Nurture groups and teacher-child relationships

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

Dr Claire Balisteri

ABSTRACT

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

Research on pupil-teacher relationships in nurture groups

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

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

Measures used for assessing attachment in school-aged children

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

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

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

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

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

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

METHOD

Participants

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

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

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

Procedure and measures

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

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

Teacher measure of child-teacher relationship quality

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

Child measures of child-teacher relationship quality

Teacher Acceptance Scale

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

Child-teacher drawing task

Each participant was provided with a blank A4 piece of paper and 12 colouring pencils. He/she was then given the following instruction: "Draw a picture of yourself and your teacher at school". No further instructions were provided. If necessary they were reminded that they should include the teacher in the drawing. At the end of the task the child was asked to point out who the teacher was and to identify any objects that they had included and to comment on what they were doing in the picture. Although there was no stated time limit, each drawing session took no longer than 30 minutes.

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

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

Descriptions for each of the scales are as follows:

1. Vitality/Creativity: this scale is designed to capture the child's emotional investment in completing the task of drawing, as indicated by going beyond the task to add embellishments and lively elements.

2. Pride/Happiness: this scale is designed to capture the child's sense of pride, belongingness and general feelings of happiness. Higher scores may show the child holding hands with the teacher or something that would be considered fun with the teacher.

3. Vulnerability: this scale aims to capture feelings of vulnerability and emotional ambivalence as expressed in the child's drawing. Drawings rated high on this scale may not appear centred or grounded and may be very small or bunched together.

4 Emotional Distance/Isolation: this scale is intended to assess feelings of emotional distance and/or loneliness on the part of the child. This may be seen in disguised expressions of anger, physical distance from the teacher.

5. Tension/Anger: this scale is concerned with the degree of tension/anger that is aroused in the child as result of being asked to draw to complete the task. Figures may appear very rigid, without colour or clear positive facial affect.

6. Role-reversal: this scale attempts to capture feelings on the part of the child that suggest a role-reversing kind of relationship with the teacher. More specifically, the teacher is perceived as weak or unreliable by the child.
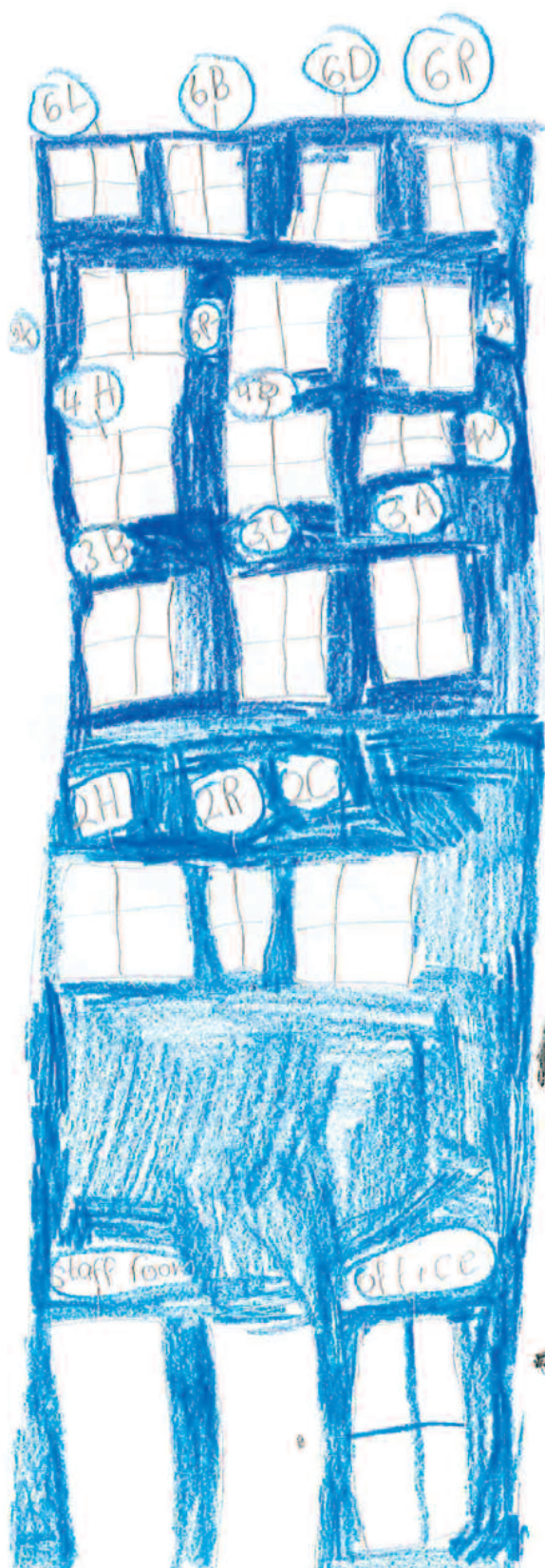
7. Bizarreness/Dissociation: this scale address a particular form of anger expressed by the child in his/her drawing. The underlying aim is to tap the unconscious processing of anger and resentment that may include unusual signs and symbols (e.g. black clouds) or fantasy themes in which the child is empowered in some way.

