How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child?

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i)   ABSTRACT

Nurture Groups are targeted, school based interventions, aimed at meeting the developmental needs of vulnerable children identified as having social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Staffed by two 'nurturing' adults, Nurture Groups provide a safe, containing, and highly structured environment to support children's social and emotional wellbeing, and their capacity to learn and achieve.

Past research has focussed on the impact of Nurture Groups on children's outcomes, with some highlighting the importance of the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child. This research aims to explore and explain the practitioner-child relationship, asking Nurture Group practitioners how they make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child. The purpose of this research is to identify what makes a successful nurture relationship, and identify factors which challenge it.

A symbolic interactionist and critical realist ontological and epistemological position was taken, and a grounded theory methodology adopted. Five Nurture Group practitioners from three full-time, Key Stage 1 Nurture Groups were interviewed.

Results revealed a 'relationship journey' between the Nurture Group practitioner and child, which develops into a 'close' relationship. As the practitioner and child get to know and understand one another, the practitioner becomes attuned to the child's needs and emotional experiences, enabling them to provide containment to the child and put appropriate support in place. The relationship journey contains a number of challenges, which the practitioner tries hard to overcome. These challenges place a significant emotional load on the practitioner, who in return, seeks containment. However, these challenges contribute towards the development of the relationship, where trust emerges, and a 'close' relationship forms.

The relationship journey is discussed in relation to psychodynamic and attachment theories, and implications for Nurture Group practitioners, stakeholders and Educational Psychologists explored.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. A national context: Wellbeing and mental health in children and young people

Many children and young people across the UK today, experience a high level of adversity and risk, including poverty, loss, and abuse, which is likely to have a significant impact on their wellbeing, development and learning (Roffey, 2016). It is estimated that one in ten young people suffer from a diagnosable mental health disorder, with one in five of these young people suffering more than one (Green, McGinnity, Meltzer, Ford, & Goodman, 2005). Mental health difficulties often include anxiety, depression, and externalising challenging behaviour (Green et al., 2005), which can be difficult for families and schools to manage and respond to (Department for Education, 2015a).

Research has frequently shown that exposure to these risks often leads to poorer outcomes, including low academic achievement, social exclusion, and later unemployment and poorer wellbeing in adulthood (Bellis, Lowey, Leckenby, Hughes, & Harrison, 2014; Green et al., 2005).

Within the recent Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015b), a child's SEND may be understood in terms of having social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. A child may present as being withdrawn, challenging, or disruptive, which can be understood in terms of underlying emotional and mental health difficulties, including depression, self-harm, and attachment disorders to name but a few.

The promotion of children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health is high on the UK Government agenda (Department of Health, 2015). In 2004, the UK Government published the Every Child Matters framework to improve outcomes for children (and narrow the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children) by increasing opportunities and reducing risks for children and young people across the UK (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Priorities on improving outcomes, mental health and wellbeing remain today, with the Government commissioning a taskforce specifically

focused on promoting, protecting and improving the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people (Department of Health, 2015).

Schools have been highlighted as being well placed to support children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health (Department of Health, 2015; Public Health England, 2015). The recent Children and Families Act (2014) places a statutory duty on all Local Authorities and schools to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people, especially those with SEND. Public Health England (2015) have suggested a set of eight principles for schools to follow to foster emotional wellbeing among children, including offering targeted support for those with identified needs.

A number of reports suggest evidence based targeted interventions which aim to support vulnerable children and young people (Cheney, Schlösser, Nash, & Glover, 2014; Public Health England, 2015; Roffey, 2016). In an evidenced based review of targeted school based interventions for children and young people with identified emotional wellbeing and mental health needs, Nurture Groups were identified as holding the strongest evidence base for promoting successful outcomes, over other school based group interventions e.g. Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning and cognitive behavioural therapy (Cheney et al., 2014). The UK Government has repeatedly reported on the benefits of Nurture Groups for promoting the social, emotional and academic outcomes of vulnerable young people with SEMH needs, across primary and secondary educational settings (Ofsted, 2008, 2011; Public Health England, 2015; Steer, 2005).

1.2. Nurture Groups

Nurture Groups are targeted, school based interventions, aimed at meeting the developmental needs of vulnerable children with SEMH needs (Boxall & Lucas, 2010). Nurture Groups were first developed in the 1960's by Educational Psychologist Marjorie Boxall, in response to large numbers of young people starting school with significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, who were struggling to access mainstream education. Their difficulties were understood as being a result of disrupted or impoverished early nurturing experiences (Boxall & Lucas, 2010). Nurture Groups were designed to offer

a safe, containing and highly structured nurturing environment, which gave children the opportunity to develop trusting relationships with key adults, providing a foundation for social and emotional development, and academic achievement.

Nurture Groups are inclusive classes of typically 10-12 children, supported by two consistent nurture practitioners (Boxall & Lucas, 2010). The children attend the Nurture Group for a substantial part of the school day, yet maintain contact with their mainstream class for activities such as registration, Physical Education, and break times. The nurture room is furnished to represent the home and school to provide a range of learning opportunities. Within the Nurture Group, children's learning is understood developmentally. Children typically access the group for two-four terms before transitioning back to their mainstream class (Boxall & Lucas, 2010).

Since their inception, three main models of Nurture Group practice have developed (Cooper & Whitebread, 2007):

1. Classic 'Boxall' Nurture Group: Follow the model set by Marjorie Boxall (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000). The child attends the Nurture Group full time (nine half-day sessions per week).

2. Variant Nurture Group: An adaptation of the classic Boxall model. The core principals of nurture are followed, but with a different structure. Often the child attends on a part-time basis (one – eight, half-day sessions per week).

3. Non-Boxall Nurture Group: Groups are termed 'Nurture Groups' and claim to be an adaptation of the Nurture Group concept, but don't follow the core Boxall principals.

The theoretical foundation of the Nurture Group is based around attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment is the long term relationship between two people (Bomber, 2007) e.g. between a child and their parent. Within an attachment relationship, the way the adult responds to and fulfils the needs of the child, shapes how the child understands themselves, and how they relate and respond to others around them. The type of early attachment relationship developed in infancy or early childhood provides a 'template' for later relationships (Bomber, 2007).

For those children entering school whose early attachment experiences, for whatever reason, were not met with warmth and consistency, nor were they provided containment from fear and anxiety, are often identified as having a high level of need. These children typically enter school with low self-esteem, find it difficult to cope with the demands and challenges of school life, and struggle to develop healthy, trusting relationships with adults and their peers (Geddes, 2006). Nurture Groups aim to support these children by providing opportunities to develop secure, nurturing relationships within the Nurture Group. Nurture practitioners model trusting, predictable relationships, and offer a safe base (Bowlby, 1988) from which children can explore and learn. The relationship between the practitioner and child is frequently cited as vital for the child's development, and success of the Nurture Group (e.g. Bennathan & Boxall, 2000; Billington, 2012).

1.3. A local context

The Local Authority (LA) within which this research was based has a long history of running Nurture Groups for its most vulnerable children. The first Nurture Groups were set up in the 1980's and have continued to grow, with just under 20 Nurture Groups now running across primary schools within the LA. Initially beginning within the Key Stage 1 (KS1) age phase, the LA increasingly became aware of the benefits that Nurture Group provisions had for promoting positive outcomes for its more vulnerable children, leading to the LA's decision to fully fund all KS1 groups. In recent years, the LA has begun to part fund Nurture Groups set up within Key Stage 2 (KS2), in recognition that the intervention can continue to positively support children in their later childhood years. The LA has a commitment to continue the support and development of Nurture Groups, providing regular training and peer group meetings, monitoring and evaluating the provisions, and running a steering group committee (see Appendix 1). The LA's Children and Young People's Plan states that they seek for all their children to;

- Be kept safe

- Have equality of access to educational and extracurricular activities

- Have a good start in life

- Achieve their potential and experience positive life outcomes

Educational Psychologists (EPs) have a key role in supporting Nurture Groups across the LA, which includes providing consultation and termly training sessions with practitioners, and collaboration with LA stakeholders to contribute to the development of nurture provisions. The EP has frequently been highlighted elsewhere as well placed to facilitate the ongoing development of nurture practice (e.g. Kearney, Williams, & Doherty, 2016; Roffey, 2016).

1.4. The impact of Nurture Groups

The vast majority of research into Nurture Groups has focussed on evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention on children's outcomes. Hughes and Schlösser (2014) carried out a systematic review of 11 Nurture Group studies to identify the impact of Nurture Groups in relation to the emotional wellbeing, social and behavioural development of children. By analysing quantitative data, the authors identified that Nurture Groups offer an effective intervention to support the wellbeing of young people. More recently, Bennett (2015) carried out a larger scale review, identifying that Nurture Groups positively improve children's SEMH, in particular, increasing the child's capacity to manage feelings of anger, and supporting a reduction in behaviours that challenge.

Ofsted (2011) reported that Nurture Groups within primary education settings enable children to build positive relationships, better manage their emotions and behaviour, and make academic progress. Binnie and Allen (2008) evaluated the impact of six part-time Nurture Groups based in primary schools, using both quantitative and qualitative measures. Pre and post measures of the Boxall Profile (a tool developed by Bennathan and Boxall (1998) to measure children's emotional development), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) and a self-esteem scale, indicated significant positive gains in all measures. Further feedback from parents and school staff revealed positive views of the Nurture Group, with benefits viewed as extending across the whole school environment. More recently, and with a greater focus on seeking a qualitative insight into Nurture Group outcomes, Shaver and McClatchey (2013) sought the perspectives of Nurture Group practitioners

and children. The practitioners reported positive gains in children's wellbeing, social skills, emotional awareness, and academic progress. The children reported that their Nurture Group experiences supported their social development, behaviour and academic achievement.

Further studies also highlight that Nurture Group children are more likely to remain in their mainstream schools instead of requiring special educational placements, and are less likely to require a statutory assessment of SEND (Iszatt & Wasilewska, 1997). Evidence also indicates that a Nurture Group can help foster a whole school nurturing ethos (Binnie & Allen, 2008; Doyle, 2003; Shaver & McClatchey, 2013). Therefore it is clear that Nurture Groups have a positive impact in a number of areas relating to both the individual wellbeing and achievement of the child, and the wider school network.

1.5. Factors leading to successful nurture provision

Whilst the majority of research into Nurture Groups has evaluated their impact on children and young people's outcomes, far less research has looked into the processes operating within Nurture Groups, or the factors which lead to a successful nurture provision. Several researchers have highlighted that research must begin to identify the processes of change i.e. why Nurture Groups work, to better understand the outcomes typically seen (Bennett, 2015; Cheney et al., 2014; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Hughes & Schlösser, 2014).

Recently, a small number of studies have begun to explore the processes operating within Nurture Groups (Bani, 2011; Birch, 2016; Chiappella, 2015; Colwell & O'Connor, 2003). In their systematic literature review of Nurture Group research, Bennett (2015) highlighted a weak amount of evidence relating to the factors which lead to an effective Nurture Group. This included the child's individual characteristics, composition of the group, and a whole-school nurturing ethos. Colwell and O'Connor (2003) and Bani (2011) studied the types of communication used by Nurture Group practitioners, finding that compared to teachers in mainstream classes, Nurture Group practitioners were found to use more positive forms of communication, and twice as much verbal than non-verbal praise. Both studies argued that the form of communication used by nurture practitioners helped to create an environment more

likely to foster the growth of self-esteem (although no actual measures of self-esteem were taken), and therefore act as a key factor towards influencing change.

Birch (2016) sought Nurture Group practitioners' views of factors which lead to successful Nurture Group practice. Through analysis of themes arising from focus groups with practitioners from three different Nurture Groups, four key characteristics and challenges for Nurture Groups were identified; relationships with parents, support for practitioners, pressures on practitioners, and understanding and meeting the needs of the nurture child. Chiappella (2015) also explored the processes operating within a Nurture Group. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with Nurture Group practitioners from six Key Stage 3 (KS3) Nurture Groups. Thematic analysis of these interviews revealed six themes or processes. These themes related to the structure of the Nurture Group, the teaching and learning opportunities, and relationships within the Nurture Group. The relationship theme related to relationships between the young people themselves, and between the practitioner and child. Trust was a key aspect of the relationship theme, with young people feeling cared for and listened to.

1.6. Nurture Group relationships

The practice of Nurture Groups is founded in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), where the relationship between the practitioner and child is vital for the child's development (Billington, 2012). Yet despite this theoretical view, very little research into Nurture Groups has specifically focussed on Nurture Group relationships.

A small number of studies have considered the relationship between the practitioner and parents of Nurture Group children (Bishop & Swain, 2000; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kirkbride, 2014) and between Nurture Group children themselves (Chiappella, 2015; Griffiths, Stenner, & Hicks, 2014; Kourmoulaki, 2013). However, the mention of relationships in some of these studies is very brief, and not the sole focus of the research.

