exists) and a non-singular reality ontology (where each person has their own interpretation of reality) (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). In keeping with the pragmatic paradigm, the findings from the project are to be held lightly and judged against their successful application in the real world (Colley, 2012a).

A qualitative research methodology was employed where data derived from eight focus group interviews were thematically analysed at Phase 1 (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The analysis in this instance was theory driven and coding was linked explicitly to the three research questions throughout the recursive process. At Phase 2 the findings emerging from the focus group data were member checked through a process of semi-structured interviews with four nurture teams that had already contributed to the focus groups. Data from the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews were then

combined through the recursive process in order to answer the three research questions.

Any potential researcher bias was mitigated through independent coding procedures and a member checking procedures with research participants that was built into the research methods.

PARTICIPANTS

A non-random, purposive sample of 35 professionals working in the field of secondary school nurture group provision were invited to participate in the study with 29 participants accepting the invitation and forming the final sample. Of the 29 participants, 15 were actively engaged in secondary school nurture group practice while four were educational psychologists supporting nurture group in their local authorities. Four academics with shared research interests in nurture groups joined the sample alongside six members of local authority behaviour support and inclusion teams. In all, 20 different professional settings were represented by the purposive sample as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant roles/settings

Participant roles/settings	Number
Secondary nurture group practitioners	15
8 Teachers	
5 TAs	
2 SLT	
Educational psychology services	4
Academics (nurture)	4
Behaviour support/inclusion teams	6
	n=29

DATA COLLECTION

Phase 1: Focus groups

A focus group is a form of group interview that collects qualitative information on specific topics through participatory discussion (Cohen et al, 2018). This method for data collection was chosen because the project was seeking to explore the experiences, opinions and ideas of participants around models of best practice in secondary nurture groups and focus group methodology aligned well with this research aim.

The participants were invited to attend a one-day research conference that included focus group discussions lasting 50 minutes each. Participants were pre-allocated to one of four focus groups to ensure that each group had a balance of practitioners, educational psychologists and advisory team members. The first set of focus groups took place in the morning and, with the

guidance of a moderator, discussed issues around 'What needs to be in place before a successful secondary nurture group opens?'. The moderator in each of the four focus groups was well versed in nurture group practice and was also a participant at the conference. Each moderator had been given guidance ahead of the day on the content to be covered, the timing of each focus group and contact numbers for assistance should this be required. The discussion was semi-structured and moderators guided the discussions to include opinions around staff training, 'must haves' and whole school preparation. Research assistants attended each focus group and recorded the timings of each speaker on field notes for transcription identification purposes.

The second set of four focus groups took place in the afternoon with the same allocation of participants. This time the semi-structured discussions were focused on the structures and operational features of the successful secondary nurture group with moderators ensuring that opinions on timetabling, curriculum content and mainstream links were all aired during the 50 minute session.

A total of eight 50 minute focus groups were audio-recorded then transcribed with the consent of all participants. The transcriptions were thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke 2006) and these initial findings constituted Phase 1 of the research project.

Phase 2: Member check Interviews

Six months after the focus group data had been thematically analysed, a series of four member check interviews took place with four nurture group teams that had been represented at the original research conference. The aim of the semi-structured interviews was to address the 'fit' between the participant views expressed in Phase 1 (focus group data) and the researcher's representation of them (Tobin & Begley, 2004). The member checking process was applied with the aim of testing the credibility and trustworthiness of the emerging results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and each nurture team was presented with a summary of the initial findings from Phase 1 in advance of the interview (see Appendix 1).

Each interview took place on location and face to face with each being audio recorded to collect the views of the nurture team on the initial findings. The participants at Phase 2 have been summarised in Table 2 below. Each interview was structured around the findings summary and each aspect of the initial findings was considered in terms of

its perceived accuracy and authenticity. All audio recordings were then transcribed with the consent of all participants and a thematic analysis of these findings (Braun and Clarke, 2006) constituted Phase 2 of the research project.

Table 2: *Participants at Phase 2 Interviews*

School	Participants member checking the findings of Phase 1
A	Nurture teacher Nurture TA
B	Nurture teacher
C	Nurture teacher
D	Nurture teacher Nurture TA School SLT (Nurture) School executive principal

ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a systematic, qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions (Nowell et al, 2017). This study employed deductive thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report patterns (or themes) in the data at Phase 1 (focus group data) and at Phase 2 (Interview data). The analysis was theory driven and data was coded in relation to the three research questions throughout the analytical process. During this recursive and reflective process, the six stages of analysis identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) were employed.

Phase 1 Analysis: focus group data

The thematic analysis of the focus group data was transcript-based and organised in relation to the research questions. The analysis was systematic and followed a prescribed procedure whereby researchers familiarised themselves with the transcripts in the first instance and then agreed a set of initial codes. This was undertaken manually with the colour coding of text in relation to the initial codes. By refining and prioritising these initial codes, potential themes emerged in relation to all three research questions and Table 3 illustrates how potential themes emerged in relation to research question 1.

Table 3: Coding in relation to RQ1

Research question 1	10 Initial codes in relation to RQ1	Potential themes
What are the prerequisites for a successful secondary school nurture group?	Establishing a whole school approach to nurture Supportive SLT; Nurture coordinator is on SLT Audit of whole school needs Whole school understanding through CPD and whole school training sessions (eg. On the principles of nurture, attachment theory and the impact of neglect on brain development) Six principles of nurture are understood by mainstream staff Annual staff training refreshers plus induction training for new staff 'Right people' in NG base (resilient, reliable, strong) Right environment; protected space; home from home; foothold in the school Budget – sustainability, funding planned; consumables; Parents – agreements; information sharing; supportive NG has a profile within the school (newsletter; nurture committee)	Support and understanding of SLT for a whole school approach to nurture Audit of whole school needs Whole school staff training programme Nurture group pre-requisites ('right people'; protected space)

Phase 2 Analysis: Interview data

The initial findings from Phase 1 were presented to four nurture teams to member check for trustworthiness and authenticity. The 50 minute interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. The data was then thematically analysed in relation to the three research questions and the findings at Phase 1 (Braun and Clarke 2006). By combining the data from the interviews with the focus group data, a number of key themes emerged in relation to each research question.

ETHICS

Good ethical research practice is the responsibility of the research team and the underpinning principle of the research conducted is to do no harm to research participants (OBU Research Ethics Code 2021). Prior to the commencement of the study informed consent was secured from all 29 participants. An information sheet outlined the voluntary nature of the research and assured anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. Ethical approval was confirmed by the Oxford Brookes University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) and the storage and management of data has followed the guidelines set out by the Oxford Brookes University Research Data Management Policy.

FINDINGS

The research findings have been presented as thematic maps relating to each of the three research questions. Themes and subthemes have been presented and unpacked with supporting evidence from the research data. Selected data chunks can be located precisely in the data sets using the systematic identification descriptor (eg FG1 A8 = Focus group 1, Group A, paragraph 8; B 93 = Interview B, paragraph 93)

Box 1: Thematic map in relation to research question 1

Research question	Themes	Sub themes
What are the prerequisites for a successful secondary school nurture group?	1.1 A whole-school approach	Mainstream staff understanding of the principles of nurture A receptive school philosophy is already evident A range of socio-emotional support interventions exist
	1.2 The senior leadership team are on board and committed	SLT understand nurture principles and are driving the intervention An audit of 'school readiness' has been completed A sustainable budget is agreed The intervention has protection
	1.3 The whole school is prepared	Trained, resilient staff have been appointed to the NG Robust systems are in place (referrals, mainstream links) Parents have been informed Students have been informed

The research has identified a number of prerequisites to establishing a successful nurture group in the secondary school and these will now be explored with reference to the data.

1.1 A whole-school approach

Participants reflected on the importance of mainstream staff training in the principles of nurture before the nurture group opens and noted that without this training, the project may feel isolated and misunderstood.

'The whole school understanding before you open a nurture group is very important – and something we still struggle with now.' (FG1 A8).

'I feel that training on the principles of nurture absolutely needs to happen as soon as we start a nurture group. If we don't have this training, I think this is where the misconceptions occur.' (C196).

A receptive school philosophy was regarded as fertile ground for the successful secondary school nurture group to take root and this was often illustrated by a range of complementary socio-emotional support interventions that were already in place at the school.

'It does seem to be working best where the whole ethos is receptive anyway. So often these schools have had other programmes going on as it were in sympathy with nurture – restorative practice, rights respecting, those sort of things. So it's fertile ground really for this thing to take off.' (FG1C 11).

1.2 The senior leadership team is on board and committed

The commitment and knowledge of the SLT is vital to the success of the nurture group project and will help to drive the nurturing philosophy of the school while supporting those working in the nurture group. Schools should designate a 'Nurture champion' from within the SLT who then undertakes the National Nurturing Schools programme with nurtureUK.

'My experience is that nothing happens in school, or doesn't happen properly, unless we've actually got the senior leadership driving it.' (FG1A 42).

In contrast, a lack of support and commitment from SLT can undermine the ability of the nurture group to take root – and no amount of staff training will compensate for that lack of commitment.

'If they (the SLT) are not behind it, I think probably your group will not continue.' (FG1A 43).

1.3 The whole school is prepared

The team that lead the nurture group will need to be well trained in the theory and practice of nurture group provision and this training is available from nurtureuk.org. Without this training, early mistakes can be made that may then be hard to repair.

'The training of the people running the group is important ... if you don't know what you're doing and you get it wrong, it is quite difficult to undo what you've got wrong.' (FG1B 36)

The nurture team needs to be physically robust but cover staff should be trained in the event of absence.

'Reliability of people is an issue – you know (we have had) that experience with people who were fantastic

at making attachments with children and then they are off on long periods of sick.' (FG1C 6).

An important prerequisite for a successful nurture group is a clear referral system that is understood by mainstream staff, the pastoral team and the SLT. A placement in the nurture group should be evidence based and Boxall Profile® assessments should be undertaken to help the referral panel make these judgements. These mechanisms will ensure the nurture group works strategically and effectively with specific students and is not perceived to be a crisis management centre.