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

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

Drawing 1 – Nurture group student

Scoring awarded for Drawing 1 and explanation of marking

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

Drawing 2 – Nurture group student

Me

Mrs W
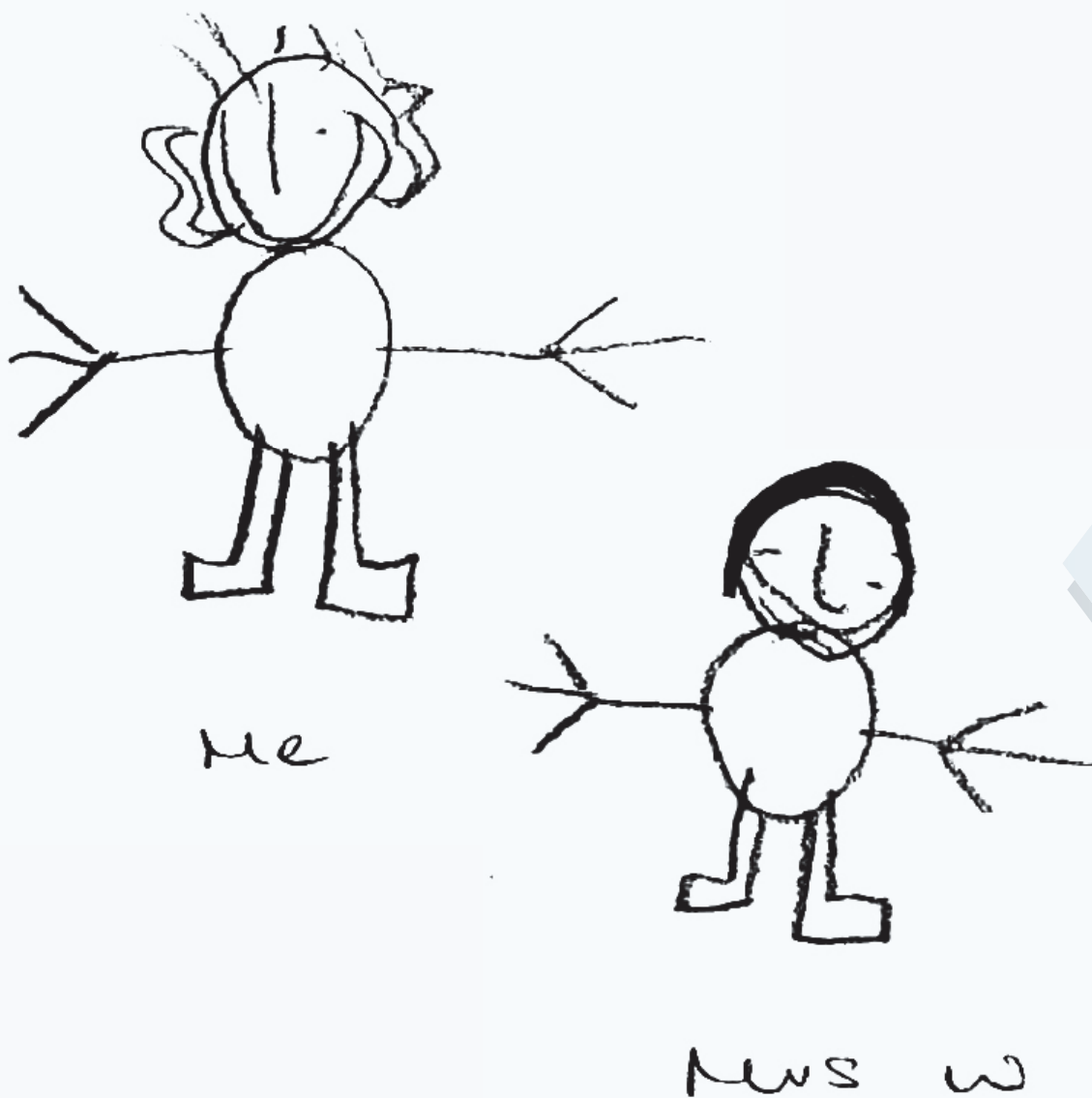
Scoring awarded for Drawing 2 and explanation of marking