Griffiths et al. (2014) listened to the voices of KS2 children attending a Nurture Group, to gain insight into their Nurture Group experiences. The authors found that the nurture children placed an important focus on relationships, particularly relationships with their peers and with practitioners, leading to a sense of belonging. Garner and Thomas (2011) carried out focus groups and individual interviews with nurture practitioners, school staff, parents, and young people in three secondary schools with established Nurture Groups. Relationships again were found to be a key theme which contributed to the success of the intervention, with the young people expressing the importance of their relationship with the nurture practitioners to meet their own social, emotional and learning needs. Viewed alongside the previously described study by Chiappella (2015), these studies indicate the perceived importance of Nurture Group relationships.

To date, only one study has solely focussed on the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child (Balisteri, 2016). This study aimed to explore the perceived quality of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. Quantitative measures of the practitioner-child relationship were taken, and compared to mainstream teacher-child relationships. Results indicated that the relationship formed between the practitioner and child is perceived to be closer than a mainstream teacher-child relationship. This study is the first to highlight the nature of the practitioner-child relationship.

Whilst it seems that relationships fostered within the Nurture Group are of central importance to the success of the Nurture Group (Balisteri, 2016; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Griffiths et al., 2014), the research is limited. Published research has yet to explore in detail the nature of the relationship between the practitioner and child, nor explain the factors at play within the relationship.

1.7. Rationale

There appears to be a lack of research, which focusses on the nature of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. Whilst the practitioner-child relationship thus far, has often been understood within an attachment framework, which underpins Nurture Group practice and theory, very little is known about the actual nature of the relationship, and the key factors at play. Research into the practitioner-

child relationship will help to fill the gap in the available literature, and contribute towards developing our understanding of the relationship, which is so often seen as having central importance to the success of the Nurture Group (Billington, 2012).

1.8. Purpose

The main purpose of this research is to explore and explain the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, identifying the factors which influence the relationship. Previous research has hinted that the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship is key to the success of the Nurture Group, but it is unclear as to what factors within the relationship are key.

A greater understanding of the practitioner-child relationship will help highlight the relationship between the practitioner and child, and the factors which enable and/or challenge the relationship. This research will help to identify what a successful Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship looks like, and how this relationship develops.

This research aims to seek the perspectives and explanations that Nurture Group practitioners, working in classic 'Boxall', KS1 Nurture Groups, give to the practitioner-child relationship. The research will have value for the Nurture Group practitioners themselves, and stakeholders working within the LA within which this research took place.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 1

2.1. Chapter overview

This chapter is the first of a two-part literature review. This first literature review sets out to review what existing research says about relationships between the Nurture Group practitioner and child. The search approach will be described, followed by a critical review of the available research. The reviewed literature will then be used to highlight what questions haven't yet been answered, leading into the aims of this current study. The second part of the literature review can be found in chapter five, which reviews relevant literature, based on the findings of this research.

2.2. Aims of the literature review

This first part of the literature review seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What does research say about the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship?

2. What questions still remain about the relationship?

2.3. Approach to the literature review

This research sets out to use a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to study the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. The original grounded theory method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), advises the researcher against carrying out a literature review before data generation and analysis, to avoid bringing prior assumptions into the analysis process. However, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that some degree of familiarity with the literature prior to data analysis can be helpful, to help formulate the research question(s), and be more sensitive to what arises in the data. Consequently, I carried out a superficial review of the literature prior to data generation and analysis, which was then repeated in more detail, after completion of the analysis process.

An initial literature search was carried out in April 2016, to help direct the focus of this study. Relevant literature were identified by searching *PsychINFO, Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, ERIC* AND *Education Source* databases, using the terms *nurture group**, *nurture class**, *nurture room** and *group*

nurture AND *relationship**, or *interaction*.* The search was limited to journal articles published no earlier than 1969, when the first Nurture Group was set up by Marjorie Boxall (Boxall & Lucas, 2010)*.* After duplicates, were removed, this search provided 18 peer reviewed journals, of which only two met the inclusion criteria (described below). To widen the search, the terms *nurture group*, nurture class**, *nurture room** and *group nurture* were searched, providing 47 journal articles. Articles were individually scanned against the inclusion criteria, revealing four relevant articles (two of which were duplicates from the earlier search). A manual search of *The International Journal of Nurture In Education* was also carried out, revealing a further nine results, of which three met the inclusion criteria. In total, 56 articles were returned through the literature search, of which seven articles met the inclusion criteria.

The above literature search was then repeated in April 2017, to identify any further articles published in the interim period between May 2016 and April 2017. A further four results were returned, none of which met the inclusion criteria.

The following inclusion criteria were applied to identify relevant articles for the literature review:

- The research was carried out in a Nurture Group which followed a 'true' Nurture Group model i.e. either a classic 'Boxall' or variant model (see Cooper & Whitebread, 2007).
- Some or all of the results made reference to the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child.
- The study was conducted in the UK.

In total, seven relevant articles were identified, which matched the inclusion criteria. The reader is asked to refer to Appendix 2 for a summary of articles excluded from the final literature review.

Articles were critiqued by drawing upon two different appraisal tools; the CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) (CASP, 2016) and the four principals outlined by Yardley (2000). The articles identified for this literature review used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The CASP therefore felt appropriate to use as it provides prompts for the critiquing of both qualitative and quantitative

research. The four principals outlined by Yardley are particularly applicable to the second part of the literature review (see chapter 5 for further details). In an attempt to marry together the two literature reviews (chapters 2 and 5), both appraisal tools were drawn upon for the literature reviews. Tables summarising the articles reviewed in this chapter, can be found in Appendix 3.

2.4. Research making reference to the practitioner-child relationship

When reviewing the existing literature, it was identified that a limited amount of research has looked at the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child. Only seven articles were found to discuss the practitioner-child relationship, the majority of which make reference to the relationship as a small part of the wider results.

The earliest study to make reference to the practitioner-child relationship was carried out by Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001). As one of the earliest published studies into Nurture Groups, the authors set out to identify the impact of Nurture Groups on children's social, emotional, and behavioural development, through a large scale study of primary and secondary (KS3) Nurture Groups. While the main focus of the research was to quantifiably measure the impact of the intervention via SDQ (Goodman, 1997), Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998) and academic data, some attempt was made to access child, parent and teacher views. Cooper et al. (2001) reported in one brief sentence that Nurture Group children experienced great fondness towards their practitioners. No further evidence of the practitioner-child relationship was reported. Limited value can be held towards this early finding, as the exact methods used to obtain and analyse participant views were not described, and it is unclear how well this small finding represented the wider views of the Nurture Group children, parents and practitioners.

Further studies have also briefly reported findings relating to the practitioner-child relationship (Griffiths et al., 2014; Pyle & Rae, 2015). Pyle and Rae (2015) carried out a grounded theory study to explore and explain the impact of Nurture Groups on the relationship between the Nurture Group child and their parent(s). 12 parents and 11 children aged 6-9 years, who accessed a mix of classic Boxall and variant

model Nurture Groups, were interviewed through focus groups and individual interviews. Analysis of responses identified that Nurture Groups helped to foster more positive parent-child relationships. Several factors were found to influence this process, including the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child. Pyle and Rae (2015) described the practitioner-child relationship as one which is very 'close' (p. 13). The parents attributed the relationship between the practitioner and child to the child's increased feelings of belonging and SEMH. The results of this study hold strength, as views of both parents and Nurture Group children were sought, allowing triangulation of results, which identified similar views of the importance of the practitioner-child relationship.

Griffiths et al. (2014) similarly carried out a study to elicit Nurture Group children's views, but this time with the broad aim of hearing how they constructed their experiences of the Nurture Group. Eight children aged 7-11 years, who attended one Nurture Group for four half-days per week (two children had recently reintegrated back into their mainstream classes), were asked to take part in a focus group, which was carefully designed to account for the children's additional and developmental needs. The children were asked to share their thoughts, experiences and feelings towards the Nurture Group. Thematic analysis of the focus group responses revealed four themes relating to the children's experiences. Relationships was one theme, which contained, six sub-themes; belonging, feeling like a family, availability, predictability, trust, and friendship. These results support the findings of Pyle and Rae (2015), highlighting the perceived importance of relationships, particularly the feeling of belonging which is experienced. However, the findings of Griffiths et al. (2014) lack clarity and detail. The authors did not distinguish practitioner-child relationships from relationships between the children themselves when outlining the results. It is unclear how much of the relationship theme, and which sub-themes, related to the practitioner-child relationship. No description was given to the sub-themes, limiting the depth and transparency of the results. Furthermore, the study was limited to one single Nurture Group setting, reducing the generalisability of the findings. Further exploration of children's views from a larger number of settings would be required to strengthen the results found.

Several other studies have also adopted a thematic analysis methodology when carrying out Nurture Group research (Chiappella, 2015; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013), which has allowed for greater insight to be gained about the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. However, the practitioner-child relationship has still not been the primary focus of the research carried out.

Chiappella (2015) carried out a study involving six Nurture Groups, which catered for young people aged 11-14 years (KS3). This was a mixed-methods study, which set out to explore the impact of the intervention for young people, and identify some of the processes involved. The qualitative aspect of the study involved semi-structured interviews with nine Nurture Group practitioners. Interviews were analysed through thematic analysis, which revealed that across the six settings, positive outcomes were often seen in relation to the young people's social and emotional development. Of greater interest to this literature review, relationships within the Nurture Group were identified as a key theme or process taking place within the groups. Trusting relationships were viewed as vital to the Nurture Group success. The authors described that the quality of the relationships were reflected by the practitioners viewing that the young people felt sensitively cared for and listened to. However, as with the study by Griffiths, et al. (2014), the relationships described relate to both the relationships between the young people themselves, and with the practitioners. Discussion of the results aren't separated by type of relationship, meaning that it is unclear how much of the results are weighted to the practitioner-child relationship. The authors allude to the sensitive nature of the relationship being akin to a parent-child attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1969), rather than a mainstream teacher-child relationship, which suggests that the results relate to the practitioner-child relationship. However, the results aren't presented in a manner which clearly allows for this conclusion to be made.

A much more detailed and methodologically transparent study was carried out by Garner and Thomas (2011), who took a purely qualitative approach to studying Nurture Groups, again within KS3, secondary school settings. This study aimed to explore the perceived impact of Nurture Groups and how they are implemented, by seeking the views of key people linked to the three separate groups; Nurture Group

practitioners, mainstream school staff, young people accessing the Nurture Groups, and their parents. Focus groups were carried out with school staff and parents, and individual interviews with the young people. Seeking views from multiple perspectives allowed for triangulation of data, when later analysed using thematic analysis.

As with previously mentioned studies (Chiappella, 2015; Griffiths et al., 2014), relationships again were identified as a key theme from the analysis. However, of greater significance, Garner and Thomas (2011) made clear reference to the relationships theme as relating to the relationship between the practitioner and child, providing stronger and more detailed insight into the practitioner-child relationship alone. The relationship was described as one which was 'close', and of great importance to the young people's development, particularly in being able to meet their social, emotional and learning needs. The results shed further light on what the Nurture Group practitioners offered for the young people, including feelings of security and protection, and feeling listened to. Parents expressed that they viewed the relationship to be based on trust, equality, and respect. Garner and Thomas (2011) linked these findings to an attachment theory framework (Bowlby, 1969), describing the relationship to be a representation of an attachment relationship, where the parent/practitioner provides safety, care, and a base from which the child/young person can venture out and learn.

In further discussion of their results, particularly in relation to the practitioner-child relationship, Garner and Thomas (2011) consider potential qualitative differences in the relationship between primary and secondary school Nurture Group settings. They describe necessary variations in the structure and function of Nurture Groups in secondary schools versus primary schools (while still maintaining the principles of Nurture Groups), to account for systemic differences, academic pressures, and the age of the young people accessing the groups. As a result, Garner and Thomas (2011) suggest that the practitioner-child relationship in a secondary school, is based more on respect and equality, whereas in a primary setting, the relationship is more adult directed. Further comparison of primary and secondary settings would be required to support this claim. However, it highlights a significant downside to the

Nurture Group research. Variation exists within the Nurture Group literature, with studies being carried out in nurture settings which cater for different age groups, reducing the extent to which findings can be easily contrasted and compared. The studies described so far in this chapter, reflect a range of age groups, from primary KS1 and KS2 (Griffiths et al., 2014; Pyle & Rae, 2015), to KS3 (Chiappella, 2015; Garner & Thomas, 2011). The research by Cooper et al. (2001) studied both primary and secondary school settings. The variation in age groups studied, reduces the consistency of the research carried out.

A further limitation of the studies reviewed so far (and problematic in the wider Nurture Group literature), which is important to highlight, is the variation in Nurture Group models studied. Some studies have researched a mixture of classic 'Boxall' and variant Nurture Groups (Cooper et al., 2001; Pyle & Rae, 2015). Where variant Nurture Groups have been studied, differences arise in the part-time nature of the Nurture Group, ranging from children accessing the Nurture Group for one session per week (Garner & Thomas, 2011) to four half-days per week (Griffiths et al., 2014). This lack of consistency adds further variation to the research, impacting on the conclusions that can be drawn about the nature of the practitioner-child relationship in relation to specific Nurture Group models.