'I've always made it very clear and I like this phrase, we don't have a 'revolving door' in nurture, we can't just chuck someone through the door. We have a referral system and mechanism.' (FG1C 3).

Informing key stakeholders about the purpose of the nurture group provision in advance of it opening will be an important preparatory step and both parents/carers and students may be wary or reluctant to engage unless this is explained with care.

'Some parents can almost be offended if they don't fully understand what (nurture) is there for, and they can take it personally; that you're almost suggesting that they've failed in some way or something like that. So it's making sure that it's clear what nurture is actually about, and them feeling that this a positive thing for their children.' (FG1B 8)

The findings in relation to research question 2 have been summarised in Box 2 overleaf.

The research has identified a number of key operational features with regard to the successful secondary school nurture group and these will now be set out with careful reference to the data.

2.1 The prerequisites identified by research question 1 are in place

The research found that the features of a successful secondary school nurture group were predicated upon the prerequisites identified in research question 1. Where mainstream staff had a sound and integrated understanding of nurture and where the SLT were on board and driving the initiative, nurture groups thrived. It was imperative that the whole school, including all stakeholders, were prepared for the nurture group to open and that a 'safe base' was prioritised for the students attending nurture.

2.2 The nurture group offers students a safe base

The research data suggested that a 'safe base' for students was created through high quality relationships and a protected learning environment.

Box 2: Thematic map in relation to research question 2

Research question	Themes	Sub themes
What are the operational features of a successful secondary school nurture group?	2.1 The prerequisites identified by research question 1 are in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A whole school approach • Senior leaders are on board and committed • The whole school is prepared
	2.2 The nurture group offers students a safe base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe base • High quality relationships • Predictable routines • Year group focus • A safe transition from primary • Balanced group size and dynamic • A safe return to mainstream (with 'check in' time)
	2.3 The nurture group offers a developmental curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nurture group curriculum is flexible and dynamic • The curriculum prioritises socio-emotional learning at the appropriate developmental level • The six nurture principles underpin the curriculum • Boxall Profile® assessments inform target setting
	2.4 Nurture group staff are proactively supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff breaks are built into the working day • Staff supervision is included
	2.5 Nurture group Impact: evidence and dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boxall Profile® data • Mainstream staff evaluations • Nurture group staff evaluations • Case studies • Informal updates for staff
	2.6 The profile of nurture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurture working group • Nurture governor • Nurture group newsletter • School newsletter • School website

'An allocated space; a discrete space that is protected. The safety of that space has been so important to (students). From that safety – and the security of those relationships – they can spread their wings into their mainstream lessons and evolve. For me, that's just been an essential remit.' (FG1C 3).

'What explained the (successful) outcomes was the relationship that they were forming with practitioners and with the other students. It was the relationship that was the mechanism for change.' (FG2B 49).

The findings also suggested that to secure a predictable routine in the delivery of nurture, schools should be courageous and prioritise nurture over all other curriculum areas for the agreed period of referral. For the majority of research participants, providing nurture in the first two periods of each day provided the opportunity to settle students in to the school day, ensure that they had eaten and pick up on any issues that might undermine their learning in mainstream classes.

'We've managed to get priority for nurture. We want that first lesson of the day – that's the one we take, regardless of whether it's English or Maths.' (FG2A 134).

'It's really important to keep the continuity. So, lessons one and two for Year 7 – and it doesn't matter what lessons they've got, that's when they're out for nurture.' (D229)

For the most part, a nurture group that focused on students transitioning into the secondary school in Year 7 (aged 11-12) was the most common model and practitioners expressed the view that students should be observed for an initial period (September-October) to see how they settled into their new school environment. Decisions about nurture support could then be made based on the students' current presentation.

'We definitely think it works best with Year 7.' (FG1B 38).

'When they come into the school at first, after the primary transition, we give them some time to bed in, see how they settle, and then we usually pick up the group around October time.' (PrA 11).

'The reason why we don't take them out right at the beginning is that although we have very good lines of communication at the primary schools, we sometimes find that the primary schools say, "I think this could probably be very emotional; I don't think X will cope

with secondary” – and actually they flourish.’ (FG1C 46).

The optimum group size for the successful secondary school nurture group is between eight and 10 students per nurture session. Inevitably, the students that require nurture support may have a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties that is communicated through volatile responses to staff and peers. Finding the right mix of students to make the nurture sessions successful for all is therefore a key operational feature that requires the careful analysis of Boxall Profile® data, classroom observations and pilot nurture sessions before the members of the nurture group are confirmed

‘To have maximum impact, you’ve got to get the right group and the right group dynamics...’ (D210).

‘What we’ve found useful is to test out the group dynamics by inviting the young people in different groups to come down and we’ll maybe have them do a task and just observe how individuals work together. That’s helped us where we’ve maybe been unsure about the selection of certain pupils working together,’ (PrA22).

The research suggested that maintaining relationships with students once they have returned full time to mainstream could be managed through informal ‘check in’ sessions at break times or more formally with timetabled meetings

‘After they re-integrate within our school, we have found it useful to offer a check-in time. So, all of our pupils are given five or 10 minutes a week with the Support for Learning worker who was supporting their group, and that maybe takes place throughout 2nd Year and 3rd Year, however long they need a little bit of extra support.’ (PrA 22)

‘We have breakfast club and lunchtime clubs that they can all sort of check in with (us).’ (FG1D 176)

2.3 The nurture group offers a developmental curriculum

The nurture curriculum needs to be flexible and dynamic with staff able to adapt to the interests of the students to secure their engagement and enthusiasm. This ability to work at developmental levels rather than curriculum levels can cause mainstream staff to misunderstand and challenge the nurture curriculum if the preparation of staff for nurture has been incomplete. Adhering to the six principles of nurture is central to the curriculum and the research suggests that training in the six principles continues to help staff to reflect on their own practice.

‘A couple of the girls were really interested in doing fitness, so we did it as an intervention.’ (FG2A 157).

‘(In the nurture group) you do what you see fit and look at the levels of the students and teach according to that. But geography have a huge problem with that (saying) “They have to do six-digit coordinates.” and I’m like, “They don’t even understand three-digit numbers, so they’re not going to know six-digit coordinates, are they?”.’ (FG1A 88).

But doubts were expressed regarding the reliability of the Boxall Profile® assessments and its tendency to capture only one perspective on a student’s developmental progress.

‘I think the Boxall is great for setting targets and planning activities during the nurture group sessions, but sometimes the people filling in their forms are the people that the child is most comfortable with and, you know, at their best with, so you don’t always see what they’re like out in other subjects.’ (FG1B 78).

2.4 Nurture group staff are proactively supported

The successful secondary school nurture group will have a staff team that feel supported. Supervision is an accepted practice in health and social care professions and yet its importance for teaching staff is underestimated. Formal supervision sessions for the nurture team, led by the local educational psychology service, and protected planning time were highlighted as being key operational features of the successful nurture group.

‘These members of staff are dealing with the most vulnerable children that we’ve got in these schools and they have no one to then pass it on to. One of my SENCos is paying for herself to have therapy once a week because she said, “I need to get rid of all of this before I go home to my daughter.”.’ (FG1A 119)

‘I think there has to be a recognition that we’re dealing with children who have been traumatised more regularly and there’s a huge emotional demand on the role of the person working within nurture.’ (FG1C 6)

‘It has to be recognised that breaks are important because of the job. If I’ve had a member of staff off and I’m looking for somebody just to take one break, so that I can get out and have a little bit of a break and recognise that that’s important.’ (FG2C 10)

‘I think supervision is a growing need.’ (FG1C 6)

2.5 NG Impact: evidence and dissemination

Boxall Profile® data was found to be central to the evidence trail alongside mainstream staff evaluations and parent/carer questionnaires. Case studies of individual students were also recommended for evidencing the impact of the provision where small steps of progress were celebrated with warmth and pride.

'May-time is massive for me. I have to go to SLT and I've got all the Boxall data, I've got the parental and pupil and staff questionnaire results, and we do that on a really big scale.' (P2 43).

'What I would suggest – do five case studies for secondary schools, a minimum of five case studies, so that when Ofsted come in, you've got them there and that's your impact.' (FG2A 242).

2.6 The profile of nurture

It is important that the nurture group is linked in to the range of socio-emotional support systems in the school and that its presence is celebrated and alluded to in the School Development Plan.

'We encourage them to have (nurture) in the school development plan; to get a named school governor who's going to be the governor for nurture; to really sort of think about it across the whole school community.' (FG1B 21).

'Having a little segment in the newsletter, it just makes parents more aware to say, "Oh, okay, I know there's lots of other young people that are going to this group,". If parents and young people understand it, they'll just think it's the norm and they won't think it's something different.' (FG1B96)

The findings in relation to research question 3 have been summarised in Box 3 below:

Box 3: Thematic map in relation to research question 3

Research question	Themes	Sub themes
What are the challenges to anticipate when setting up a secondary school nurture group?	3.1 The prerequisites identified by 4 research question 1 are not in place	Staff understanding of nurture principles is incomplete Timetable issues Nurture group protection is ineffective (the room; staffing; time to plan)
	3.2 The demands on the nurture group team	Emotional demands Planning 'backup' for staff Resilience and reliability Rates of impact Potential Isolation
	3.2 Student experience	Stigma issues Unsuccessful transitions into mainstream
	3.4 Parental engagement	Responses to referral Unpredictable engagement
	3.5 No quick fix	Managing expectations Impact data Fluctuations in behaviour

The research has identified a number of barriers

to establishing a successful nurture group in the secondary school and these challenges will now be unpacked with reference to the data.