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

Results

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

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

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

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

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

Results for teacher measures for child-teacher relationship quality

No significant differences were found between the groups in improvements in overall relationship quality (total score of the STRS). It was found that teachers from both groups reported significant improvements in overall relationship quality over time, (F(1,61) = 4.911 p = .030, partial ŋ2=.075).

Further analyses of the sub-scales of the STRS revealed some differences between NGs and mainstream classes. A main effect for group was reported on the closeness scale of the STRS indicating that NG teachers felt they had a much closer relationship with their students, (F(1,61) =8.399 p<.005, partial ŋ2=.121) A main effect for time was also reported suggesting that teachers from both groups developed a closer relationship with their students over time, (F(1,61) = 9.977 p <.002, partial ŋ2=.141). The main effect for group and main effect for time are displayed in figure 1.

Figure 1:
Line graph of the main effect for group and for time on the closeness score of the STRS:
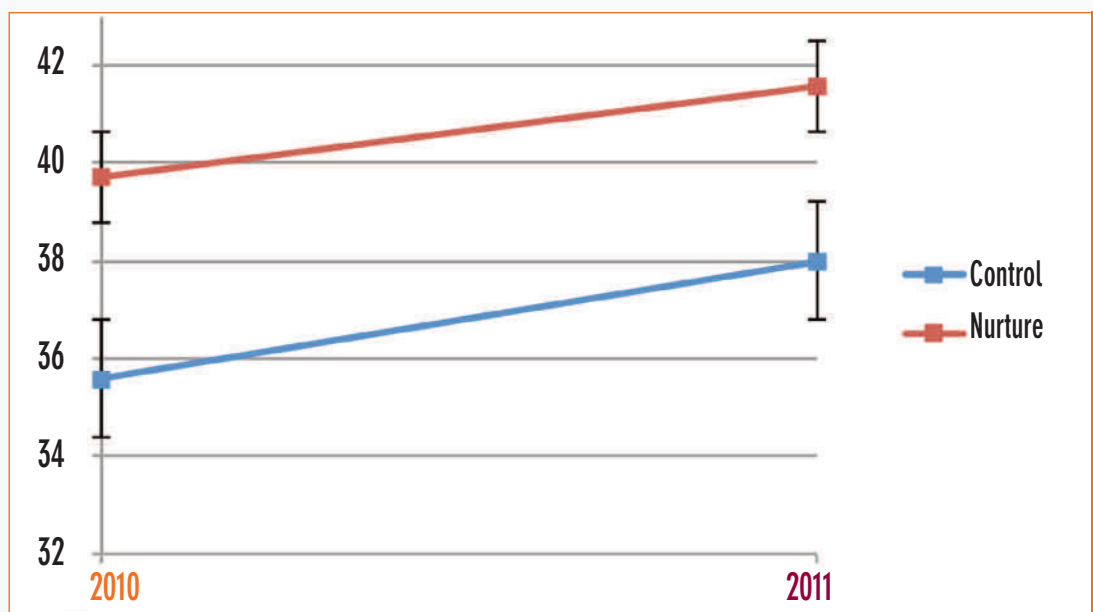
Results for child measure of child-teacher relationship quality