Kourmoulaki (2013) carried out a very methodologically similar study to Garner and Thomas (2011), accessing the views of Nurture Group practitioners, mainstream staff, young people, and their parents, in a part-time, KS3 Nurture Group. Again thematic analysis was used to analyse the views expressed by participants. The similarity in methodology, age group and Nurture Group model studied, enables greater comparison of these two studies. Kourmoulaki (2013) set out to explore the structure and impact of the Nurture Group, supportive mechanisms in place, and areas for future development. Within their analysis of these areas, the relationship between the practitioner and child dominated two of the sub-themes identified, relating to the characteristics of the practitioners, and feelings of safety. It was identified that the practitioners offered consistency and attention, and were attuned to the young people's needs, which together enabled the development of a trusting practitioner-child relationship. Furthermore, the practitioners were viewed as calm, caring and inclusive. They took care to get to know

the young people, so that they could sensitively respond to their needs and allow a close relationship to develop. Practitioners were described as holding emotional attachments towards the Nurture Group children. These findings complement the findings of Garner and Thomas (2011), and aspects of studies described earlier (Chiappella, 2015; Griffiths et al., 2014; Pyle & Rae, 2015). Again, brief links were made to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), where the practitioner is consistent, responsive and sensitively attuned to the young person's needs.

Despite the practitioner-child relationship not being a key focus of the study by Kourmoulaki (2013), it provides significant insight into the nature of the relationship. Whilst it is acknowledged that this single case study of a Nurture Group setting limits the generalisability of the findings, the thoroughness and depth of the results offer the greatest contribution to the available literature so far.

2.5. Research specifically addressing the practitioner-child relationship

Only one research article was identified in the literature search with the specific aim to study the practitioner-child relationship. Balisteri (2016) explored the perceived quality of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship across five KS2 Nurture Groups, which followed a part-time model. Practitioners across the five Nurture Groups, 31 nurture children, and matched controls from five schools without Nurture Groups, were invited to complete questionnaires designed to measure the quality and nature of the practitioner/teacher-child relationship, within the first one-two months of the academic year (when the nurture children joined the Nurture Group), and again, six months later. Practitioners and teachers completed a 28 item Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) (Pianta, as cited by Balisteri, 2016), which was designed to measure conflict, closeness and dependency. The children completed a five item Teacher Acceptance Scale (Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007), designed to access how the children felt towards the practitioners or teachers. The children were also asked to draw a picture of themselves and their practitioner/teacher, which were individually analysed against eight dimensions of relationship quality (Fury, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1997). The drawings were scored by

two separate researchers to check for reliability, before a final score was agreed. The difference in scores for all three measures were then statistically analysed to identify group or time differences.

Analysis of the results revealed that in contrast to the control teachers, Nurture Group practitioners perceived greater feelings of closeness with the Nurture Group children at both time points, with the degree of closeness increasing over the six months (as measured by the STRS). No differences for conflict or dependency were found. The Nurture Group children also reported feeling more accepted by the Nurture Group practitioners than the control group felt towards their teachers. This difference was present at both time points. These two results indicate that even at the early stages of entering the Nurture Group, greater feelings of closeness and acceptance were present in the relationship. Analysis of the children's drawings revealed that the Nurture Group children felt greater feelings of vulnerability at time point one, but this diminished in line with controls by time point two. No further effects were found for the other seven aspects of the scale.

This study highlights differences in the nature of the relationship between the practitioner and child, versus a mainstream teacher-child relationship. It indicates greater feelings of closeness and acceptance, even at the early stages of the relationship forming. Balisteri (2016) argues that the reduced feelings of vulnerability for the Nurture Group children reflects an increase in emotional security in the relationship, attributing this to the development of an attachment relationship between the practitioner and child.

The findings of this study are important, as it is the only study identified for this literature review, to focus solely on the practitioner-child relationship. However, flaws in the measures used limits the reliability and validity of the study. The Teacher Acceptance Scale (Harrison et al., 2007) and the children's drawing task (Fury et al., 1997), are newly designed tools, with limited evidence of their reliability, which questions how well they measure and reflect the relationships that were studied. Secondly, only one scale of the drawing task revealed changes over time or between groups. This questions whether the measure is a valid or sensitive enough measure of relationship quality.

Qualitative measures of relationships studied, may have provided greater insight into relationship quality (e.g. see Kourmoulaki, 2013).

2.6. Chapter summary

An aim of this chapter was to answer the question, '*What does research say about the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship?*' From the seven articles that were reviewed, the research seems to highlight the importance of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. The relationship seems to be somewhat different to a teacher-child relationship (Chiappella, 2015; Kourmoulaki, 2013). The relationship appears to reflect trust and closeness between the practitioner and child, providing security, a sense of belonging and respect. The research also suggests that the practitioner-child relationship leads to positive outcomes for the child. (See Table 1 below for a summary of the key themes arising from the literature review.) All articles discussed, framed their study or results within an attachment framework (Bowlby, 1969), where the relationship reflects an earlier parent-child relationship, where the adult is responsive and attuned to the child's needs, and provides a safe base from which the child can venture out and learn.

Table 1. Summary of what existing research states about the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

The child/young person's experience of the relationship	The practitioner is…	Practitioner-child relationship positively impacts on…
Belonging *(Griffiths et al., 2014; Pyle & Rae, 2015)*	Available *(Griffiths et al., 2014)*	Parent-child relationships *(Pyle & Rae, 2015)*
Security & protection *(Balisteri, 2016; Garner & Thomas, 2011)*	Attentive *(Kourmoulaki, 2013; Pyle & Rae, 2015)*	The child's SEMH *(Garner & Thomas, 2011; Pyle & Rae, 2015)*
Trust *(Kourmoulaki, 2013; Griffiths et al., 2014)*	Consistent *(Kourmoulaki, 2013)*	The child's learning & general development *(Chiappella, 2015; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013)*
Being listened to *(Garner & Thomas, 2011; Pyle & Rae, 2015)*	Caring *(Kourmoulaki, 2013)* Calm *(Kourmoulaki, 2013)*	
Being attended to *(Kourmoulaki, 2013; Pyle & Rae, 2015)*	Offers respect *(Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013)*	The child sharing their experiences *(Chiappella, 2015; Kourmoulaki, 2013)*
Acceptance & inclusion *(Balisteri, 2016; Kourmoulaki, 2013)*	Sensitive and attuned to the child's needs *(Kourmoulaki, 2013)*	The child's needs being met *(Kourmoulaki, 2013)*

Together the practitioner and child experience
A close relationship *(Balisteri, 2016; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013)*
Trust *(Kourmoulaki, 2013; Griffiths et al., 2014)*

A number of challenges exist within the studies discussed. The most detailed of studies described above were carried out in secondary school populations (Chiappella, 2015; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013). This has provided an element of insight into the practitioner-child relationship within these settings, but few studies have looked in detail at the relationship between the practitioner and child within primary school settings. Furthermore, only one study has solely set out to research the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship (Balisteri, 2016), meaning that there have been few opportunities to consider the nature of the practitioner-child relationship in detail. The study by Balisteri (2016) was limited due to the quantitative measures used (some of which lacked reliability), which reduced the breadth and depth that the relationship could be explored. Qualitative research could offer a better opportunity to explore the relationship.

In answer of the second literature review question, '*what questions still remain about the relationship?*' the following areas have been identified through this literature review;

- What is the nature of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship within primary school settings?
- What can qualitative methods of data collection and analysis reveal about the nature of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship?

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA GENERATION

3.1. Chapter overview

This chapter will provide a detailed description and explanation of the grounded theory methodological approach taken when carrying out this research. The ontological and epistemological position of the research will be discussed in relation to the grounded theory methodology, and a detailed account of the data generation and analysis procedures described. Trustworthiness of the study will be discussed towards the end of the chapter, and ethical considerations addressed.

3.2. Research aims

The overall focus of this research is to answer the question, 'How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child?' This question will be explored from the perspective of the Nurture Group practitioner.

Three research questions will be explored to meet this aim;

1. How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child?

2. What enables the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and the Nurture Group child?

3. What challenges the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and the Nurture Group child?

When designing the above research questions, thought was given to the language used, acknowledging that different terminology suggest different meanings or perspectives, which would alter the focus or aims of the research. As examples, the term 'enables' in question two was chosen as it suggests that both internal *and* external factors to the relationship can be studied. The term 'challenges' in question three was chosen over terms such as 'threatens' and 'hinders' because the language acknowledges potential difficulties, but also suggests hope for positive change, which can be explored in the research.

During early stages of the research design, including the development of the research questions, I considered whether to explore the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship from one or multiple perspectives. Particular consideration was given to this due to the nature of the chosen methodology (described in detail below), which encourages the researcher to gain a rich understanding of the research topic by seeking the views of multiple people within a system, through a theoretical sampling approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A case study approach was considered, where perspectives of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship could have been gained from Nurture Group practitioners, the Nurture Group child, parents, Head Teachers, SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Coordinators), and other teaching and support staff. This approach could have highlighted different perceptions, explanations and *'negative cases'* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to help build a rich understanding of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. In particular, careful consideration was given to gaining the perspective of the Nurture Group practitioner *and* Nurture Group child, in recognition that a relationship, by nature, involves two people and therefore two perspectives.

Whilst seeking multiple perspectives of the practitioner-child relationship could have offered different perspectives of the relationship, I chose to seek one perspective; that of the Nurture Group practitioner. This decision was made based on the following:

a) The main aim of the research was to study the Nurture Group practitioners' views of the practitioner child relationship.

b) Seeking the perspective of the Nurture Group practitioner fits best with the particular ontological orientation of the research (symbolic interactionism), focussing on meaning given to the practitioner-child relationship from direct social interaction and experience of the relationship.

c) Perspectives of practitioners from multiple Nurture Group settings could be sought, enabling insight from many different individuals, and allowing for identification of negative cases.

d) Nurture Group practitioners could provide a richness of detail, due to their direct experience of the practitioner-child relationship.

e) Individuals external to the Nurture Group might not have an understanding of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, as they have not experienced it for themselves (this was in fact highlighted by Nurture Group practitioners during the research interviews). Seeking out the perspectives of others would have therefore undermined these participants' perspectives.

f) Gaining the perspective of the Nurture Group child may have been limited due to their developmental ages (4-7 years).

3.2.   Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore and explain the contexts, and in particular the factors, that operate within and influence the nature of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, so that we can identify what makes a successful relationship.

Despite a substantial volume of research supporting the efficacy of Nurture Groups, a limited amount of research has explored the processes or factors operating within Nurture Groups. A small number of studies have indicated that the relationships held within Nurture Groups play an important role towards enabling the positive outcomes typically seen (Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013), but further research is required to develop a more thorough understanding of what factors are at play within Nurture Group practitioner-child relationships.

This research aims to shed light on how Nurture Group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child, and the factors which enable or challenge the relationship. This research will be valuable in indicating what a successful practitioner-child relationship looks and feels like. The research will be valuable to Nurture Group practitioners working in Nurture Groups which follow the same structure and organisation, and work with the same age range of children, as described in this study.

3.3.   Design

A qualitative methodology is adopted for this research, seeking out the views, perceptions and explanations held by Nurture Group practitioners. The research is both exploratory and explanatory. It is exploratory as it will explore the interpretations that participants give to the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, and explanatory as it will explain the factors and contexts at play.

3.4.   Ontological & epistemological position of the researcher

Ontology refers to our beliefs about the nature of reality, and epistemology refers to how we come to know what we know i.e. the relationship between the researcher and reality (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Robson, 2011). Ontological and epistemological positions of the researcher direct the type of methodological approach chosen to answer a research question (Lincoln et al., 2011; Birks & Mills, 2015; 2011).

This research will be approached from a symbolic interactionist ontological position. Symbolic interactionism was first described by Herbert Blumer, and developed mainly from the work of George Mead, who studied the nature of society (Blumer, 1969). Mead suggested that society, or group life, influenced human consciousness, the mind, objects, and constructions of human behaviour (Blumer, 1969). Blumer identified five key factors from Meads work, which helped shape the emergence of symbolic interactionism; the self, the act, social interaction, objects, and joint interaction (Blumer, 1969). Symbolic interactionism focusses on the subjective meanings or interpretations that individuals give to the external world, through joint interactions with each other. Interactions between individuals or groups shape the meaning given to a context (e.g. a Nurture Group) or wider society. Blumer (1969) outlined three premises of symbolic interactionism:

1. Individuals give meaning to 'objects' (social objects i.e. people, and physical objects), influencing their actions

2. The meanings given to objects influence, and are influenced by, social interactions, framed within their own social and cultural contexts

3. Meanings arise through interpretations

Blumer also viewed meanings as being fluid, not fixed nor limited in number, changing and emerging through interactions with others (Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic interactionism takes the view that reality exists in the form of shared symbolic meanings (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011). These symbolic meanings are shaped by social interaction. Social interactions shape our behaviours, and the perceptions and meanings we give to our experiences (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2011; Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills, & Usher, 2013). As this research seeks to study the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child (whereby a relationship exists as a series of social interactions), symbolic interactionism is viewed as a well-fitting ontological position to take.

While referring to the work of Blumer and Mead, Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that an external world of events, people, and objects exist, which we give meaning to, based on our experiences, in particular our social interactions, which are linked to social factors such as gender and culture. In reference to the current research, a symbolic interactionist view would argue that Nurture Group practitioners give meaning to the practitioner-child relationship, based on events, experiences and social interactions, and further influences such as the practitioners' backgrounds, culture and gender.