3.1 The prerequisites identified by research question 1 are not in place

The first challenge for schools wishing to set up a successful nurture group can relate to prerequisites that are missing or incomplete. For example, if the SLT is not on board and committed from the outset then training in the philosophy of nurture will not permeate the school and the understanding of mainstream staff will be incomplete. This will in turn lead to misconceptions about nurture 'rewarding' poor behaviour or providing a 'dumping ground' for those students who misbehave.

'I remember once a teacher coming up to me and she said, "Well, this boy, he's been kicking off in my lesson and you're giving him a cup of tea and toast – I mean, what's that all about?" (P2 23).

'Their view is thinking, "Oh, it's a sin-bin, isn't it?" (FG1B 13)

In addition it was found that staff might also abrogate responsibility for the students and seek to offload students on to the nurture team at the earliest opportunity

'We had one particular teacher who kept coming and saying, "When are you starting it? When are you starting it? I've got four kids in my class that you'll definitely be having! I can't cope with them. When are you starting it? Can you just take them out before you start it?"' (D309)

Resistance might also be experienced from mainstream staff that 'don't get it and won't get it'. Where the staff team comprises a high number of such colleagues, the challenges in establishing a pervasive nurturing philosophy across the school will be steep.

'We've had some people not buying into this philosophy of nurture. They say that we're creating children who would never learn how to deal with mainstream if all you did was do this and keep them all together, without mixing. And so we had some resistance; a few people with opinions didn't buy into it.' (C182)

'I still think we've got some staff who don't understand (nurture), but that's because, really, they shouldn't be in teaching full-stop if I'm absolutely blunt, because they don't understand children full-stop.' (D280).

Timetabling the nurture group sessions in a secondary school environment remains a perennial challenge for the nurture team, for faculty heads and for parents/carers who have raised concerns about students missing key lessons.

'I've found timetables were probably the biggest issue that we've got because in primary, it's easier to take them for, say, an afternoon but in secondary, you come up with lots of opposition.' (P2 18)

3.2 The demands on the nurture group team

A further prerequisite identified by research question 1 findings alluded to the need for the nurture group to be protected as a space and as a team. Unfortunately, the research suggests that the nurture room can be commandeered for alternative purposes at times and that staff time for planning and preparation can also be compromised.

'By Easter, (the nurture students) will go back into full-time (mainstream) education because we can't physically run nurture at that time because our space is taken for exams.' (FG2B 102).

'Our nurture time should be protected time, but it's not, and sometimes, if they're really desperate for cover, they will come and say, 'oh, there's two staff in there – you know, do we really need two staff for 12 children, when we've got a class that we need to teach?' So, we have had occasions where they'll come and say, "Sorry, we're really desperate – can we take one of you to teach a class?".' (FG1B 49).

The emotional demands made on the nurture team were highlighted in the data as a particular challenge and this was seen to impact on the attendance of the nurture team if plans for support and cover in nurture were not built into the planning.

'The year I had extreme behavioural difficulties (in the group) and, yes, that year I was wiped out. I just spent every conscious moment just coming up with strategies and techniques and ways of trying to manage the behaviour, and of course, that affected me, mentally.' (C135).

'Staff have to be very resilient.' (FG1D 24).

'Staffing capacity (is an issue). Have you got a backup? And how do you grow your provision without draining a limited resource which is your human resource?' (FG1D 55).

Demonstrating the impact of the nurture group provision was also a challenge at times because the 'the nature of this process is slow' (FG1C 30). Nurture staff articulated the fluctuations in progress that reflect the students' emotional dysregulation and their assimilation of new social skills. This progress might be perceived by some to be 'slow' but this is to misunderstand the context in which change is located. For some schools in the lowest Ofsted categories that require evidence of impact 'fast', a leap of faith is required to embark on the nurture journey.

'Their journey fluctuates because sometimes it's the

first time that they've been in a safe space. They've developed those relationships of trust with people and that can take time in itself. So, in a way, you're going to go further downhill when those things happen in order to help resolve that issue for that child. So, their journeys can be very different and it's recognising there will be some fluctuations, so the danger is always sort of (expecting) an upward trajectory.' (FG1C 32)

3.3 Student experience

For some students, issues around stigma, embarrassment, bullying or questioning their placement in nurture were raised with the nurture teams who responded calmly and creatively.

'It's this stigma, especially for pupils. What we find is a sort of attitude which is, "What do I say to my classmates, Miss" and that's just a challenge I think.' (FG1D 137)

'This is how I present it to the children (struggling with the placement) – I say all of us, including myself, you know, have times in my life where there are things that I find more difficult to deal with, and we will all have those things happening at some point in our lives, and you may already have things at the moment you find difficult to deal with. So, what we're here to do, together, is to find ways to not only support each other but to give you the tools to deal with those things that happen in life. So, that's how I present it' (FG1A 85).

'As soon as we've had the bullying occur, I will (visit every form) and talk about what they know of the nurture group, what is it that they want to say – and we have an honest conversation. And then I do a little thing where they have to try to shoot a paper ball into a bag that I put at a distance, and none of them can get it in. But then when I move the bag to help them get it in, I say, "Well, that's just what we do (in nurture) to help the children to have success." and it resonated.' (C174).

The transition back to a full time placement in mainstream can be stressful for students and where schools have a rigid policy of, for example, only running the nurture group for Year 7 students, the outcomes can be poor.

'Students that we've worked with over the last couple of years, I feel that we've sort of abandoned them. We worked with them through Year 7 and then, "Off you go!" as if everything is suddenly miraculously, they don't need us. Some of them clearly do. Sadly, you know, we've lost a couple [to] exclusion. How has this happened? How it's happened is that we need to not be dropping these students – they weren't ready.' (FG2A 142).

3.4 Parental engagement

The response of parents/carers to a nurture group referral can be unpredictable with some parents refusing to allow the support to be put in place while others leap at the chance

'We have had parents saying, "No, I don't want my child to be part of that group."' (FG1B 81).

'So, actually, parents tend to be really, really, really grateful that their child is getting some level of support for whatever their additional need is.' (FG1B 87).

For others, the suggestion that their child may need help with their social and emotional functioning can be perceived as a slight or attack on their parenting

'Some parents take it as a personal attack, but if you explained it as, 'Well, if your child is struggling in maths, you'd put a maths booster intervention in, wouldn't you?' But when it comes to social and emotional behavioural needs, (a referral to nurture) kind of becomes a bit of a personal attack with some of the parents.' (FG1B 81).

3.5 No quick fix

Managing the expectations of staff, parents and senior leaders regarding the immediate impact of nurture group attendance on student behaviour and progress was identified as another challenge to anticipate. Providing data and evidence for the impact of nurture group intervention is clearly important but the behaviours that have generated the initial referral to nurture may well be ingrained. Time will be needed to address the missed learning experiences being communicated through the presenting behaviour and progress will not necessarily be linear or immediate. Indeed, student behaviours may fluctuate and appear to get worse before they get better.

'The data drive is (around) what's the impact? I should imagine that could be a challenge because seven years and you see an impact – but that kind of thing may take some years to show.' (FG1C 30)

'Their journey fluctuates because sometimes it's the first time that they've been in a safe space and they've developed those relationships of trust with people and that can take time in itself.' (FG1C 32)

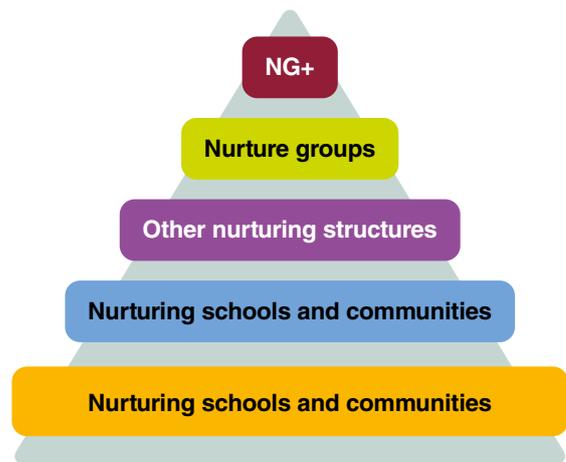
'You just need to wait a while because (negative) behaviours are more ingrained in adolescents. It can take longer to see a change.' (FG1C 30)

'So, their journeys can be very different and it's recognising there will be some fluctuations, so the danger is always sort of (expecting) an upward trajectory.' (FG1C 32)

DISCUSSION

The findings from this research project suggest that, to be successful, a secondary school nurture group needs to be embedded in a school community that understands the principles of nurture and is receptive to the philosophy of nurture. MacKay (2015) has offered a model of nurture in education that is founded on a whole school, nurturing community in the first instance (see Fig 1.). This will be reflected in nurturing structures that complement the nurture group (such as counselling sessions, restorative justice, nurture corners, 'Quiet' rooms) and the philosophy of the head teacher and senior leaders who will be driving the nurture initiative.

Figure1: A model for nurture in education (MacKay 2015)



Schools need not embark on this journey alone. Support is available from experienced organisations such as nurtureUK (www.nurtureuk.org) and high quality documentation from Education Scotland (2017) provides an excellent framework for auditing, planning and delivering nurture as a whole school approach. Training in attachment informed practice and approaches that complement and layer nurturing approaches throughout school communities (eg emotion coaching, restorative approaches, zones of regulation) can be accessed through reputable training providers and local authority services.

A six-month period of preparation for the whole school is recommended before the nurture group opens. This is to ensure that the nurture group support is fully understood by staff, students, parents/carers and the wider community before it opens. Preparations should include whole staff training in the six principles of nurture, attachment-informed practice and the Boxall Profile® assessment where possible. By offering this training to staff, the project will reduce the challenges identified by Kourmoulaki (2014) in terms of systemic gaps in whole school communication, monitoring and reintegration. The Boxall Profile®

assessment will be understood by all staff instead of it being the remit of specialists and the targets set by the assessment will be respected and contextualised by mainstream staff. Refresher training should be built into the school's ongoing Continuing Professional Development programme and new staff appointments should have access to an induction training session that covers the salient points.