Analysis of the Teacher Acceptance Scale also revealed a significant difference between the groups where the NG children overall reported feeling more accepted by their teacher (F(1,60) =9.819 p=.003, partial ŋ2=.141). The main effect for group is displayed in figure 2. No significant differences were found between the groups in terms of relationships improving over time.

Figure 2:
Line graph of the main effect for group on the Teacher Acceptance score:
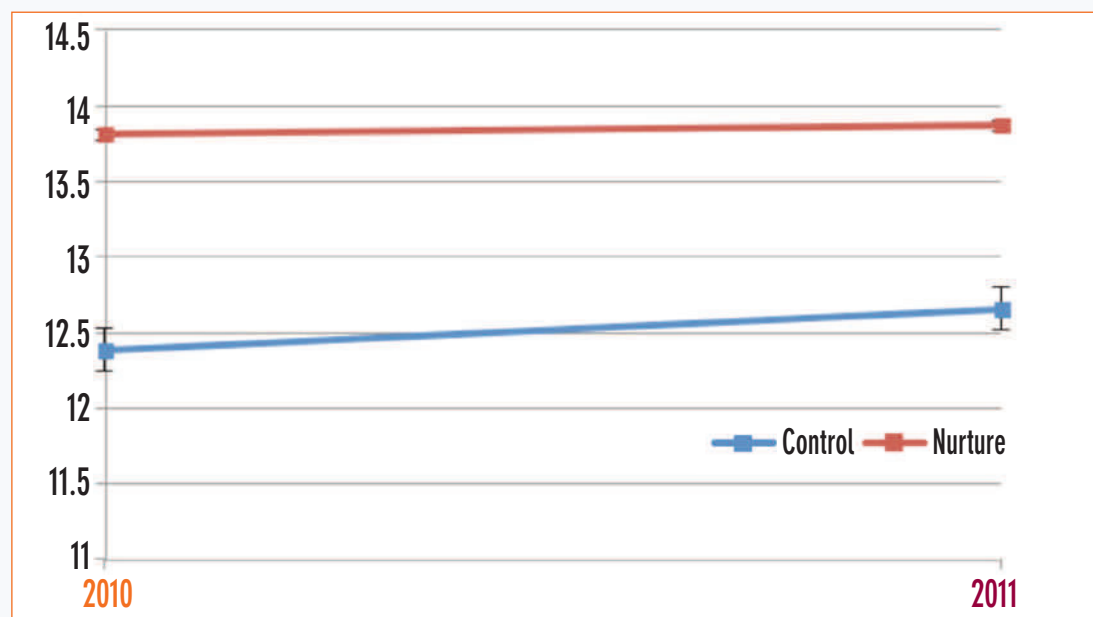
Apart from the vulnerablity scale, analysis of the drawings scales revealed no significant effects indicating that the children's feelings towards their teacher did not significantly improve over time for either group, as measured by this scale.

A significant interaction effect for both time and group was however found for the vulnerability scale of the drawings, (F(1,60) = 5.912, p<0.018, partial ŋ2=.090). Analysis revealed that feelings of vulnerability between the child and teacher improved for the NG children while the mainstream children's feelings showed greater vulnerability over time. The interaction effect for time and group is displayed in figure 3.