The epistemological position adopted for this study is that of critical realism. Critical realism sits between a social constructivist and positivist epistemology (Robson, 2011). A critical realist approach looks to find explanations for *what works*, in *what context(s)*, and *why*, by identifying mechanisms, contextual factors, and outcomes (Bhaskar, 2008). I took the position that reality about the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship can be uncovered by seeking out the symbolic meanings that Nurture Group practitioners give to the relationship, as a result of social interaction, but will be critical of the realities that emerge.

3.5.   Methodology

3.5.1.   A grounded theory approach

The methodological approach chosen for this research is grounded theory. First developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss, grounded theory aimed to "close the gap between theory and research" (p. vii), by generating an explanatory theory of a particular social context from raw data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The method is therefore an inductive process. It examines what works, for whom, in what context and with what outcomes.

Grounded theory was the methodology of choice for this research, as it best suited the aims and the ontological and epistemological orientation of the study. Grounded theory enables the researcher to describe and find explanations for social processes within a particular context (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Phrased in relation to the current research, grounded theory can offer a description and explanation of what makes a successful Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, within the contexts they take place.

Other methodologies were considered when designing the research, but weren't deemed appropriate to answer the research question and aims. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and thematic analysis were the two main methodologies considered.

IPA studies how people make sense of their lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). It allows the researcher to ask questions such as how individuals view or experience a phenomena or significant event within their lives. Applied to the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, it would allow an exploratory or descriptive focus to explore the practitioner-child relationship, by listening to what Nurture Group practitioners have to say about the experience. However, IPA would not allow the research to interpret what practitioners say about their relationship, and provide an explanation of how to build a successful Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) enables the researcher to identify and analyse themes, relationships between themes, and meanings within data. It is both exploratory and explanatory,

bringing a level of interpretation of the processes at play within the area of research. Whilst thematic analysis was a closely considered methodology of choice for the current research, it was felt that grounded theory would provide a greater level of interpretation to be able to search for an explanation of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

Consequently, grounded theory was the method of choice, as it enables the researcher not only to study *what* Nurture Group practitioners say about their relationship with the Nurture Group child (exploratory), but can also provide thorough interpretations to *explain* the practitioner-child relationship (explanatory).

Grounded theory is characterised by a common set of overarching principles or 'tools' to data collection and analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015). These principles and tools include:

1. *Coding of data*: Searching for concepts within the data. Analytical in nature.

2. *Categorisation and linking of codes/concepts into themes and sub-themes.*

3. *Theoretical sampling*: Seeking further data collection to better understand emerging concepts.

4. *Concurrent data collection and analysis*: Data collection and analysis occur alongside each other, where initial analysis informs further data collection.

5. *Constant comparison*: Continually comparing incidents of data, codes, and categories.

6. *Identifying a core category*: Identifying a category which encapsulates and explains the developing theory.

7. *Theoretical integration*: Adding explanatory power to the emerging theory by drawing upon existing theoretical bodies of knowledge.

8. *Memo writing*: Written accounts of the researchers' thoughts, ideas and decisions throughout the data collection and analysis.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) described grounded theory as an 'iterative process' of data collection and analysis, where data 'codes' and categories emerge and are compared to develop further questions or avenues to explore, until theoretical saturation is met.

Robson (2011) argues that grounded theory is a logical approach to exploring complex situations, as it allows the researcher to go back and forth between data analysis and data collection, sometimes with new questions, to gain a deep understanding of the area of study.

Variations of the Glaser and Strauss original grounded theory method have been developed over the past 20 years (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Each method takes a slightly different approach in terms of process and underpinning ontological and epistemological orientations. Glaser and Strauss's version of grounded theory developed from a combination of their own epistemological backgrounds of positivism and pragmatism (Charmaz, 2014), and very much focussed on generating a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whilst the original Glaser and Strauss method of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) didn't state a particular underlying ontological or epistemological position, (Glaser, as cited in Newman (2008), argues that a world view is not needed in order for a theory to emerge from the data), Newman (2008) describes that the approach takes more of a positivist or pragmatic view of the world.

Conversely, Charmaz (2014) took a very different ontological and epistemological position in her version of grounded theory, developing a method which sits more towards the relativist and constructivist side of the ontological and epistemological spectrum. Charmaz placed an emphasis on language, meaning, and action (Charmaz, 2015), and focussed on the researchers own constructions, subjectivities, and pre-conceptions of the data, and their representations of and relationship with participants, to explore reality (Charmaz, 2014). The approach nevertheless, still follows the original methods of Glaser and Strauss (1967), such as using constant comparison, concurrent data generation and analysis, and development of initial codes from the data.

Both methods of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2014), don't quite fit with the symbolic interactionist and critical realist positions adopted for this study. Therefore the Corbin and Strauss (2008) method was viewed to be a more appropriate method of choice.

3.5.2.   A Corbin and Strauss method of grounded theory

Corbin and Strauss (2008) adapted the approach taken by Glaser and Strauss (1967), focussing more on the verification of data. They developed a series of analytical tools to support the concurrent data generation and analysis, and to minimise the researcher bringing their pre-existing assumptions and values into the analytic process. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also outlined an approach to coding. The researcher begins with initial open coding, where individual words or groups of words are coded within the data to form concepts; axial coding, where related codes/concepts are grouped together to form themes or categories; and finally theoretical integration, whereby categories or themes are linked together into an explanatory theory or framework. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also explicitly described an underlying ontological and epistemological position of pragmatism and symbolic interactionism to their approach.

The Corbin and Strauss method of grounded theory was adopted for this research, based on my ontological and epistemological position. Corbin and Strauss describe that the assumptions that underpin their grounded theory method, come from a symbolic interactionist worldview of reality (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), which fits with the ontological position of the current research. Both Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2011) and Chamberlain-Salaun et al. (2013), argue that a Corbin and Strauss grounded theory approach fits well with symbolic interactionism, as both seek to explore and explain people's views, experiences and behaviours within a social context. Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2011) further argue that symbolic interactionism provides a framework to generate data, and state that a Corbin and Strauss grounded theory aims to develop a theory from this data. They outline how the assumptions of both symbolic interactionism and Corbin and Strauss' grounded theory map together, which Chamberlain-Salaun et al. (2013) then link to the specific tools or processes stated within the grounded theory approach.

3.6.   Participants

3.6.1.   Identifying Nurture Group settings

A variety of Nurture Group models are applied and practised across the UK, some of which bear greater

or lesser resemblance to the original or 'Classic' Marjorie Boxall model (see Cooper and Whitebread

(2007) for a detailed description of different models). Previous research into Nurture Groups has been

criticised for the lack of clarity and great variance in models under study (Hughes & Schlösser, 2014).

Some research fails to clearly state the type of model studied (e.g. Reynolds, MacKay, & Kearney, 2009),

or study a variety of models (e.g. Cooper et al., 2001) making it difficult to separate and compare results

according to the model applied. The variety across the literature means that there isn't a clear picture of

what research tells us about each specific model, and findings can be difficult to interpret (Hughes &

Schlösser, 2014).

Due to the lack of consistency and rigor in some past research, this current study sets out to identify

practitioners from Nurture Group settings who follow a highly consistent model of Nurture Group

practice. I was keen to draw upon practitioners from settings which followed the 'Classic' Boxall model,

as this is the model most closely aligned with the original Nurture Groups set up by Marjorie Boxall in

the 60s (Boxall & Lucas, 2010).

This research was carried out within the LA I was practicing in, as part of my Educational Psychology

doctoral training. The LA is an outer London Borough, where almost 50% of children speak English as an

additional language, and over 50% of school aged children receive free school meals. As described in

Chapter 1, a number of Nurture Groups are established across the LA, supporting children from

Reception to KS2. The largest proportion of Nurture Groups cater for children in Reception and KS1

(henceforth referred to as a KS1 Nurture Group). KS1 Nurture Groups have a longer history of existence

within the LA than KS2 Nurture Groups, and have received greater input in regards to funding, training

and development. Consequently, this research aimed to study KS1 Nurture Groups, as it was believed

that they would provide a greater level of insight than KS2 Nurture Groups, which comparatively are still

in their infancy. In May 2016, 13 primary or infant schools (all mainstream settings) across the LA offered a KS1 Nurture Group provision, all operating on a full-time basis (children attended for nine morning and afternoon sessions per week).

I initially sought to identify Nurture Group settings which held the Marjorie Boxall Quality Mark Award (QMA). The QMA is an (optional) accreditation of Nurture Group practice, provided by the Nurture Group Network. Nurture Groups awarded the QMA reflect a high standard of good practice, assessed against a series of quality standards, and follow the structure, principles and characteristics of the Boxall model (The Nurture Group Network, 2015). Nurture Groups with the QMA reflect a consistency and high quality of Nurture Group practice, which I sought to ensure the quality of this research.

In the event that too few practitioners across QMA Nurture Group settings met the inclusion criteria (see below), or consented to participate in the research, I also sought to identify Nurture Group settings which were known within the LA to model strong Nurture Group practice, followed the Boxall model, and met the LA's own Nurture Group policies and procedures (see Appendix 1). The LA policies and procedures outline the structure and principles that Nurture Groups must follow, closely resembling the standards set out by the Nurture Group Network QMA. The policies and procedures also outline requirements that Nurture Group practitioners must meet, such as attendance at termly training sessions run by the LA, to ensure continual professional development and consistent, strong practice. It also places an emphasis on coordinated and collaborative practice between the school and the LA. The LA provide regular monitoring and reviewing of Nurture Groups, to further ensure good practice in line with the Boxall model. Liaison in May 2016 with a LA representative who had responsibility for Nurture Groups, helped identify which settings met these policies and procedures to a high standard.

I hoped that identification of Nurture Group settings with the QMA and/or which followed the LA policies and procedures, would ensure high quality and consistency in Nurture Group practice, including following the Boxall model. In May 2016, three KS1 settings were identified as holding the QMA (information accessed on May 11, 2016 via the Nurture Group Network www.nurturegroups.org), and

eight were deemed to meet the LA Nurture Group policies and procedures to a high standard (three of which held the QMA).

3.6.2. Identifying participants

The Boxall model requires that a Nurture Group be staffed by two practitioners at all times. Within the LA, each KS1 Nurture Group was staffed by a qualified teacher or Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA), and a teaching assistant (TA). Therefore, within each identified setting, two practitioners could be approached to participate in the research.

Inclusion criteria were set for identification of Nurture Group practitioners to take part in the research. Firstly, it was deemed essential that a practitioner must have attended initial Nurture Group training, either through the Nurture Group Network, or with the LA. This was to ensure that participants had a foundation in the theory and practice of Nurture Groups. Secondly, practitioners were required to have a minimum of one years' experience working in a Nurture Group. It was felt that practitioners with less than one year of practice wouldn't have the richness of experience to provide detailed insight into the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. Additionally, since children typically attend a Nurture Group for up to four terms (Boxall & Lucas, 2010) practitioners would require at least one year to experience a range of relationships, from when the children first enter the Nurture Group, to when they transition back into their mainstream classrooms.

3.6.3. Procedure

Participants were recruited following a staged approach as outlined below:

1. Identification of settings which hold the QMA.

2. Liaison with a LA representative who has oversight for Nurture Groups, to identify further settings that meet the LA policy and procedures for Nurture Groups.

3. Liaison with the same LA representative to identify practitioners from qualifying settings who meet the inclusion criteria.

4. Contact the Head Teachers of the settings which qualify for inclusion, providing written information outlining the research (see Appendix 5) and seeking consent for the setting to participate and Nurture Group practitioners to be contacted. Initial contact was made via email, followed up by a phone conversation or face to face.

5. Following consent from Head Teachers, individual Nurture Group practitioners from the respective settings were contacted via email. Written information outlining the research (see Appendix 6) was provided, and consent sought to participate in the research. At the same time, checks were again made to ensure the practitioners met the inclusion criteria.

Table 2 below, provides a summary of the settings which met the inclusion criteria, and practitioners who consented to participate in the study. Overall, five participants from three settings consented to participate in the research (one setting held the QMA). Each setting catered for 6-10 children, aged 4-7 years. Two Nurture Groups had been running for seven years, and one for five years. Two participants were qualified teachers, one an HLTA, and two were TAs. The length of time practicing as a Nurture Group practitioner ranged from 1-7 years (average 3.8 years). Four participants had attended the two day Nurture Group training run by the LA, and one had attended a three day course run by the Nurture Group Network. All participants were female.

Table 2. The identification of settings and practitioners, based on inclusion criteria and consent to participate.

Setting	QMA status	Meet LA guidelines (May '16)	NG practitioners with at least 1 year NG experience and attended initial NG training		Consent given to participate in the research	
			Practitioner 1	Practitioner 2	Practitioner 1	Practitioner 2
1	No	Partly	-	-	-	-
2	No	Not known	-	-	-	-
3	No	No	-	-	-	-
4	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	No	Yes	No	No	-	-
6	No	No	-	-	-	-
7	Yes	Yes	No	No	-	-
8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
9	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	No	Not known	-	-	-	-
11	No	Partly	-	-	-	-
12	No	No	-	-	-	-
13	Yes	Yes	No	No	-	-

3.7. Data generation/gathering

Here I refer to data *generation* rather than data *collection*. As described by Birks and Mills (2015), the researchers role when carrying out grounded theory, influences how data is gathered. In the current study, data was generated via interviews, rather than collecting data from existing sources e.g. literature or social media. Therefore the term data generation will be used.