A robust referral system will protect the nurture team from 'knee-jerk' placements and crisis management decisions that can disrupt the finely tuned dynamic within the existing nurture group. Referrals should be based on Boxall Profile® evidence and a panel comprising the nurture team, the nurture 'champion' on SLT and the pastoral team should consider the student data and the group dynamic before parents/carers are consulted and a placement is offered.

As a prerequisite, the nurture group should be included in the School Development Plan and funding for staffing, furnishings and ongoing running costs should be ring-fenced in the school's annual budget. An audit of whole school readiness (see Education Scotland 2017) might be completed by the SLT and mainstream staff as part of the preparatory process – to focus minds, generate discussion and clarify queries.

In terms of the practical preparations, an appropriate room should be allocated for the nurture group. Ideally this would be a discrete classroom on the mainstream site that is furnished in a way that is comfortable and homely, with high quality resources and materials. Second hand furnishings and shoddy resources can reflect poorly on the students accessing this provision.

The nurture team, ideally consisting of a teacher and teaching assistant, need to be trained in the theory and practice of nurture in advance and they need to be 'the right people'. This means that they are individuals who can work well as a team and can make relationships with students easily. They will then have the personal qualities to maintain those relationships under pressure, including the challenges generated by students who might lack trust in the intentions of all adults. The appointed nurture team will therefore need to be resilient, creative, determined and committed. The nurture staff need to be reflective and aware of the needs that they might be bringing to the work and professional supervision is vital to support this. Roberts (2017) offers a good starting point on the importance of professional supervision in schools. In short, the nurture group needs a staff team that is fresh and professional every morning at 8.30am to welcome the group and model ways in which life can be embraced and enjoyed.

Garner and Thomas (2011) questioned whether the secondary school nurture group can conform to the 'classic' model when support goes beyond the 'part time and short term' structure that was first advocated by Boxall (1976) – but the research found that many similarities with the 'classic' model do exist. A cohort of between eight and 10 students was still considered optimum and referrals were made through Boxall Profile® for a placement of two to three terms. Sessions would prioritise socio-emotional development over all else and offer predictable sessions at regular points each week. Many schools chose to focus on Year 7 students (aged 11-12) in support of their transition from primary school but invariably, students were given a few weeks to find their feet before referrals took place. This was because some students earmarked for nurture actually blossomed in their new secondary school setting and did not need nurture support despite the recommendations received from primary.

Securing the right group dynamic in the nurture group was found to be a key operational feature of the successful facility. A failing nurture group fails for everyone and creating a group that is unbalanced by too many similar needs should be avoided. A way to mitigate this was found to be 'pilot' nurture sessions that allowed staff to monitor the group dynamic in advance, before confirming the cohort membership.

The size and complexity of the secondary school setting when compared with primary was raised as a complication for secondary nurture (Colley 2009) and the research suggests that the nurture team will come under pressure at times to take on additional roles within the school or be taken for teaching cover when mainstream teaching staff are absent. Schools should avoid this. Nurture teams need protecting from providing mainstream cover because the students accessing nurture need consistent staffing and predictable routines.

The nurture team will invariably be working with the school's most vulnerable young people. These students may have complex social backgrounds and a range of adverse childhood experiences (Feletti and Anda 1998). Given the intensity of this daily work, nurture teams should be offered professional supervision on a regular basis as part of a proactive and forward-thinking approach to staff wellbeing. Professional supervision offers the opportunity for staff to reflect critically on their own practice in a safe, confidential and supportive environment. An experienced supervisor, often an educational psychologist, can help the supervisee to explore their emotional work and review the priorities

in their current workload. While it is common practice in health and social care professions to receive this kind of support, professional supervision largely goes missing in education and nurture teams may well offer the ideal place to inaugurate this work.

A number of challenges for the successful secondary school nurture group were highlighted by the literature and these included timetabling issues (Colley 2009), the stigma of attending nurture (Hilton 2014) and the sadness felt by students once their nurture placement was complete (ibidem). The research acknowledged these issues as ongoing but encouraged schools to be bold and to prioritise nurture over all else in the timetabling of sessions. While this might irritate mainstream staff and faculty heads, the quality training in whole school nurture will emphasise that all learning is emotionally based and that we must attend to the emotional needs of students before they can learn successfully. Placing the timetabling of nurture in this context will help mainstream staff – and parents/carers – to accept ‘this is how we are going to do it’.

Training will also draw out those members of staff who are struggling with the concept of nurture. This group must be anticipated by those planning a whole school nurturing approach that includes a nurture group. These colleagues may challenge the role that the nurture a group plays (‘sin bin’; reward for naughty kids; soft option) while undermining the relational basis of nurture through punitive and/or coercive classroom management techniques. Unfortunately, such thinking has been exacerbated by documents such as the DFE’s 2016 publication ‘Behaviour and Discipline in Schools’ that refers to punishment on 11 occasions and the development of zero tolerance cultures and isolation rooms in a growing number of secondary schools nationally. Engaging with colleagues who are resistant to a nurturing ethos and allowing time to challenge their perceptions should be anticipated by senior leaders preparing to drive a whole school nurturing approach. One way of doing this is through facilitating time for staff to visit and spend time within the nurture group, where they can often see first hand the change in students when experiencing a nurturing and supportive environment.

The profile of nurture in the School Development Plan, on the school website, via newsletters and through the formal celebration of nurture will help allay the concerns of parents/carers and allow students to see nurture as one of many forms of student support that the school provides. Some students need support for literacy or for medical needs. Some need extra maths tuition or support from Place2Be. Some students get Pupil Premium,

some get support from the nurture group. It is this spectrum of support – open to those who need it – that should be emphasised and explained to reduce stigma and promote tolerance across the whole school.

In order to maintain relationships and student progress, the research suggests that nurture teams build in ‘check in’ times for those students. This might involve staff calling in to mainstream lessons to ensure that students know they are being ‘kept in mind’ or arranging student visits back to nurture, before school or at breaks. In this way, relationships are maintained and students feel held in mind by the nurture team despite not attending the group any longer.

Schools should be proactive in preparing for cover in the nurture group should staff be absent. A trained teaching assistant should provide ‘back up’ for the nurture team and he/she should already know the nurture group students through close liaison over time. This kind of planning will reduce the impact of staff absence on a group that relies on stability and predictability.

A final challenge for those leading the nurture initiative in school is the rate of impact on student attendance, attainment and socio-emotional functioning. A range of research has shown nurture to impact positively in all these areas (Sloan et al 2020; Lyon 2017; Colley 2009) but this current research project confirms that progress is not linear and may not be immediate. Students work through a range of emotional issues in the safety of the nurture group and may appear to deteriorate in their behaviour before they find the trust and support to begin the road to improvement and recovery. For this reason, senior leaders, mainstream staff, parents/carers and students must remain patient with the project and be prepared for nurture to take time to become established and effective.

LIMITATIONS

The research study had a limited sample size of 29 professional participants of whom only 15 were nurture group practitioners. A larger sample size and greater representation of nurture group practitioners would have enhanced the study. The deductive, theory driven nature of the study may have limited the breadth of discussions due to its focus on three distinct research questions. In addition, the voice of young people attending secondary nurture group intervention was not included in the research study and this was a clear limitation.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Further research into best practice models for secondary school nurture groups is recommended.

This might involve an analysis of how the 'guide to opening a secondary school nurture group' (Appendix 3) impacts practice when funding is made available to follow the guidance in full. The voice of young people attending secondary nurture groups is under-represented in the research and the ways in which nurturing approaches can mitigate the impact of the current Covid-19 pandemic might be a future area for exploration with young people.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research project was to create an evidence based guide to opening a secondary school nurture group based on the experiences, opinions and ideas of professionals working in the field. Focus groups were held at a one day research conference and explored the detailed preparations required before a nurture group opens, the key operational features of a nurture group and the challenges to anticipate once the nurture group has

opened. Findings from the thematic analysis of eight focus group transcripts were then member checked through a series of semi-structured interviews with teams that had been represented at the research conference

In keeping with the pragmatic paradigm, the findings from the project are to be held lightly and judged against their successful application in the real world. In this case, the success of the project will be judged by the successful application of the guide to opening a secondary school nurture group that is included as Appendix 2.

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APPENDIX 1:

Initial findings presented to nurture teams at member checking interviews

Please consider the initial research findings from Phase 1 and reflect on their accuracy and authenticity in light of your own experience

RQs	Phase 1 – Initial findings
<p>What are the prerequisites for a successful secondary school nurture group?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Whole school approach; Supportive SLT; Whole school understanding through CPD and whole school training sessions (eg on the principles of nurture, attachment theory and the impact of neglect on brain development) ■ Annual staff training refreshers plus induction training for new staff ■ Nurture coordinator is on SLT? ■ 'Right people' in NG base (resilient, reliable, strong) ■ Right environment; protected space; home from home; foothold in the school ■ Budget – sustainability, funding planned; consumables; ■ Parents – agreements; information sharing ; hard to engage? ■ NG has a profile within the school (newsletter; nurture committee)
<p>What are the operational features of a successful secondary school nurture group?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Regular sessions; regular routine ■ Mainstream registration then nurture session 1 – every day ■ Consistent staffing ■ Consistent room/environment ■ Six principles of nurture are central to practice ■ Six principles of nurture are understood by mainstream staff ■ Nurture breakfast ■ Boxall Profile® assessments and targets ■ SDQ assessments ■ Group balance and dynamic; groups of six or seven students only ■ Referral structure based on Boxall Assessment ■ Commence in October after a settling period ■ Yr 7 and 8 focus ■ Regular sessions not a drop in; regular students not a revolving door; protected staffing not taken for cover ■ Time in the week for staff to reflect as a team and with mainstream staff/SLT. PPA time is scheduled and protected ■ Staff do access a break (breakfast clubs, break time clubs and lunch clubs are common features) ■ Regular staff supervision is in place ■ Four terms placement is the maximum <p>Plus</p> <p>Nurture committees Nurture champions (in each department) Nurture networks (across schools and areas)</p>
<p>What are the ongoing challenges to anticipate?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Capacity (limited numbers of students) ■ Funding (for resources) ■ Stigma felt by students ■ Student progress will take time ■ Mainstream attitudes (rewarding the poorly behaved) ■ Timetabling issues (protected core subjects; different year groups; different break times) ■ SLT management fragmented (one lead on behaviour with another lead on wellbeing) ■ NG isolation within the school ■ Student attendance in school ■ NG staff resilience (illness; cover staff; lack of supervision)

What are your reflections on the accuracy and authenticity of the following initial research findings?