Figure 3:

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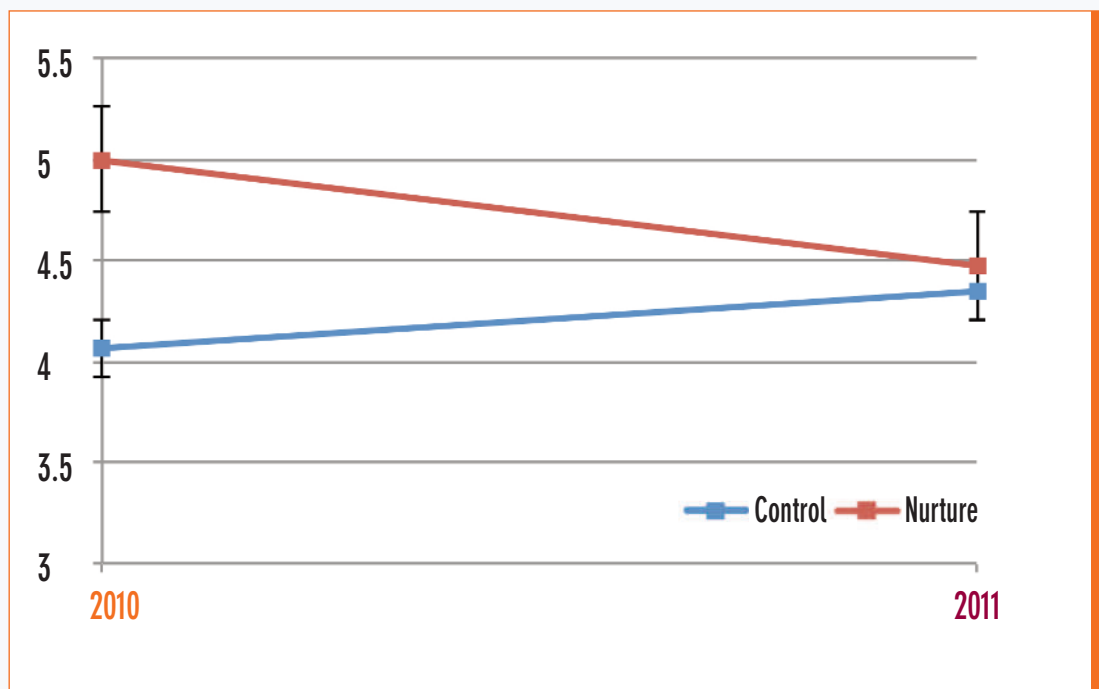
DISCUSSION

Discussion of teacher measures of child-teacher relationship quality

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

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

Discussion of child measures of child-teacher relationship quality

Findings from the Teacher Acceptance scale showed a similar

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

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

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

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

Limitations

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

Central among these characteristics are the ways in which:

■ The practical, day-to-day work of the NG is rooted in understanding of the developmental needs of children, the interdependence of social, emotional and cognitive factors, and a commitment to the fostering of positive, healthy development;

■ The work of the NG is fully integrated into mainstream school and LEA policies and structures, so as to avoid the 'sin bin' trap;

■ Children's admission to, progress in and eventual departure from the NG are informed by the use of appropriate diagnostic and evaluative tools, such as the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998).

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

Schools are complex systems and it is reasonable to expect that these drawings may reflect other dynamics (e.g. general feelings towards school, relationships with other adults in schools and relationships with peer group), which may have obscured projection of the internal working model of attachment to an individual teacher. Critics of using human figure drawings as psychological assessment tools cite empirical studies, which show poor reliability for drawings as a diagnostic tool, compared with interviews or behavioural observation (Pianta, Longmaid and Ferguson, 1999). There also appears to be some difficulty with concurrent validity in using drawing measures.