Semi-structured interviews with individual Nurture Group practitioners were the method of data generation. Semi-structured interviews are a method of gaining detailed insight into a participant's views and perceptions of the topic of study (Smith, 1995).This study was designed so that the use of semi-structured interviews would gain Nurture Group practitioners' thoughts, experiences and explanations of their relationships with Nurture Group children.

3.7.1. Designing the interview questions

The interview questions (see Appendix 7) were designed using the structure outlined by Robson (2011), as outlined below:

1. *Warm-up*: A simple question that probes the participant into the research topic *(questions 1-2).*

2. *Main body*: Questions which cover the overall research area, the order of which can be altered to follow the participant's responses *(questions 2-5).*

3. *Ending*: Questions which are less demanding or emotionally charged to help bring the interview to an end. Charmaz (2014) also recommends to end the interview on a positive note *(questions 6-7).*

The order of questions were carefully sequenced to help the participant cue in to the research topic, before exploring the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship in further detail. The phrasing of questions was carefully considered to ensure the questions allowed open ended responses and rich detail e.g. *'can you tell me about'* or *'what do you feel'*. While interview questions 3 and 4 of the interview schedule most directly relate to the second and third research questions outlined at the start of this chapter, it was hoped that all interview questions would tap in to the three research questions.

The interview questions were not designed to be a set of fixed questions, but to provide a framework for me to ask initial questions, which could be explored further using probing questions or prompts. A semi-structured interview process was therefore followed. As grounded theory is an emergent process (Birks & Mills, 2015), the research questions needed to be used flexibly in reaction to the participants' responses.