1. The full support of the senior leadership team is critical. Without this the nurture project will struggle to take root.
2. All school staff need to have training in the principles of nurture, attachment theory and the impact of neglect on brain development BEFORE a nurture group is opened.
3. Traditionally, small nurture groups have opened in schools and the influence of nurture has often been seen to impact on the whole-school ethos. Today, the opposite needs to be explored. In the secondary setting, the 'model that works' is one that develops a whole school, nurturing ethos (with training and SLT support) so that the nurture group is a *natural extension* of that philosophy for students with additional needs. Crucially, the nurture group's role with these students is fully understood by staff from inception.

APPENDIX 2:

A guide to opening a secondary school nurture group

PREREQUISITES

1. Senior leaders need to be on board and committed to developing a nurturing school. If they are not, do not open a secondary school nurture group. A member of the SLT should be designated the 'Nurture champion' and link closely with the nurture group team.
2. Ensure the nurture group is included in the School Development Plan and that the budget for nurture staffing is ring-fenced.
3. Source and consult with Education Scotland's publication 'Applying nurture as a whole school approach' (Education Scotland 2017)
4. Consider a six month period of whole school preparation before the nurture group opens.
5. During this six month period senior leaders should plan for the following:
 - Identify a 'safe space' in the school for the nurture group to be located.
 - Find funds to furnish the nurture room and to provide an ongoing nurture budget.
 - Appoint the 'right people' to run the nurture group (ideally a teacher and TA) and ensure they have received the appropriate nurture training in advance.
 - Enrol two staff on the National Nurturing Schools programme delivered by nurtureUK
 - Plan and deliver whole staff training in the principles of nurture, attachment-informed practice and the Boxall Profile® assessment instrument.
 - Complete an audit of Whole School Readiness (in the Education Scotland doc 2017)
 - Share information with parents, students and the wider community
 - Establish a clear referral system to nurture using the Boxall Profile® to assess need. Nurture must dovetail and communicate with other support systems (eg counsellors, ELSA support, pastoral systems)
 - Plan a celebration of the nurture group's opening (newsletters, social media, local press)

OPERATIONAL FEATURES

1. Identify a year group that require this support. Many schools focus on Year 7 but this feature is flexible. If your focus is Year 7, allow students until October to settle into school first.
2. Consider the dynamics of the group carefully. A balance must be found and pilot sessions are recommended before the nurture group cohort is confirmed.
3. Nurture group staff will target the identified social and emotional needs of between eight and 10 students during the nurture sessions. The developmental curriculum will support and prioritise relationships, educational engagement and emotional regulation.
4. The students will attend the nurture group for three or four sessions each week. A full return to mainstream is expected after two to three terms.
5. Progress against targets is monitored through the Boxall Profile® and additional assessments. These will be shared with mainstream staff.
6. Nurture has a high profile and nurture group activities feature regularly in school communications
7. Nurture group staff are protected from being drawn into other roles, they have breaks and they receive professional supervision every six weeks (at least) from the local Ed Psych team.
8. Reintegration into mainstream is carefully planned and the nurture team have time to check-in with students who have left the nurture group.

CHALLENGES TO ANTICIPATE

1. Schools should be courageous with their timetabling and prioritise nurture over all other curriculum areas for the agreed period of referral.
2. If mainstream staff have not received the required training then anticipate the potential for misunderstandings and mistrust.
3. If the nurture group is not couched in a suite of interlinked support systems it may find itself isolated.
4. Effective communication with parents and mainstream students is the key to avoiding stigma and offence when referrals are made.
5. Plan for staff 'backup' with trained staff able to cover for absent nurture colleagues, as required.
6. The nurture group will need time to become established and to provide evidence of its effectiveness as an early intervention.

RENFREWSHIRE'S NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS APPROACH: UTILISING NURTURING APPROACHES TO SUPPORT SCHOOL STAFF AND PUPILS DURING COVID-19

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Keywords: Nurturing approaches; digitally enhanced approaches; Covid-19; implementation science

ABSTRACT

Aims: In response to the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) and the changing needs of educational establishments, pupils and families, Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service (REPS) enhanced the existing Renfrewshire's Nurturing Relationships Approach (RNRA) with digital adaptations. This paper outlines the process.

Rationale: In 2016 REPS developed RNRA, which uses an implementation science framework and coach consult model to embed whole-school nurturing approaches in a sustainable way. RNRA was considered ideally placed to support educational communities to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. Adaptations were made to the content to make direct links to how nurture principles can support the wellbeing of staff, children and young people and their families, including those who are experiencing trauma. Digital adaptations to RNRA were required to ensure accessibility, flexibility, and sustainability of the approach.

Findings: This narrative article drawing on the concept of action research will provide an outline of RNRA and adaptations to content and digitisation of the intervention in response to Covid-19. Adaptations include a range of digitally accessible whole-school nurturing resources and a multi-media curriculum-based recovery programme. Preliminary findings and implications for future practice and research in Renfrewshire and for wider educational psychology, local authority, and nurture practitioner practice₁ are discussed.

This article identifies literature and research relevant to nurturing approaches and trauma (in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic) and discusses the existing whole establishment approach to nurturing relationships within Renfrewshire. Following this, the article describes the digitally enhanced adaptations made to Renfrewshire's nurturing relationships approach (RNRA) to support establishments to cope with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It concludes by drawing out implications for wider educational psychology (EP), local authority (LA) and nurture practitioner practice. These digital adaptations continue to be refined by Renfrewshire Educational Psychology Service (REPS), using an action research approach following quality improvement (QI) methodology. Preliminary findings from the initial cycles of this developing action research are identified with a view to add to further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trauma-informed approaches in schools

A body of research indicates there are links between children and young people's social and emotional wellbeing, their academic outcomes and future functioning (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2014;

Cheney et al., 2014; Dawson & Singh-Dhesi, 2010; National Institute for Health Care Excellence, 2013; Weare, 2015). If children and young people are in a good place emotionally then they are more settled and ready to learn. It is suggested that the school environment is well placed to provide children and young people with opportunities to promote social

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and emotional wellbeing (Cheney et al., 2014; Weare, 2015).

It has been widely reported that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and the adults who support them (Action for Children, 2020; Barnardo's, 2020; Jeffery et al., 2020; Mind, 2020). The Co-Space study explores a range of impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic including changes in mental health symptoms in children and young people in the UK between March-May 2020 (Waite et al., 2020). The study has shown a deterioration in mental health symptoms in children, especially those from a low-income household or children with additional support needs. Interestingly, it was found to show less of an impact for adolescents. This paper recognises the impact on individual people varies. Early research shows that many staff, children and young people and their families have experienced anxiety, stress or loss which may result in a range of normal, short term stress responses, but many of whom will return to typical functioning (Barlett et al., 2020). For others, the effects of Covid-19 will put them at higher risk of developing mental health conditions including anxiety, depression, and trauma related conditions (Barlett et al., 2020). Trauma describes both the experience and its short and long-term effects on behaviour, emotions, learning, memory, and relationships (Webster, 2020). Maynard et al. (2019) suggest that schools are increasingly developing trauma-informed approaches as a result of the increased knowledge base on trauma and the negative impact it can have on children and young people. Nolan et al., (2021) highlight that children who have experienced trauma are likely to engage less with school support available during the current pandemic climate, which may have negative effects on their mental health and wellbeing as well as their attachments. It is important to recognise that people are responding differently to the effects of Covid-19 and not all experience trauma.

NURTURING APPROACHES

Nurturing approaches are one recommended intervention to support children and young people's mental health, wellbeing, and attainment (Cheney et al., 2014; REPS, 2020). Nurturing approaches are also recommended as an intervention that can be used to support children and young people who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma (Education Scotland, 2018). Education Scotland (2018) suggests that trauma informed practices and nurturing approaches, which include nurture groups (NGs), share several elements. These include: the emphasis on relationships to alleviate the impact of ACEs, the importance of early intervention, an awareness

that there is a meaning behind behaviour, and a belief that poor outcomes can be mitigated with the correct support (Nolan et al., 2021).

Traditionally, nurture groups have been used to support children with social, emotional, and behavioural needs resulting from early attachment experiences (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2009). More recently research has suggested the benefits of incorporating nurturing approaches throughout the whole school (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007; Doyle, 2003; O'Connor & Colwell, 2002; Weare, 2015). As a result, whole-school nurturing approaches have been developed more widely (Warin, 2016; Coleman, 2020). The Scottish Government promotes a whole establishment nurturing approach as key in supporting behaviour, wellbeing, attainment, and achievement in Scottish schools, including recommending the approach through several policy documents (Scottish Government, 2013; Scottish Government, 2017).

Nolan et al. (2021) suggest that definitions of whole-school nurturing approaches incorporate the following:

- An understanding of attachment theory
- School staff as positive role models
- Positive relationships in school that are predictable, consistent, and reliable
- Positive relationships across the school community that include parents/carers, pupils, and staff
- High expectations with a balance between care and challenge
- A focus on connection, attunement and warmth
- Support for pupils who have missed early nurturing experiences
- Development of pupils' resilience

(eg Education Scotland, 2018, p13; nurtureUK, 2020a).