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

Directions for future development

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

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

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

"*The use of drawings as a window to inner models might be enriched by efforts to examine children's affective and behavioural responses during the task itself.***"**
(p.86).

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

CONCLUSION

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

REFERENCES

Bennathan, M and Boxall, M (1998). *The Boxall Profile: a guide to the education of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, handbook for teachers.* Maidstone, Kent: Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties.

Bowlby, J (1969). *Attachment and Loss. Vol. 1: Attachment. London:* Hogarth Press.

Boxall, M (2002). *Nurture Groups in School. Principles and Practice.* London: Paul Chapman.

Cooper, P, Arnold, R and Boyd, E (2001). The effectiveness of nurture groups: preliminary research findings. *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(4), 160-166.

Del Giudice, M (2008). Sex-biased ratio of avoidant/ambivalent attachment in middle childhood. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 26, 369-379.

Dobbs, J and Arnold, A (2009). Relationship between teachers' reports of children's behaviour and their behaviour towards those children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 24(2), 95-105.

Fury, GS (1996). The relation between infant attachment history and representations of relationships in school-aged child-family drawings. *Dissertation Abstracts International*: B57(11). 7249 (University Microfilm No. 9711409).

Fury, G, Carlson, EA and Sroufe, LA (1997). Children's representations of attachment relationships in child-family drawings, *Child Development*, 68, 1154–1164.

Goodman, R (1997). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: a research note. D*Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 38(8), 581 –586.

Green, J, Stanley, C and Peters, S (2007). Disorganized attachment representation and atypical parenting in young school age children with externalizing disorder. *Attachment and Human Development*, 9(3), 207-222.

Harrison, LJ, Clarke, L.and Ungerer, JA (2007). Children's drawings provide a new perspective on child-teacher relationship quality and school adjustment. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 22, 55-71.

Harter, S and Pike, R (1984). The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for young children. *Child Development*, 55, 1969-1982.

Jerome, EM, Hamre, BK and Pianta, RC (2009). Child-teacher Relationships from Kindergarten to Sixth Grade: Early Childhood Predictors of Teacher-perceived Conflict and Closeness. *Social Development,* 18(4), 915-945.

Kaplan, N and Main, M (1986). *Instructions for the classification of children's child-family drawings in terms of representation of attachment. Unpublished manuscript,* University of California, Berkeley.

MacKay, T, Reynolds, S and Kearney, M (2010). From attachment to attainment: the impact of nurture groups on academic achievement. *Educational and Child Psychology,* 27(3), 100-110.

Marvin, R, Cooper, G, Hoffman, K and Powell, B (2002). The circle of security Project: attachment-based intervention with care-giver/pre-school child dyads. *Attachment and Human Development*, 4(1), 107-124.

Newberry, M and Davis, HA (2008). The role of elementary teachers' conceptions of closeness to students on their differential behaviour in the classroom. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 24, 1965-1985.

O'Connor, T and Colwell, J (2002). The effectiveness and rationale of the 'nurture group' approach to helping children with emotional and behavioural difficulties remain within mainstream education. *British Journal of Special Education*, 29(2), 96-100.

Pianta, R (1992). The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale. Charlottesville: University of Virginia
Pianta, RC, Longmaid, K and Ferguson, JE (1999). Attachment-based classifications of children's child-family drawings: psychometric properties and relations with children's adjustment in kindergarten. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 28(2), 244–255.

Pyle, A and Rae, T (2015). Exploring parents' and children's perceptions of nurture groups and the way in which they impact upon parent-child relationships. *The International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 1(1), 1-40.

Sanders, T (2007). Helping children thrive at school: the effectiveness of nurture groups. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 23(1), 45-61.

Veltman MWM, and Browne KD (2001). Three decades of child maltreatment research: implications for the school years. *Trauma, Violence, Abuse*, 2, 215-239.

NE