One of the key principles of grounded theory is theoretical sampling (Birks & Mills, 2015). Theoretical sampling encourages the researcher to develop rich concepts by seeking out further data gathering opportunities (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Questions asked to participants may vary between each interview (Birks & Mills, 2015). In the current study, my approach to theoretical sampling involved listening back to initial interviews with the first three participants and identifying emerging questions to ask in later interviews. Figure 1 below shows the points at which theoretical sampling took place. These emerging questions were explored in later interviews, by asking further probing questions, if the participant gave reference to the questions in mind. The original interview questions remained the same throughout all interviews.

```
                    Interviews 1 & 2

                          ↓

              Listen back to interviews 1 & 2

        - Theoretical sampling (emerging questions identified)

                          ↓

                      Interview 3

                          ↓

                Listen back to interview 3

        - Theoretical sampling (emerging questions identified)

                          ↓

                    Interviews 4 & 5
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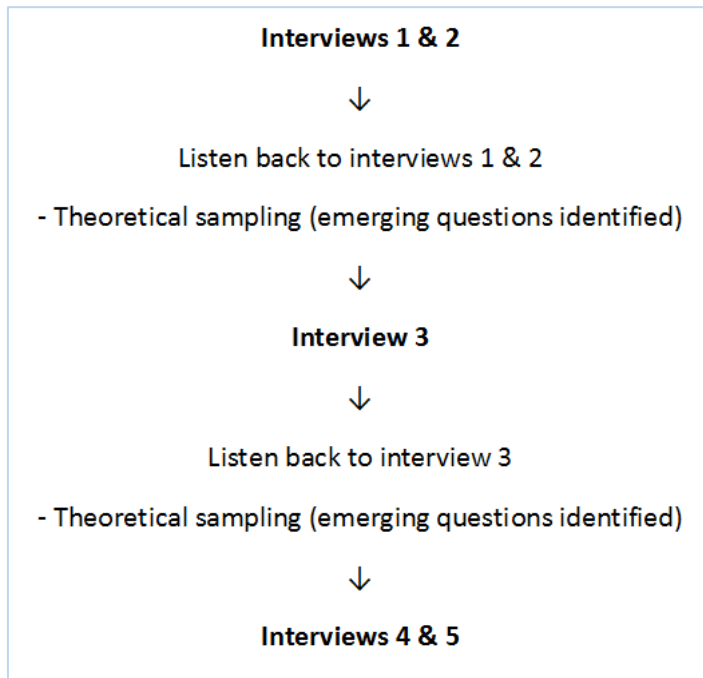
Figure 1. Order of interviews and points of theoretical sampling

3.7.1. Procedures

Interviews took place in private rooms within each respective practitioner's school setting, and lasted between 45-70 minutes. All interviews were conducted by myself, and audio-recorded to enable transcription. I also took brief notes to record emerging thoughts and non-verbal forms of communication which felt important to note down.

An introduction was given at the start of each interview (see Appendix 7 for introductory script), outlining the purpose of the research, what the interview involved, checking the participant had read and understood the participant information sheet (see Appendix 6), and consented to participate in the study.

For each interview, I took steps to reduce any potential power imbalance between myself as practitioner-researcher, and participants. This included carrying out the interviews at a place and time that suited each participant, and using open ended questions to allow the participants to direct the interviews somewhat.

Once interviews had ended I provided a short de-brief, and checked the emotional well-being of the participant in the event that the interview had raised any uncomfortable feelings. For one participant, follow-up support was provided the following day through a phone call, as some of the experiences she shared during the interview had raised difficult feelings for her. Discussions were had regarding her own well-being, safeguarding procedures, and where she could seek further support. The participant was signposted to appropriate wellbeing services. Further email correspondence identified that she was well.

3.8. Data analysis

3.8.1. Transcription & MaxQDA

All audio recordings were transcribed by myself. I used a basic level of transcription, because as per a grounded theory approach, the focus of the analysis was to look at *what* was said by participants, as opposed to *how* it was said. Pauses, sighs and laughter were noted in the transcription to help give meaning to what was said by the participant. All transcriptions were checked for accuracy, by listening back to the audio recordings while reading the transcript. An example of one transcript can be found in appendix 8, and the remaining four transcripts in the attached flash drive.

Transcriptions were then analysed with the support of MaxQDA software (please refer to the attached flash drive for a copy of the completed MaxQDA analysis).

3.8.2. Coding

Following transcription, each interview transcript was read once to allow myself to become more familiar with the data, before beginning the analysis process outlined in Figure 2. Each transcript was analysed in turn. As outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008), analysis begins with initial open coding, whereby a transcript is carefully searched and broken down to look for meanings of words or phrases (sometimes referred to as incidents of data). The researcher can apply analytic tools (described below), to support this process. Meanings that arise from the data are termed as concepts; they are interpretations (rather than descriptions) of the data, which give rise to the explanatory nature of

grounded theory. Concepts are given a coding label, to help describe and explain the meaning of the concept. Examples can be seen in Table 3.

What differentiates the Corbin and Strauss (2008) method of grounded theory from the methods outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2014), is the use of analytic tools. Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest the researcher uses a series of analytic tools, which are designed to support the coding process, allowing the researcher to interact with the data, and avoid bringing in prior assumptions or biases. During the current research, I used a range of analytical tools to support the coding process (see Appendix 9 which outlines the tools used). Table 3 gives examples of how some tools were applied.

The use of analytic tools helped me to develop rich concepts, each with their own properties (characteristics which describe the concept) and dimensions (the boundaries and variations of the concept).

Table 3. Examples from the analysis of the use of analytical tools, open coding and memos.

Data excerpts from transcripts	Memo	Analytical tool used	Open code(s) used
'In the mainstream classroom you have 30 kids, and you haven't really got the time to give them that much attention.' (Antonia)	Here the participant seems to suggest that limited attention can be given to the child in the mainstream classroom. Perhaps the opposite of this is the child receiving much more attention in the NG.	Flip-flopping	Attention to the child
'We put a lot of effort into what we do, so you feel like it's part of you, you're doing a lot. Part of you sort of giving it to them, aren't you?' (Claire)	This seems really powerful *'you're giving something of yourself'*. It suggests that a lot of effort has been put into the relationship, and that the practitioner feels they are handing over something of themselves for the child to take away and keep.	Asking questions of the data	Internal role model Relationship beyond the NG
'It's mentally and physically draining.' (Sofia)	The term 'draining' seems to hold quite a strong message. I have an image of the practitioner's strengths and resources leaking away, as they provide containment for the child.	Notice emotions and the meaning they give to the text.	Emotional load Being a container

As initial open coding developed, with various concepts arising from the data, I began to notice relationships or links between concepts. Corbin and Strauss (2008) describe the linking of concepts as axial coding. They stress that axial coding isn't a separate process to initial open coding. Rather, axial and open coding occur alongside one another as more concepts emerge, develop, and change. This follows the iterative back and forth, constant comparison method of grounded theory, as demonstrated in Figure 2, whereby I moved back and forth between initial open coding and axial coding. During the analysis, as relationships, similarities or links between individual concepts were identified, themes, subthemes and categories naturally emerged, which pulled the data together in a meaningful way. Birks and Mills (2015) describe this process as constantly comparing *'codes to codes, codes to categories, and categories to categories'* (p.11). As with initial open coding, analytic tools were also applied to support axial coding.
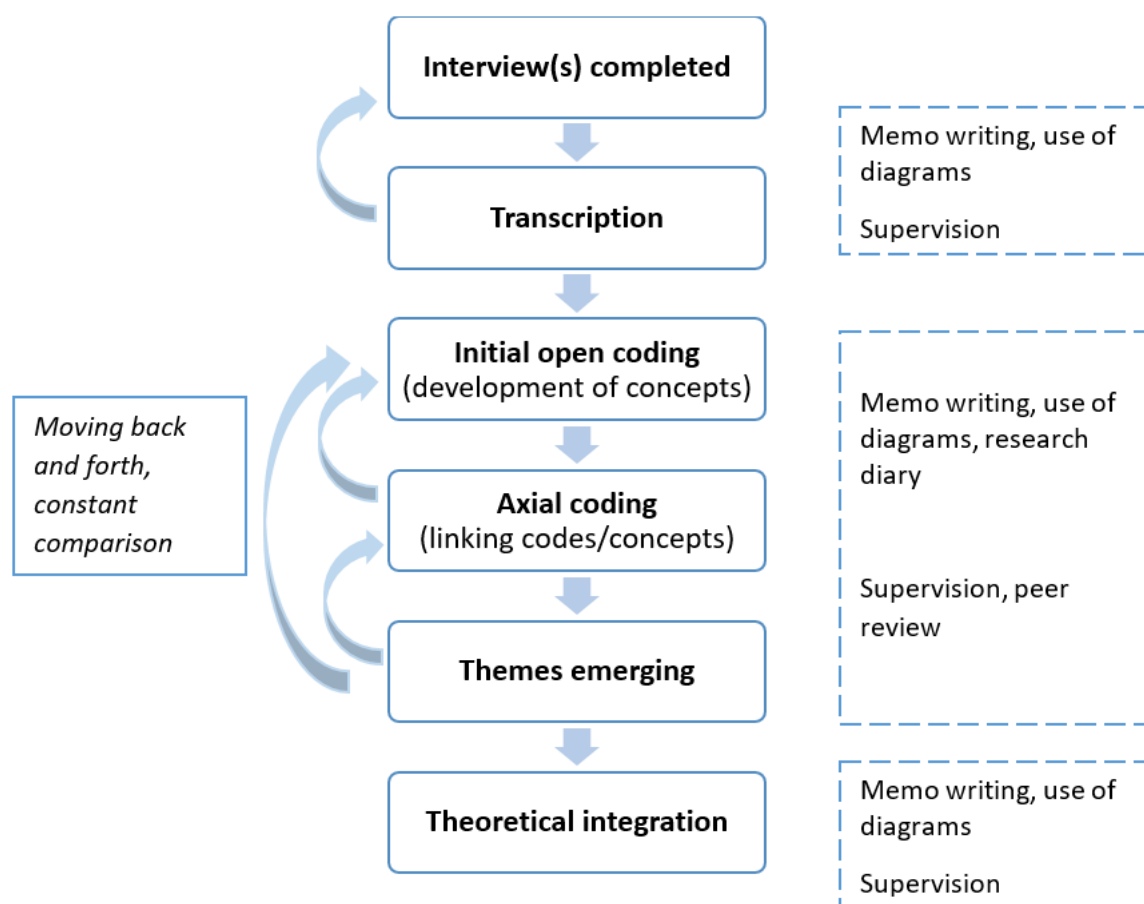
Figure 2. Analysis process.

3.8.3. Theoretical integration

Towards the latter stages of coding, where concepts had been identified, and themes or categories

emerged, I began to pull the analysis together into a meaningful theory or framework (see Figure 2). The

aim of theoretical integration is to capture and explain a theory (Birks & Mills, 2015). As with axial

coding, I searched for explanatory links between themes, to identify one core overarching category. This

is described by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as theoretical integration.

I applied three criteria suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008) to facilitate identifying a core category:

1. All categories/themes must be related and come under the core category

2. The core category must appear throughout the data

3. Explanation for the core category and resulting theory must be logical and consistent, naturally

    emerging from the data

Birks and Mills (2015) suggest using existing theory to support theoretical integration. They believe that

situating an emerging theory within a theoretical body of knowledge provides greater explanatory

power to the grounded theory. I drew upon different psychological theories and concepts to support

aspects of the theoretical integration.

3.8.4. Use of memos and diagrams

Memos were made following each interview and throughout the analysis to record and track the

analysis process (see Table 3). Birks and Mills (2015) stress the importance of the use of memos to aid

researcher reflexivity. Memos were labelled against emerging codes/concepts, themes/categories and

later in the analysis, against the emerging core category. Memos recorded my thoughts, reflections and

interpretations of the data, and described and explained each code, category, relationship within the

data, and the final theory. Table 4 below, gives examples of memos written at different stages of the

analysis. Memos also recorded questions which arose from the data generation and analysis, and

changes that were made as a result of constant comparison and iteration. Memos were particularly

useful to track the development of the emerging theory, and provide an explanation of the results.

Table 4. Examples of different types of memos used throughout the analysis.

Type of memo	Example memo
Open coding memo	The practitioner seems to be suggesting that when the child's behaviour is challenging (which sometimes impacts on the group dynamics and makes things worse), the practitioner worries whether they are doing the right thing. They might feel anxious or doubt themselves.
Emerging themes memo	As I look at the code 'child feels comfort towards the (parental) practitioner', the content seems to be linked to the relationship being close and the child trusting the practitioner, which is maintained after the child leaves the NG. I wonder if this code is a sub-code of 'close relationship between practitioner and child', highlighting how the child feels towards the practitioner.
Theoretical memo	When looking at challenges, especially 'practitioner feels unable to facilitate change' I've realised that a lot of the data incidents talk about when positive outcomes haven't been gained. I feel this needs to be highlighted. It makes me think of my drawing where some journeys off the mountain are very rocky and tricky, where scars aren't always healed – a close relationship is formed but not necessarily a good relationship, or one where change is seen.

Diagrams were also used during the analysis as a method of visually representing what was emerging from the data (see Figure 3). The use of diagrams are advocated by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as a way of supporting the analytic thinking of the researcher. Diagrams were used to show possible relationships between concepts, and support theoretical integration. Simple diagrams were made during initial stages of the analysis (see Figure 3 for an example), which were regularly modified as the analysis developed, until a final, overarching diagram was created to represent the final theory.
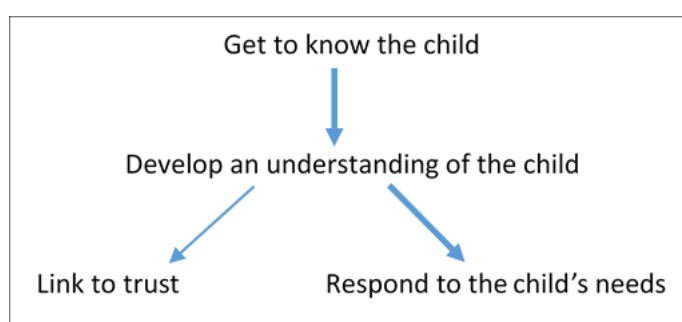
Figure 3. Example of a diagram drawn in the early stages of analysis.

3.9. Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, Lincoln and Guba's evaluative principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were followed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These four

principles provide alternative labels to describe the validity and reliability of research (Robson, 2011). The following measures or procedures were carried out to ensure reasonable interpretation of the data, ensuring a degree of robustness to the research.

3.9.1. Credibility

Credibility is to do with truth, and the validity of interpretations and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I took a number of steps or reflexive positions to ensure credibility.

Firstly, I recognised that my role and a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) may influence the research, in the form of researcher bias, but also in my interactions with participants and research settings. As a TEP, I had existing knowledge of Nurture Groups, their underpinning theory, and direct experience working with Nurture Group settings and Nurture Group practitioners. I also had experience in delivering training to Nurture Group practitioners across the LA, and in one setting I had pre-existing relationships with the practitioners from my regular school based work. Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognise that researchers can't avoid bringing their own assumptions, prior knowledge and experiences, and interpretations into their research. However, I considered that I could still impose my existing knowledge or be biased when interpreting the data.

Secondly, I monitored and took steps to check the processes and outcomes of the analysis through peer review and supervision. This was particularly useful in checking for and highlighting biases, exploring and clarifying interpretations of codes and categories, and sounding out the emerging theory. The use of memos and a research diary to record the research process were also kept to monitor the credibility of the analysis.

Thirdly, I checked for what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as 'negative cases', searching for data which didn't fit with the emerging theory. Searching for negative cases is an analytic tool advocated by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as part of a grounded theory methodology. This method reduces the potential for researcher bias, and encourages the researcher to consider other forms of interpretation which encompasses the 'negative case'.

3.9.2. Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of research to other contexts or periods of time to which the research was carried out (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I am aware that the analysis from this study is applicable to KS1, full-time, Boxall model Nurture Groups, within one London LA. Caution would need to be taken before considering transferring the results to other contexts, including for example, KS3 Nurture Groups.

I also acknowledge that all practitioners who participated in the research were female. Therefore caution should be taken again, before attempting to transfer the findings to Nurture Group practitioner-child relationships, where the practitioner(s) are male.

3.9.3. Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability or consistency of the research process and outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability, an audit trail was kept, whereby the research process and analysis (including the emergence and development of initial codes, categories, theory, and researcher interpretations) were recorded. This was done in the form of a research diary and the use of memos. Robson (2011) argues that keeping an audit trail enables thorough, careful and honest research.

Peer review was also carried out by a fellow TEP to check the process and outcomes of the analysis mid-way through. The peer reviewer was also carrying out a piece of grounded theory research, and therefore had understanding of the methodology. The peer reviewer was provided with an extract of data, and asked to code the extract, before comparing their coding labels against my own. This had the benefit of introducing new interpretations which I had not yet noticed, which I was able to hold in mind while reviewing and continuing the analysis process. This included, being more sensitive to data relating to the structure of the Nurture Group, and the influence of structure to the practitioner-child relationship. Peer review also opened up my interpretation of the ending phase of the relationship as having links to 'loss'.