WHOLE-ESTABLISHMENT APPROACH TO NURTURE: RENFREWSHIRE'S NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS APPROACH (RNRA)

The Scottish Government suggests that key to nurturing approaches is an understanding of attachment theory and how early experiences can have a significant impact on development (Scottish Government, 2017). The Scottish Government also stresses that wellbeing and relationships are central to nurturing approaches (Scottish Government, 2017). Education Scotland's 'Applying Nurture as a Whole School Approach' framework identifies that all school/ Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) staff have a role to play in establishing the positive

relationships required to promote healthy social and emotional development.

In 2016, informed by research on whole-school nurture approaches and Education Scotland guidance, REPS developed RNRA. RNRA is an authority-wide whole establishment approach to developing nurturing relationships. It is a universal approach for supporting the wellbeing of all pupils, but also recognises that some children and young people have experienced ACEs and trauma and may require more targeted support (REPS, 2020).

RNRA is based on enhancing establishment staff's understanding of attachment theory and nurturing approaches, and embedding the six principles of nurture (Lucas et al., 2006) (see figure 1) across the whole school community (REPS, 2020).

Figure 1: *The six principles of nurture (nurtureUK, 2020b, p2)*



The aims of RNRA are:

- To promote an understanding of attachment theory and of the importance of nurturing relationships in helping all children and young people to learn and develop socially and emotionally.
- To promote an understanding of the six nurture principles and support establishments to embed these at a whole establishment level.
- To support practices that will improve wellbeing and promote resilience for children and young people.
- To introduce an approach to implementation that is evidence-based and therefore has the best chance of delivering a sustainable approach for establishments and children and young people.

(REPS, 2020)

A doctorate evaluation was carried out on behalf of the LA, evaluating the impact of RNRA in three primaries and one secondary school (Nolan, 2020). The empirical study suggested that RNRA leads to:

- A positive impact on staff's skills, practice, knowledge and understanding
- Positive changes in staff mindset
- The implementation of new interventions
- The promotion of nurturing relationships
- Positive changes to the environment.
- Positive social, emotional, and behavioural effects on pupils in the primary and secondary sectors (Nolan, 2020).

RNRA has been identified as a national exemplar of good practice within the Education Scotland improvement hub (Education Scotland, 2021).

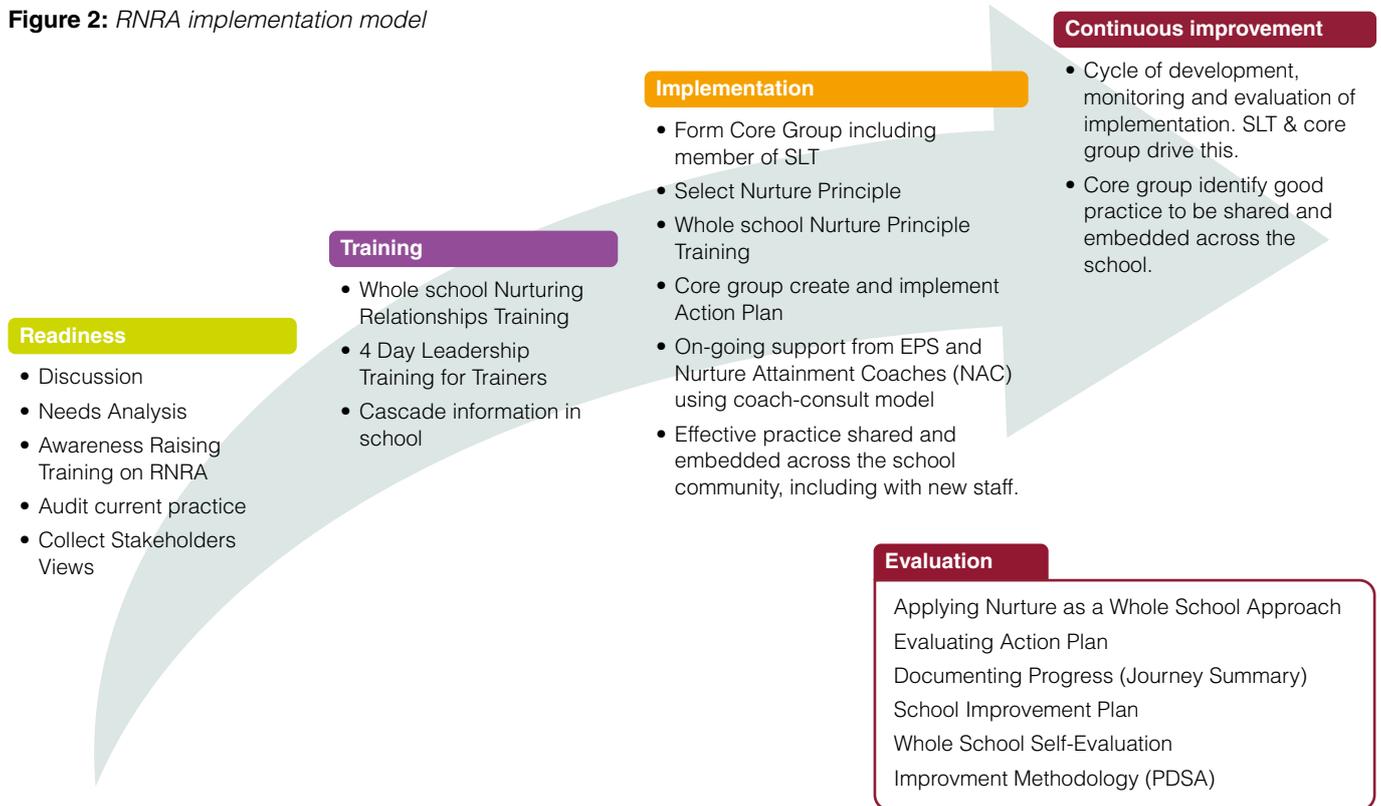
RNRA IMPLEMENTATION MODEL

The RNRA approach to implementation has been a key part of the success of this initiative. The RNRA implementation model (see figure 2) integrates an implementation science framework (Meyers et al., 2012), a coach consult model (Balchin et al., 2006) and quality improvement (QI) approaches, including action research cycles based on the model for improvement (Langley et al., 2009) to embed nurturing practice across the whole establishment in an evidence based and sustainable way (REPS, 2020).

Implementation science is the study of methods that influence the integration of evidence-based interventions into practice settings. It is now recognised for its critical importance and there is a growing body of evidence that clearly states implementation influences desired outcomes (Meyers et al., 2012). The RNRA implementation model follows the implementation science framework as described by Meyers et al. (2012). Each RNRA establishment follows the RNRA implementation model that includes: readiness assessment; leadership training for those leading the initiative within an establishment; whole establishment training (to increase knowledge about attachment theory and nurturing approaches, including the six nurture principles); the setting up of an RNRA core group of staff to lead the implementation, including developing and evaluating the establishment's RNRA action plan; and ongoing coach consult support provided by REPS.

The coach consult model aims to increase establishments' ownership of the whole establishment nurturing approach and sustainability. REPS offers coaching for each establishment to support the development of its nurturing relationships action plan and the resultant

Figure 2: RNRA implementation model



changes in practice. Establishment core groups are supported to use QI methodology to help them understand their context before developing their theory of change. The core groups then use action research cycles to test out new practice or to make improvements to existing practice and to evaluate these changes in a quick iterative cycle of plan, do, study, act (PDSA). This supports the design and evaluation of the impact of new practice introduced. It is widely accepted that action research approaches are effective in developing and embedding sustainable improvements in education settings (Elliot, 1991).

RNRA is a whole establishment approach and encourages all establishment staff to attend training and they can opt-in to be part of the RNRA core group. This includes all teaching and support staff and business support, janitorial and kitchen staff. The importance of all establishment staff being trained in establishing a nurturing culture is one of the key themes reported by Warin and Hibbin (2016). Typically, RNRA core groups have between six and 10 members. Coleman (2020) reports on the key role that leadership plays in leading the change to establish a whole-school nurturing culture, and it is a stipulation of the RNRA implementation that the core group must include a member of the senior leadership team.

This RNRA model of implementation is consistent across establishments, but the way in which the initiative develops is bespoke, as each

establishment develops practice in a way that suits its context and identified needs.

DIGITAL ADAPTATIONS TO RNRA IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The following section describes the rationale, adaptations made and the approach to implementation of a new suite of digitally accessible resources which were developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These adaptations will continue to be reviewed in ongoing cycles of action research, in line with the existing emphasis on QI methodology in RNRA as an evidence-based approach to identifying and embedding sustainable improvements.

RATIONALE

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on establishments and individuals prompted an opportunity to refine and enhance current RNRA frameworks. Recommendations from a recent report (Barnardo's, 2020) on the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health and wellbeing of children and the adults who support them include: the need to develop relationship-based programmes that support rebuilding of connections disrupted by Covid-19 isolation, and the introduction of a flexible curriculum that can adjust to meet the psychological needs of children and young people on return to school. RNRA is a relational and trauma informed approach currently in place across the majority of Renfrewshire establishments. As such, it is ideally placed to support the wellbeing of

staff, children and young people and their families as they cope with the effects of Covid-19 (REPS, 2020). To make the materials directly related to Covid-19, REPS refined and enhanced RNRA so that it serves as a framework for understanding the community trauma caused by Covid-19 and makes direct links to how the nurture principles can support the wellbeing of staff, children and young people and their families, including those who are experiencing trauma (REPS 2020).

REPS identified that digital adaptation of RNRA resources and support was needed due to the abrupt shift to remote learning and virtual educational psychology (EP) service delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic. REPS was able to adapt the content to consider the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The response to this crisis also provided new solutions to an existing issue of growth in demand for RNRA from establishments. The percentage of Renfrewshire education establishments engaged in RNRA has rapidly increased from 1% of schools and no ELCC settings in 2016 to 87% of schools and 92% of ELCC settings in 2020. Following QI methodology to plan for increasing scale and spread of the approach, REPS had already begun to consider how it could

adapt the existing RNRA implementation model to sustain the fidelity of the approach with significantly increased demand. Plans to create RNRA e-learning courses and networks of support were at the early stages of development in March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic led to school closures and home learning across Scotland. The process of digital adaptation gave REPS opportunities to improve the accessibility of the RNRA materials and to consider how to increase the direct engagement of staff, children and young people and parents/ carers with RNRA.