3.9.4. Confirmability

Methods of maintaining an audit trail, peer review, supervision, and use of a research diary, were used to ensure that the findings of the research were grounded in the raw data.

3.10. Ethical considerations

Before carrying out the research, ethical approval was sought from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 10). Principles from the BPS ethical code for research with human participants (BPS, 2014) were also followed throughout the research, alongside the BPS Code of Ethics (BPS, 2009), which stipulates respect, responsibility, integrity and competence.

As described in earlier sections, informed consent was sought from Head Teachers of each setting, before next seeking informed consent from respective Nurture Group practitioners. Informed consent was again sought from participants before each interview began (see Appendix 11).

All participants were given the right to withdraw, up until the point of the data being transcribed and anonymised for analysis. In the data analysis and final reporting of the research, all identifying details of the LA, participating settings, and Nurture Group practitioners, were anonymised, but done so in a way which wouldn't impact on the data interpretation. Identifiable details of any children, adults or services named or described in the transcribed interviews, were also anonymised or removed to protect any third party and ensure the greatest degree of anonymity possible. Participants were informed that all information shared during the interviews would be treated in a confidential and sensitive manner, and the final results shared with other participants and stakeholders. All data collected during the research was protected in line with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust data protection procedures.

Interviews took place in a private room to maintain confidentiality of each participant. I sought to remain open to sensitive or challenging topics or experiences which arose during the interviews. Following the interviews, participants were debriefed, and signposted to necessary services if sensitive issues have arisen, with a follow up phone call to check the wellbeing of those participants.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Overview of chapter

This chapter will provide a detailed description of the results which emerged from the research interviews, outlining a theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. To help the reader gain an understanding of the theory, an analogy of a story book will be used. The story book analogy will be briefly described, followed by a detailed account of the results. Quotes from participants will be provided throughout to help give meaning to the research. The results will then be described in relation to the three research questions.

4.2. A story book about a journey between a practitioner and child

To give meaning to the results and theory which emerged through the analysis, I will use the analogy of a story book to describe the results. For every book, there is a beginning, a middle and an end. And with every good story, there is a challenge part way through which must be overcome. The reader is asked to refer to Appendix 12, where an illustration of the story can be found.

This story begins with a practitioner and a child, who venture out on a journey with their nurture family. The child has a heavy backpack full of feelings and experiences which require nurturing. The practitioner has a responsibility of guiding and protecting the child, although the child doesn't yet trust the practitioner to keep them safe. The practitioner and child spend a lot of time together, and slowly begin to get to know and understand each other as they continue further on their journey.

Over time, the practitioner is able to carry some of the weight from the child's backpack, and replace it with experiences which nourish and extend the child's development and wellbeing. Whilst rewarding, this act can be emotionally draining for the practitioner.

While some journeys are relatively smooth, other journeys may venture along treacherous paths, into a dark forest where the practitioner and child become separated and lose their way, or lead up a steep and rocky volcano, where eruptions are unpredictable and threaten the practitioner and child's safety.

These paths are full of fear, worry and doubt, which the practitioner tries hard to carry, to protect the child, adding to their emotional load. To ensure the practitioner can survive and continue the journey with the child, they draw upon support from others along the way, who help to carry the load or enable the practitioner to leave some of the load behind.

When the journey ventures onto a treacherous path, the practitioner has the tricky task of trying to find a different path, or head back to an earlier point. Treacherous paths can be overcome, but can cause damage and leave scars which never quite go away.

Over time the practitioner and child's journey nears an end, and something very close and special has been built; their relationship. This relationship feels very powerful and emotive, where both practitioner and child have a deep understanding of each other, just like a parent and child. The child feels great trust, comfort and safety in the practitioner, and is nourished enough to continue to develop and become independent. The practitioner feels great fondness and pride in the child's journey, yet begins to mourn the expected loss that the end of the journey brings.

The epilogue to this story tells the reader that for some practitioners and children (although not all), their relationship journey continues in some way. Every so often they visit each other or wave as they pass by, re-experiencing the feelings they previously had towards each other.

4.3. Detailed explanation of the results

Figure 4 below provides a simple diagrammatic overview of the theory which emerged, representing the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. The theory which emerged from the data, comprises of five key categories:

- Beginnings
- Supporting the child's development
- Trust
- Challenges

- A close relationship

The first four key categories are linked over time, and lead to one overarching category, named 'a close relationship'. A close relationship has two small outputs; 'Outcomes' and 'Beyond the Nurture Group'. The theory is also supported by 'context' factors, relating to the set-up and structure of the Nurture Group. In Figure 4, an arrow can be seen, which represents the passing of time, which links together the categories and outputs of the theory. A beginning, middle and end is marked to indicate which aspects of the theory relate to the story book analogy described above.
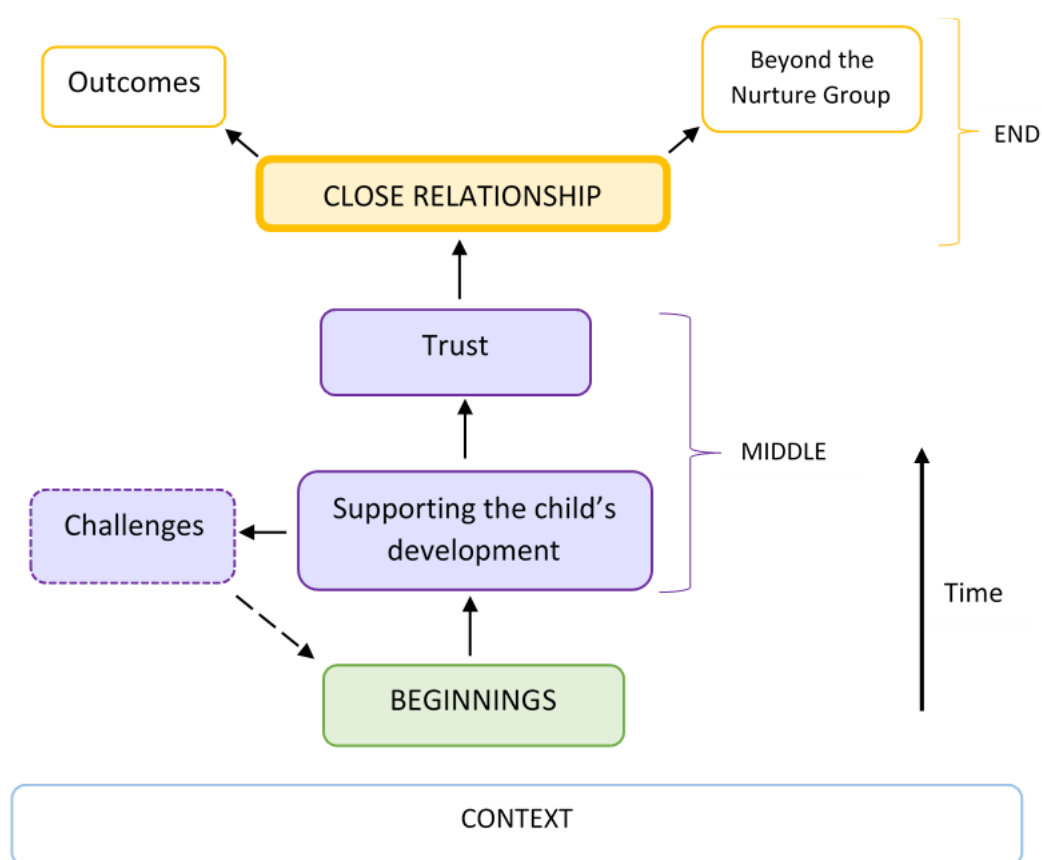
Figure 4. Simple diagrammatic representation of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

A more detailed overview of the theory, depicting the smaller concepts within each category, and how the concepts relate to each other, feeding up towards the overarching category of a 'close relationship', can be seen in Figure 5. A description of each category, along with the context factors and outputs are provided thereafter.
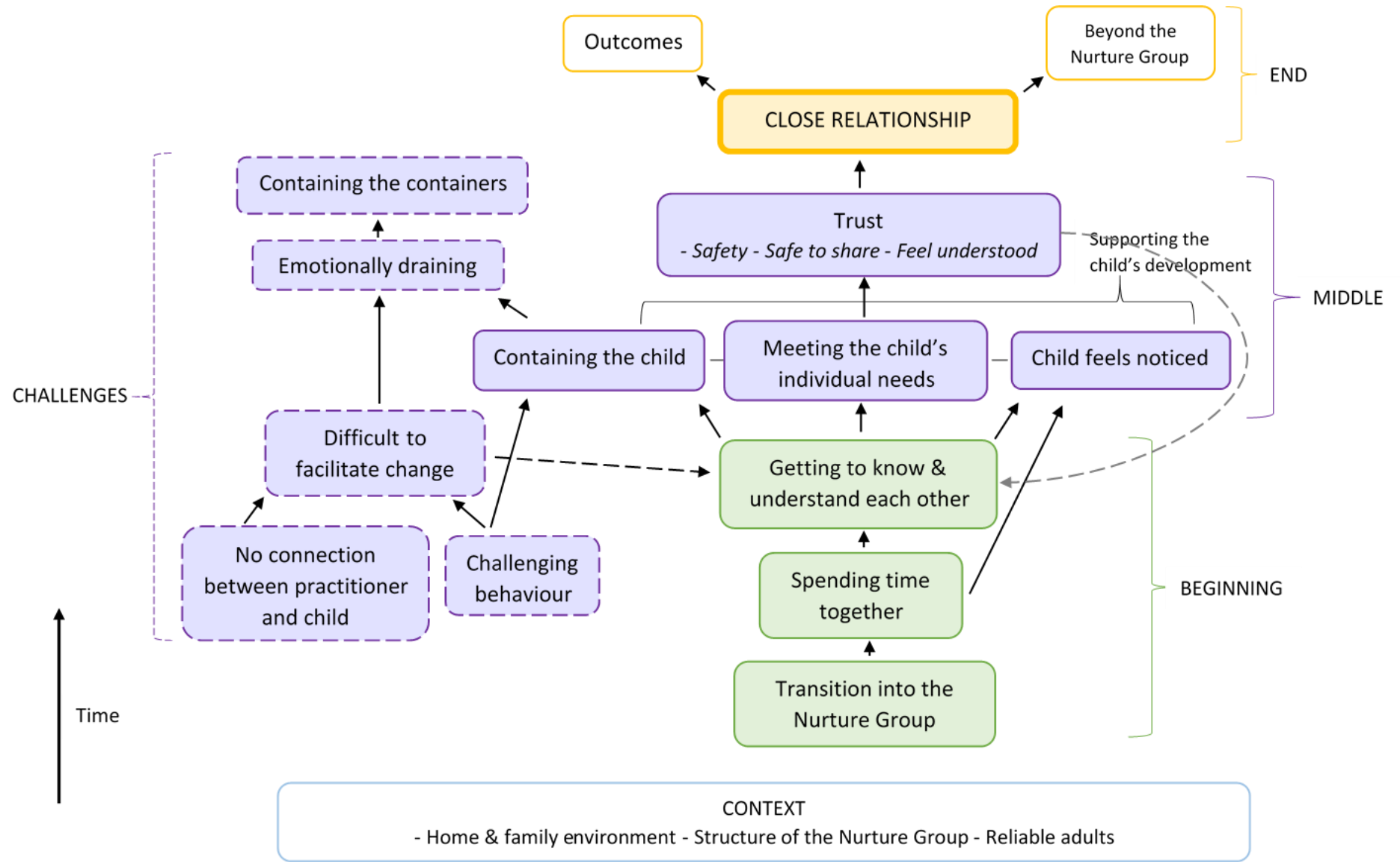
Figure 5. Detailed map of the emergent theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

4.3.1.   The setting of the story: Context

The context within which the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship theory emerges (or if

referring to the analogy of the story book, the setting of the story), relates to the setting, structures and

boundaries of the Nurture Group. The context is comprised of four different code concepts:

- Home and family environment

- Fun, enjoyable environment

- Structure of the Nurture Group

- Presence of reliable adults

Home and family environment

This concept refers to the environment of the Nurture Group, which is akin to a family home. The home

and family environment has two dimensions:

1. Home environment: The Nurture Group is set up to resemble a family home, both in appearance

   and feel.

2. Family: The Nurture Group contains a family of children and two adult (parents). The 'family'

   carry out activities together, have shared meals, and provide support to one another.

 'We're a little family in here.' (Sofia)

Structure of the Nurture Group

This code refers to the structural set-up of the Nurture Group. There are several properties or

characteristics which define the code:

- A small ratio of children to adults

- Daily routines

- Meal/snack times throughout the day

- A mix of group and individual activities

- Clear and consistent rules and boundaries

The structure of the Nurture Group helps to reduce anxiety, and the children to feel relaxed and comfortable.

> '*The day is very much structured…it helps children. It reduces anxiety…we'll go pick the children up from class, take them here, have breakfast, share our dish, share thoughts.*' *(Antonia)*
>
> '*Routine is what helps them become familiar with the day.*' *(Nikki)*

Fun, enjoyable environment

Within the structured boundaries of the Nurture Group, the practitioner creates an environment which is fun, relaxed and enjoyable. This is achieved through play, fun activities and laughter. There is a careful balance between moments of fun and play, and carrying out more formal learning tasks.

> '*You can be quite fun with it, so once they see you engaging in activities with other children, it's not just sit down and do your work, do this, do that, that you can have fun at the same time. That kind of breaks down the barriers.*' *(Sofia)*

Presence of reliable adults

> '*They just need consistency, and they need to know that you're not going to be blowing your top one minute, and all fun and games the next. But that it's consistent, so they know what the expectations are.*' *(Karen)*

The practitioner is reliable and consistent in their manner, approach, and response to the child or a situation. The child knows what to expect from the practitioner, which reassures the child. Both practitioners are consistent in their approach, responding to the child in the same manner.

The practitioner always being available is a property of this code. The same practitioner is always available, both physically and emotionally, to support the child, especially when an issue arises or the child is upset. Any changes in practitioner disrupts the consistent availability of the adult.

> '*We are always there, so it's usually, it's the same staff there every day. So it's a consistent thing.*' *(Claire)*

A further property of this code is the practitioner communicating firm boundaries and expectations. They enforce the rules which help to structure the Nurture Group.

> '*[There] are sort of times when you will be firm. They know you mean it.*' *(Claire)*

4.3.2. The beginning

The beginning of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, and the beginning of the story, is made up of three sub-categories, as can be seen below in Figure 6. The sub-categories are:

a) The child transitions into the Nurture Group

b) Spending time together

c) Getting to know and understand each other
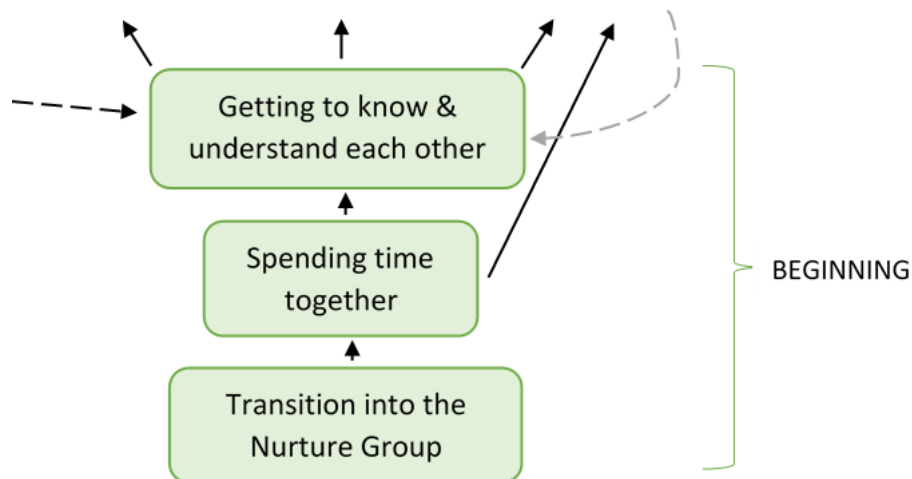
Figure 6. Beginning of the practitioner-child relationship.

These sub-categories are linked, in order, over time (demonstrated by the upward arrows in Figure 6), signifying how the practitioner-child relationship begins to form, as they set out on their journey together. The sub-category of 'getting to know and understand each other' feeds into the next category of 'supporting the child's development', represented by the three upward arrows at the top of Figure 6. The sub-category of 'spending time together' also directly feeds up to 'supporting the child's development'. Other categories in the theory, feed back into 'beginnings' (represented by the dashed arrows), which will be described later in this chapter.

Child transitions into the Nurture Group

The child's first entry into the Nurture Group marks the start of their transition, and the beginning stage of the practitioner-child relationship. There are two dimensions to this sub-category:

1. Feeling anxious and wary

2. Practitioner supporting the child to settle in

The first dimension of the child's transition, refers to the feelings experienced by the practitioner, and especially the child. The child is scared and anxious at first, maybe withdrawing from the practitioner and other children, or seeming unsettled, which is communicated through their behaviour.

> '*At the same time, she was scared of coming in here, I was sort of like scared of her reaction [laughs] to me.' (Nikki)*

> '*They don't know you or haven't seen you around…they must feel a bit worried…Bit scared, or bit anxious. (Claire)*

At the same time, the practitioner shares similar feelings of anxiety, as they don't yet know the child.

The second dimension refers to the structures and activities which the practitioner sets up, to support the child to begin to settle into the Nurture Group. The practitioner allows the child to explore the environment, and creates play based activities to help the child become familiar with and relaxed in the Nurture Group. Some practitioners plan for children to visit the Nurture Group in advance so that the child can begin to develop a familiarity prior to joining full-time.

> '*We like them to feel very at home, so we allow them to explore the environment around them…we encourage the other children to befriend them, to show them where this is, where that is ... And we might let them play and get comfortable in the environment they are in.' (Antonia)*

Over time, the child begins to settle and become familiar with the practitioner and their surroundings.

Spending time together

This sub-category refers to the practitioner and child spending time together, interacting and communicating through play, structured activities and conversation. The practitioner and child talk about their own experiences, their thoughts, and events taking place in the Nurture Group or the outside world. They spend time together through a mix of one-to-one and group situations.

> '*We sit with our children, and we all, on a Monday its 'what did you do at the weekend?' But during the rest of the week, I might tell them something if something has happened in the news, or when Tim Peake was going into space.' (Karen)*

Due to the context of the Nurture Group, the practitioner and child are able to closely interact with each other on a frequent basis, which facilitates the development of a relationship.

> *'You have to constantly be engaging and interacting with the child at all times. So through that, you do build a relationship with the child, you get quite close to the child, you know.' (Antonia)*

> ***Attention***

A characteristic of this sub-category is the attention that the practitioner is able to give to the child.

> *'It's just having that time to just support them, encourage them, just that individual attention that they get, which helps with their work side of things.' (Karen)*

Again, the availability of time, along with a small ratio of children, enables the practitioner and child to spend a large amount of time together, and greater attention given to the child than would be possible in a mainstream classroom, which supports the development of a stronger relationship.

> *'The mainstream classroom you have 30 kids, and you haven't really got the time to give them that much attention. And with Nurture Group you have a smaller group, a smaller number of children. And so you can build relationships easier…because you are constantly communicating with them, constantly engaging with them.' (Antonia)*

Getting to know and understand each other

A further sub-category within 'beginnings', relates to the practitioner and child coming to know and understand each other.

> *'As time goes on they get to know you, you get to know them, and you know how that child works.' (Sofia)*