DIGITAL ADAPTATIONS TO RNRA

REPS recognised the need for support and guidance in educational establishments to adapt existing nurturing relationships approaches to the quickly developing virtual ways of working and learning in March 2020. The first digitally available resource from REPS was 'Nurturing relationships during establishment closures', which contained guidance and ideas to create nurturing connections virtually (REPS, 2020). Table 1 summarises the digitally accessible resources produced by REPS between March and November 2020.

Following on below, there is an account of the core resources developed for the main stakeholders; all

Table 1: RNRA resources developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Resource title	Intended audience	Digital delivery methods
Nurturing relationships during establishment closures	All education staff	Posted to REPS blog ¹ Shared on social media (Twitter)
Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: a trauma informed resource (extended version)	Senior leadership teams of educational establishments and RNRA core groups.	Posted to REPS blog Shared on social media (Twitter)
Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: a summary of trauma informed priorities for educational establishments	All education staff	Posted to REPS blog Shared on social media (Twitter)
Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: a closer look at trauma informed practice	Education staff supporting children and young people impacted by trauma.	Posted to REPS blog Shared on social media (Twitter)
Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: skills for recovery (pupil programme)	Children and young people from Primary 6 (age 9-10 years) to Secondary 6 (age 16-17 years).	All resources posted to the LA health and wellbeing development blog ² for ease of access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 x lesson plans & PowerPoints • 6 x videos hosted on YouTube • 6 x pupil Infographics • Sway leaflet 'Wellbeing when isolating' (pupil version)
Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: skills for recovery (staff programme)	All education staff	Social media strategy (Twitter) All resources posted to the LA health and wellbeing development blog for ease of access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 x weekly plans including video links and resources • 6 x staff Infographics
Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: skills for recovery (parent/carer programme)	Parents/carers of children and young people engaged in the pupil programme.	All resources posted to the LA health and wellbeing development blog for ease of access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 x weekly plans including video links and resources • Sway leaflet 'Wellbeing when isolating' (parent/carer version)

1 <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/re/renfrewshireedpsych/>

2 <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/re/renfrewshirehwb/skills-for-recovery/>

education staff, senior leadership teams, RNRA core group members, children and young people from Primary 6 to Secondary 6 (aged 9 to 18 years) and their parents/carers.

Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: A trauma informed resource (extended version)

The purpose of this resource is to provide senior leadership teams and existing RNRA core groups with a refined and enhanced nurturing relationships framework for recovery in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. RNRA core groups are already established to develop RNRA practice in educational establishments. As previously detailed, they are comprised of members of establishment staff and senior leadership and lead the implementation of nurturing approaches in the establishment. This extended resource is structured around the six nurture principles (Lucas et al., 2006). Within each nurture principle section there is information about key features of the nurture principle, why these are important for Covid-19 recovery planning, suggestions for putting the nurture principle into practice and links to further resources or information. The extended resource also gives a brief introduction to trauma informed approaches and practical actions.

Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: A summary of trauma informed priorities for educational establishments

The purpose of the summary resource is to highlight guidance from the extended resource that would be most relevant to the immediate priorities of educational establishments as they returned to school buildings post lockdown. Key information is structured in three broad areas: preparation for transition; supporting children and young people through interactions and supporting adults.

Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: A closer look at trauma-informed practice

The purpose of the 'Closer look at trauma-informed practice' resource is to provide more detailed learning and guidance regarding trauma specific approaches. This resource includes guidance to support the planning of a whole establishment approach to trauma-informed practice.

Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: Skills for recovery

Skills for Recovery (SFR) is a collaborative project between REPS and Renfrewshire's health and wellbeing development officer. SFR was developed in response to a request from LA education managers for a programme to support the transition back to secondary schools following the summer

holidays and the school closures prior to this in March 2020. The request included:

- A specific focus on supporting both staff and pupil wellbeing;
- Curricular resources that could be delivered through personal and social education lessons without significantly adding to the workload of teaching staff;
- Resources that could be used flexibly and accessed from home to:
 - support the proposed blended learning approach at that time;
 - allow quick adaptation of teaching methods if there was another lockdown; and
 - enable pupils who were self-isolating due to Covid-19 to complete the programme.

At the time of developing the SFR programmes there were vast numbers of resources being made available online from a variety of sources to support wellbeing during Covid-19. There was acknowledgement that the choice for schools could become overwhelming and lead to inconsistent approaches across educational establishments. The purpose of this resource was therefore to promote clear and consistent messages across LA establishments about how RNRA practice can nurture the mental health and wellbeing of staff, children and young people and their families as they adapt to the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. The content is based on the extended 'Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better: A Trauma Informed Resource' in addition to a range of freely available resources designed to support mental health and wellbeing in the context of Covid-19. There are consistencies between the content of SFR and an existing cognitive behaviour therapy based curricular approach to support mental health and wellbeing that was already established in Renfrewshire secondary schools.

SFR is a multi-faceted resource with specific pupil, staff, and parent/carer programmes. SFR was developed with digital accessibility as a key consideration. The resources are posted on the LA's health and wellbeing blog, which is publicly available, therefore allowing pupils and parents/carers to use the resources at home as well as in school. As recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2020), the resources include approaches to changing behaviour that are evidence-based, for example support to set goals and develop plans to improve personal wellbeing.

The pupil programme provided practical help in the first six weeks of the new school session including materials related to: dealing with

change, understanding, and naming our feelings, relationships and bouncing back. The programme also includes signposting to supports within the LA through a ready-made curricular resource, videos, and infographics. SFR was initially developed only for secondary pupils (aged 11-18 years), however, in response to demand from primary schools, it was offered to primary six (aged 9-10 years) and seven pupils (aged 10-11 years) to support preparation for secondary school transition.

The purpose of the parent/carer programme is to provide support for parents/carers' mental health and wellbeing, to help parents/carers to understand what their child is learning through the SFR programme in school, and to give parents/carers ideas about how they can support their child's wellbeing. In a recent review of research pertaining to the mental health of children and adolescents impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns, Singh et al. (2020) surmise that role modelling of important life skills, such as coping with stress, emotions and problem-solving by parents is particularly important for adolescents. Parent mental health and coping skills are also highlighted as factors which affect the mental health of children following disasters (Singh et al. 2020).

The staff development programme has a focus on nurturing approaches and staff wellbeing, to mirror the curricular resource. Relationships are key to learning and mental health and wellbeing: children and young people learn more when their teacher is happy and performing well (White, 2020; Glazzard & Rose, 2019). Research has found that teachers have higher job-related stress on average than other professionals (Worth & Van den Brande, 2019). The teacher wellbeing index (Education Support, 2020) shared findings collated during the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrating that education professionals reported high stress levels, an increase in poor wellbeing and a higher workload. REPS was mindful of the potential to add to existing stress by overloading staff with too much information at the point of transition back to schools. Infographics were produced to highlight key information for each of the six weeks of the SFR programme and the six curricular lessons were produced for teachers to use with little preparation required.

IMPLEMENTATION

The LA health and wellbeing development officer worked with Secondary schools to raise awareness of the SFR resources and offered support to plan implementation. The SFR resources were also promoted in the LA health and wellbeing digital newsletter and multiple social media channels.

LA education managers and the head of service (education) supported the dissemination and implementation of the Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better digital resources, highlighting the value of these to establishments across the LA's 49 primary schools, 12 secondary schools, 21 ELCCs, two alternative provision establishments and six flexible learning bases. REPS held a virtual launch to inform establishments about the suite of resources and supported schools to implement these through providing coach consult support. Core groups, already established to develop RNRA practice within educational establishments have produced action plans which detail creative and thoughtful implementation of practice directly informed by the range of digital resources produced by REPS. Establishments were urged to consider how best to engage parents/carers in the SFR programme, and to use the materials in ways that best meet the needs of their community. Some establishments sought to engage parents/carers and have used social media outlets, such as Twitter and Facebook, to communicate the information in manageable and engaging ways. Other establishments reported good engagement through existing parent/carer communication systems, such as SeeSaw and Show my Homework.

SMALL-SCALE EVALUATION: METHODOLOGY

A small number of establishments (n=3) were asked to give feedback on the SFR programme through an online survey, sent to them by the LA health and wellbeing development officer based on the school's uptake of the resources. Participants gave their consent by way of completing this survey. There are no identifying factors for establishments that shared their view within this paper to ensure their anonymity. Participant responses were submitted by primary six pupils (n=16) and primary and secondary teachers (n= 6). In addition to this small-scale survey, anecdotal feedback from establishments and tracking data from digital platforms regarding engagement with the resources is reported.

The purpose of seeking this feedback was to review the effectiveness of the adaptations made to the RNRA resources in this cycle of action research. The findings will be considered in the next cycle of PDSA, with the aim that this iterative process results in a resource which meets local needs and is a sustainable intervention.

FINDINGS

Survey

Brief preliminary feedback from small samples of primary six pupils (n=16) and primary and secondary teachers (n=6) indicates that all the teachers found the SFR pupil programme extremely

easy or somewhat easy to use. Eleven of the primary pupils in the sample found the SFR programme useful and had used some of the things they had learned, while half of the pupils wanted to learn more about some of the things covered in the SFR pupil programme. Although it is acknowledged that this is a very small sample, these figures are encouraging, given that the SFR pupil programme was primarily developed for secondary aged pupils. This is reflected in teacher feedback, where the majority of the teachers reported that pupils mostly engaged well with the SFR resources and two thirds had noticed some of their pupils using strategies they had learned from this programme. Nearly all of the pupils in the sample considered that they might look at the online resources for the SFR programme again in the future, while two thirds of the teachers reported that they were somewhat likely to use the SFR pupil programme again in the future. Around half of the pupils had shared what they had learned with their parents/carers, however only a small number of the teachers reported that they or the establishment's senior management team had shared information about the SFR programme with parents/carers.

Qualitative teacher feedback about the SFR pupil programme collected through the online survey highlighted some areas for improvement, including: ensuring videos are appropriate for primary aged children in terms of understanding the language and terms used; reviewing some of the curricular tasks to reduce repetition for secondary pupils, and improving the engagement with PowerPoint slides, eg use of videos. Other positive feedback included: the SFR programme encouraged more open discussion about mental health issues; pupils were engaged and seemed to enjoy the course and that the programme encouraged good interaction from pupils.

Establishment feedback and tracking data

Individual establishments have measured the impact of new practice from the Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better resources put in place, detailing this in their RNRA action plans. Establishments have used QI methodologies, such as PDSA, and a range of qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate impact, including staff, pupil and parent surveys and rating scales. Some establishments have already reported positive impact. Some not previously engaged in RNRA have used the digital resources and have anecdotally reported that the resources have had a positive impact on staff understanding and practice in using nurturing relationships to support transitions back to establishments. It is hoped that as a result of using the Nurturing Wellbeing materials and seeing the impact they

have, that these establishments will decide to develop RNRA further.

Engagement with the SFR programmes has been high, with most of the 12 secondary schools in the LA reporting that the SFR lessons have been delivered to some or all their pupils. Many primary schools have also been using the SFR programme with Primary 6 and 7 pupils. YouTube views of the SFR videos indicates higher engagement at the start of the six-week programme (618 views as of 3 December 2020), which declined as the weeks progressed. This decline could be due to promotion of the week one video on the LA social media sites and the involvement of some local high-profile personalities in this video. Videos for the following weeks were not so heavily publicised and were more likely to only have been viewed by those engaged in the SFR programmes. The decline may also be as a result of pupils successfully transitioning back to school. Engagement with the Microsoft Sway leaflets, designed for pupils who are self-isolating and their parents/carers, was encouraging with 1,830 views in the first three weeks following the launch, with over half of these coming from the parent/carer resource. Engagement with the SFR staff programme has been mixed. In some establishments where staff wellbeing was identified as a key priority on their school improvement plan, collegiate time or departmental meetings were used by senior leadership teams to highlight and work through parts of the SFR staff programme. In others the existing RNRA core groups used the resources to inform action plans to improve staff wellbeing. Some senior managers gave anecdotal feedback that the volume of information in the staff programme may be overwhelming for teachers who are already stressed by their workload and that this could affect levels of engagement.

DISCUSSION

The incorporation of practice recommended in the Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better resources into establishment RNRA action plans, and the high levels of engagement with the SFR programmes, suggests that establishments have seen the need to support staff, pupil and family wellbeing and have considered these resources appropriate and helpful in doing so. Initial feedback indicates that practice suggested in the Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better resources put in place by establishments has had a positive impact. Initial feedback from a sample of staff and pupils reporting on the SFR resource through an online survey, suggests high levels of pupil engagement, with a high proportion of pupils using strategies suggested and wanting to find out more. A high proportion of pupils and school staff also said that they would consider revisiting

the online SFR resources again in the future. Digital availability of SFR and other Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better resources will allow for this and highlights the benefits of digital adaptation of interventions to allow wider and more flexible access for users. Teachers were very positive about the digital access, with all staff who responded reporting that the SFR resources were extremely easy or somewhat easy to use. Teachers also reported on the benefits of a resource which was ready to deliver to pupils, especially at a time when establishment staff were exceptionally busy coping with changes to working practices, while also trying to cope with the stress associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

In several establishments senior leaders and RNRA core group members have used the digital resources to lead staff training. Previously, many would have asked their link EP to deliver such training. This suggests that the digital platform has provided ready access to the information and resources and this has helped build staff confidence about delivering training independently. This has positive implications for the sustainability of RNRA within establishments. REPS has been developing the existing RNRA leadership training to provide participants with the knowledge, resources, skills, and confidence to lead RNRA more independently within their establishment. The independent use of these Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better materials suggests that digital resources have a positive role to play in this.

Digital availability of RNRA resources also has implications for REPS capacity. Prior to this development, all EPs would have been directly involved in disseminating these resources and delivering training about them to individual establishments. This has general implications for future REPS service delivery as it allows for that time to be used more effectively. The digital availability of RNRA resources was particularly important during the Covid-19 restrictions, where EPs operated service delivery predominantly via virtual means.

While some establishments have made efforts to engage parents/carers with the resources, for example through social media, only a small percentage of establishments from the sample providing feedback reported that they had shared information with parents/carers about SFR. However, encouragingly a much higher percentage of pupils reported sharing what they had learned through SFR with a parent/carers. RNRA implementation typically begins with development of staff knowledge and skills followed by changes in practice. Once staff feel confident about the

initiative and its impact, RNRA practice is developed further to include more engagement with parents/carers and the wider community. This is reflected in the RNRA accreditation criteria that charts an establishment's progress in implementing RNRA. Further data gathering and reflection are planned to help identify the reasons behind establishments' limited promotion of the parental resources and to identify the barriers to access and engagement with the SFR staff programme. Adaptations will continue to be made to the resources reflecting the data and feedback gathered.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of this approach to digitally adapting an existing whole establishment nurturing relationships approach have been identified. RNRA uses implementation science and QI methodology to develop interventions that are refined to meet the needs of each context. The Nurturing Wellbeing to Build Back Better resources (digital adaptations of existing RNRA materials) did not follow the same process, due to the speed of development and implementation necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic. REPS did not pilot the resources nor consult with stakeholders prior to dissemination to establishments, families, and communities. This process would have undoubtedly led to a refinement of the materials and would have highlighted any issues with accessibility.

Although data are currently being gathered to evaluate the impact of the digital interventions, this process is in its early stages. The preliminary data currently available to authors have a small sample size due to the early stages of data gathering. The small scale feedback to date has identified some improvements that could be made to the materials; however, it is acknowledged that it is limited in scale and scope. Since writing, improvements have been made to the delivery of information utilising Microsoft Sway to allow easy access and inclusion of hyperlinks. It is hoped that a follow-on paper will be written focusing on the impact of the digital interventions once all data gathering has taken place and data has been analysed.

Significantly, the views of parents/carers were not received despite the resources being accessed. The choice to partake in feedback was optional. Access to technology to engage with the digital materials and therefore with the online surveys may pose a barrier to parental engagement. A recent report on digital exclusion in Scotland (Halliday, 2020) highlights that a third of households with low incomes do not have any internet access and 19 per cent of Scottish people do not know how to use digital technology. Although many LAs have

identified the risks posed by digital inequalities and supply technology to children who need it, there remain issues around confidence and skills of parents/carers to support their child to use the technology appropriately (Halliday, 2020). Further work should be carried out to investigate this issue and to improve accessibility of the resources for parents/carers. Further implications for LAs and EPs in addressing these inequalities will be discussed in the implications section.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

- Relational and trauma informed approaches that promote the practical application of the six nurture principles, as RNRA does, can support the wellbeing of staff, children and young people and their families as they cope with the effects of Covid-19 (REPS, 2020).
- RNRA should continue to be implemented and further developed as a key part of the LA approach to supporting mental health.
- Establishments with an existing nurture framework and established nurturing relationships practice that supports pupil and staff wellbeing are well prepared to support their establishment community when something traumatic happens.
- EPs should ensure that interventions take account of the needs of both staff and pupil wellbeing and consider the prevalence of work-related stress in teachers.
- Ready-to-use curricular materials that require little teacher preparation time offer a manageable method of delivering a nurture-based intervention directly to children and young people without adding to teacher stress.
- Ensuring that resources are digitally accessible can offer a flexible approach to EP training and interventions in educational establishments, and in this way can increase the scale and scope of EP support. This has implications for capacity issues in relation to EP services.
- Providing EPS resources digitally has positive implications for the sustainability of EPS initiatives, such as RNRA within establishments. Having digital resources can support establishment staff to lead initiatives and training more independently.
- One benefit of offering interventions digitally is to widen access and increase direct engagement of EP services with children, young people, parents and carers, however EP services should also take account of the issue of digital inequality and seek to address this.

- Working in partnership with education services colleagues at LA level can allow EPs to develop training and interventions that more effectively meet the needs of stakeholders and to promote these developments across the local authority.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- It is recommended that data continue to be gathered to evaluate the impact of the digital interventions on staff and pupil wellbeing.
- It is also recommended that data is collected from parents/carers.

CONCLUSION

The Covid-19 pandemic has been disruptive to all children and young people and traumatic for some (Action for Children, 2020; Barnardo's, 2020; Jeffery et al., 2020; Mind, 2020). Research suggests that RNRA has a positive impact on staff practice and pupil wellbeing (REPS, 2020). Research also indicates that nurturing approaches can be used to support children and young people who have experienced ACEs and trauma (Education Scotland, 2018). Hence, RNRA was considered an appropriate and useful resource to support educational communities to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic, especially as many establishments in the LA were already familiar with the materials and had a framework in place to implement RNRA (REPS, 2020). REPS identified that digital adaptation of RNRA resources and support was needed due to the abrupt shift to remote learning and virtual EP service delivery due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The process of digital adaptation gave REPS opportunities to improve the flexibility and accessibility of RNRA materials, to increase the direct engagement of children, young people, and parents/carers with RNRA and to address existing issues with sustainability of the model of EP support. Staff wellbeing was a significant consideration in the development of these resources. Some limitations of the approach have been identified, including a lack of stakeholder consultation and refinement of the digital resources and possible impact of digital inequalities on accessibility for pupils and parents/carers. REPS plans to continue to gather data on the use of the digital RNRA resources and to use this information to improve the approach. Given the benefits of digital approaches to EP service delivery to both stakeholders and EPs outlined in this paper, this is an area of EP practice which will undoubtedly continue to evolve beyond the Covid-19 pandemic and inform nurture and other EP practice more widely.

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ABOUT NURTUREUK

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

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

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

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