Getting to know and understand each other can be broken down further, focussing on the separate perspectives of the child and the practitioner.

> ***The child gets to know the practitioner***

At the beginning of the relationship journey, the child gets to know the practitioner through observing the practitioner from a safe distance and through direct interaction. The child notices how the practitioner engages and interacts with other children, as if gathering information about the practitioner's character, and how they are likely to respond to the child and make them feel.

'I find that they, they are watching you…they look to see how you're interacting with other children, like how the other children are responding to you as well.' (Nikki)

As the child gets to know the practitioner, they can begin to relax and feel comfortable around the

practitioner, as they know what to expect.

'You want them to get to know you, because you want them to feel comfortable with you, and then…if there's anything they want to say to you, they will say to you if they feel comfortable with you. (Claire)

Practitioner gets to know and understand the child

Similarly to the child getting to know the practitioner, the practitioner gets to know and understand the

child, by observing them, directly spending time with the child, and reflecting on the child's behaviour.

The practitioner consequently comes to know the child's strengths, interests, personality, and needs,

which helps them to develop an understanding of the child's needs, their internal world, and what they

might be communicating through their behaviour.

'Once you get to know them, you sort of get an idea, you have to know their home life, their background, erm, their social skills, like what their strengths, their weaknesses.' (Nikki)

'We get to know their personalities, get to know triggers to their behaviour, their sort of patterns, things that might set them off.' (Karen)

A key property of this concept, is the practitioner getting to know and understand the *individual* child.

'You're looking at that child individually…That's the difference…we try to sort of work it so that it fits around them.' (Claire)

Knowing and understanding the individual child helps to inform the practitioner about how they might

go about supporting the child's development.

'Relationships is different because you need to know each child. Once you know them, you know how to work with them, and you know how to relate to them.' (Antonia)

The practitioner also reflects on how the child has responded to them, to help develop a greater

understanding of the child and how to support them further.

'It's getting to know the children. You might have said something, and it might not work. And you think 'arch'. And it's make it worse. Or you think, 'ok, next time maybe I'll say it like this.' (Claire)

Throughout the relationship journey, the practitioner seeks to develop more of an understanding of the child, maintaining a constant curiosity. This takes place particularly during the initial stages of the relationship, and later on when challenges arise.

> *'I think that sometimes it, there's more to the story of that child, personally. That you have to flag up, and ask questions about.' (Nikki)*

> *'We kind of just leave the child to it, and do observations around that child, try to pick up on bits. On a certain day, at a certain time. Has the child stayed at one parent's house that night, and then the next...You try to just get as much information as possible, then try to puzzle bits together. (Sofia)*

> ***Awareness of the child's past and current experiences***

Part of the practitioner getting to know and understand the child is also about finding out, or holding questions in their mind, about the child's past and current experiences outside of school. This includes environmental risks, trauma, family structures, and relationships with family members. The practitioner reflects on how these factors may impact on the child's internal world, helping to build a further understanding of the child, and thus what to be sensitive towards and how to best meet the child's needs.

> *'If I know what's happening at home. If I know what's going on in the child's mind, then I'm able to work alongside and find a balance.' (Sofia)*

4.3.3. The middle

The middle of the practitioner and child's relationship journey is represented by the three key categories highlighted in purple in Figure 4. These categories are;

- Supporting the child's development

- Trust

- Challenges

Each category will be described and explained separately.

Figure 7 below, depicts the first two categories in greater detail. The earlier described sub-category of 'getting to know and understand each other' leads into three sub-categories within 'supporting the

child's development', which together, feed into the category of 'trust'. A dashed arrow respresents how

'trust' influences the sub-category of 'getting to know and understand each other'.
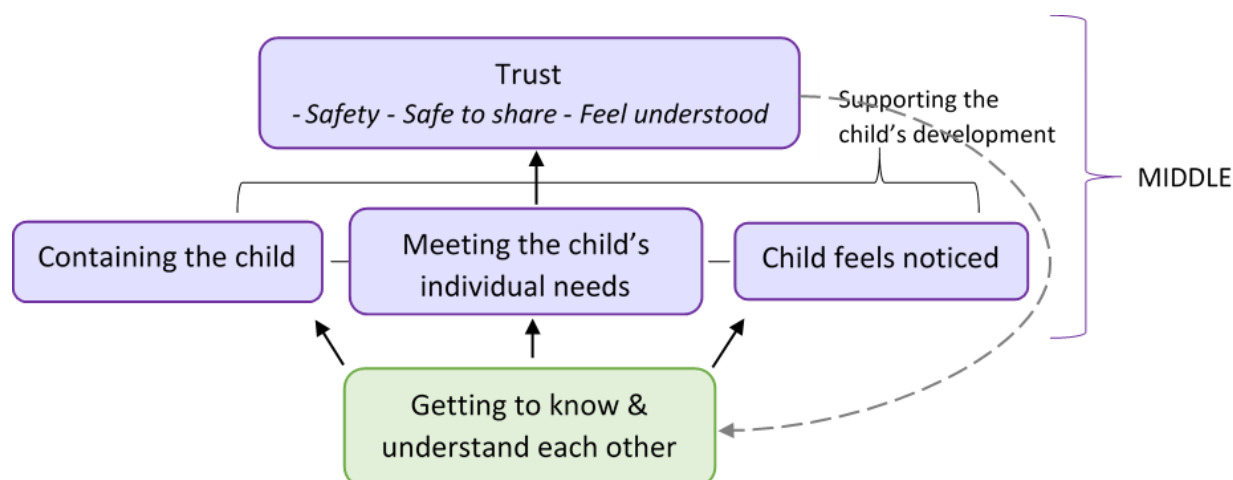
Figure 7. Categories of supporting the child's development and trust.

4.3.3.1.   Supporting the child's development

The key category of supporting the child's development, represents how the actions of the practitioner

enables the child to become nourished and facilitate their development. In the relationship journey

described in 4.2, this is represented through the practitioner replacing the heavy weight of the child's

backpack with nourishment to support the child's development and wellbeing. This category is

composed of three interlinked sub-categories:

- Child feels noticed

- Meeting the child's individual needs

- Containing the child

Child feels noticed

The development of the child feeling noticed is a direct result of the earlier described sub-categories of

'spending time together' and 'getting to know and understand each other'. Feeling noticed has two key

dimensions:

1. The child feels valued

2. The child feels heard

The first dimension reflects the child feeling special and acknowledged for who they are. The practitioner has set up ways to allow the child to experience feelings of self-worth, with their strengths and achievements recognised. Praise is a key mechanism to the child feeling valued.

> *'Positive praise, always acknowledging and making a big deal if they've done something. Making a big deal out of it so that they feel special.' (Antonia)*

The child may be given small responsibilities to allow them the feeling of worth, or that they can provide something of value to others, which supports the development of the child's confidence and self-esteem.

> *'Making them feel special. Making them feel that they're needed to do certain things. You know, if it wasn't for them, this couldn't have happened.' (Sofia)*

The second dimension is the child feeling heard, and within this, held in mind by the practitioner. The practitioner listens carefully to the child and shows an interest in what they have to say. Subsequently the child feels cared for and heard.

> *'They know that what they've told you, we haven't forgotten…they know that you do, you do care about what they say.' (Claire)*

Meeting the child's individual needs

The practitioner applies their knowledge and understanding of the individual child to sensitively and appropriately respond to and meet the child's individual needs. The practitioner plans developmentally suitable learning activities, and is attuned to the child's emotional experiences so that they can delicately support the child.

> *'I usually plan individually to meet the child's need. So I plan according to the child's ability or social need, or emotional need.' (Antonia)*

> *'Once you learn about them you know, you just know certain procedures to follow for them, and what to do to calm them down.' (Nikki)*

There are five small dimensions to this sub-category:

1. New opportunities and experiences for the child

2. Sensitivity towards the child's vulnerabilities

3. Allowing the child a voice to make choices and decisions

4. Giving the child small responsibilities

5. Being a role model for the child

The first dimension refers to opportunities for the child to gain new experiences, which they wouldn't necessarily receive at home or in the mainstream classroom. This includes engaging in conversations with an adult, participating in play, experiencing new activities, and learning about the world.

> *'We did 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea'…We talked about how to make tea, and we'd open the teabag up to see what the tea looks like. We had some flavoured tea…we closed their eyes and they had to smell it and say what fruit they thought it was.' (Karen)*

The second dimension reflects the practitioner being sensitive and attuned to the child's vulnerabilities and emotional experiences. They pick up on what the child's behaviour is communicating, or events which might be emotionally difficult for the child, identifying ways to minimise any distress. The practitioner is thoughtfully sensitive and aware of the child.

> *'If I know father's day is coming up, and I know that the child's father isn't on the scene, we would make a card, but for somebody else, so that child wouldn't feel left out…And then the child would be asking questions and then you just need to be sensitive of what it is you're responding.' (Sofia)*

The third dimension reflects structured opportunities for the child to make their own choices or decisions e.g. how the room should be decorated, or how an issue should be resolved.

> *'We let them get involved. So it's not just us delegating things…allowing them that opportunity to have a voice as what they want to do.' (Nikki)*

Being able to make decisions or have choice enables the child to feel they have a voice, and feel they have some control and responsibility.

A further dimension in meeting the child's individual needs, is giving the child small responsibilities. This approach supports the child to feel of worth, building their self-confidence. It also communicates that the practitioner is developing trust in the child.

> *'She likes responsibility as well, so it's really good to give her something to do in the morning. She can help me set out the breakfast table.' (Nikki)*

The final dimension is the practitioner modelling positive behaviour and healthy ways of relating to others, which becomes a blueprint for the child to interact with the world around them.

'So I always find, the way we influence the relationship between the children, is the adults modelling that positive relationship between each other, so that children can see that.' (Antonia)

The practitioner recognises that they give something to the child, which the child can use in the outside world.

'There's part of you that going off with them.' (Claire)

Containing the child

Containing the child is the final sub-category of 'supporting the development of the child', which is vitally significant in the practitioner-child relationship. If referring back to the story analogy, containing the child is especially important in reducing the emotional load in the child's backpack. Containing the child refers to the practitioner understanding a child's feelings, holding the feelings for the child, and helping the child to make sense of their feelings.

'If you don't understand how they're feeling, then you can't really help them move away from what they're thinking.' (Sofia)

The practitioner is attuned to how the child is feeling, and tries to understand the child's inner emotional experiences.

'On a daily basis you sort of sense that, 'oh, they look a bit grumpy today' or, you know, they're on the verge or doing, something's going to happen, or they're not happy.' (Claire)

The practitioner seems to hold the child's feelings, as if they are their own, and tries to manage them.

'Because I'm taking on their problems as well.' (Sofia)

The practitioner supports the child to understand their feelings, providing reassurance and helping the child to feel safe and calm.

'In the days that she did maybe kick off, after she had calmed down, we'd just talk to her about what we're doing, why she's maybe feeling that way' (Nikki)

'And, also help the child understand that as an adult I understand, and it's ok to get angry. Because adults get angry too. It's ok to express.' (Antonia)

While making sense of the child's feelings, the practitioner recognises the intensity of the child's emotions, which can be frightening and overwhelming. The practitioner tries to protect the child from these emotions to further help the child to feel safe.

'You're trying to show them that things are going to be ok. But knowing that child is going through something is not a nice thing. And you can't show that to the child, because the child would then start thinking 'that's scary'. You don't need them to know that.' (Sofia)

The process of repeatedly containing the child over time helps the child to feel more emotionally settled.

'They know that we're trusted to like regain like their sense of, just like stability for them. We're almost like stability. So once they see us, it's sort of like they know the procedures. Like they come in, we try to calm them down.' (Nikki)

Providing time and space for a child to calm down

Part of containing the child also involves the practitioner allowing the child the time and space to calm down when very upset. This is often when the child is externalising their feelings, for example, by shouting and being physically 'violent'. Providing time and space for the child to calm down allows the child to settle, before the practitioner can use spoken word to provide further containment.

'Sometimes they just need that space to calm down on their own. They don't need someone getting in their way all the time.' (Nikki)

One participant used the analogy of a fizzy drink bottle to demonstrate the value of allowing the child to calm a little, before then helping the child to reflect on their emotional experiences.

'You just need to know when to give them their own space…I've always seen it as kind of, a bottle of a fizzy drink. If you shake it, it becomes really fizzy, you can't open it or it will just explode. Whereas if you leave it to calm down, eventually you can open it slowly.' (Sofia)

4.3.3.2.   Trust

Trust is a key aspect of the development of the relationship between the practitioner and child. Trust builds over time, and along with it, the relationship. Without trust, there is no relationship.

'It's building that trusting relationship, with the child and the nurture teacher…the group is small…you have that advantage to get to know that child better, and that child get to know you. So I, I definitely think it's trusting relationship that will be, that's number one.' (Antonia)

There are three code concepts within the category of trust:

- The child feels comfortable, relaxed, and safe with the practitioner

- The child feels safe to approach the practitioner and share their thoughts

- The child feels understood

These code concepts are similar, yet distinct, feeding into each other. If the child feels safe, comfortable and relaxed with the practitioner, they are more likely to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. If the child feels understood by the practitioner, they feel trust in them.

> *'The trust I think…they're just more relaxed with you, they're relaxed with you, they'll say most things, they'll tell you things. And, you know they wanna come and talk to you.' (Claire)*

Through the process of the child developing trust in the practitioner, where they feel safe to engage with and open up to the practitioner, further opportunities emerge for the practitioner to get to know and understand the child. This is represented in Figure 7, where a feedback loop can be seen, linking 'trust' back to the sub-category of 'getting to know and understand each other'.

Child feels comfortable, relaxed, and safe

The child feels safe towards the practitioner. They feel secure, comfortable, and relaxed around the practitioner, as they become a familiar, trusted adult.

> *'I think they feel really safe. I think they feel really safe towards you.' (Antonia)*

The child recognises the practitioner as reliable and supportive. They therefore feel safe to engage with the practitioner and learn from them.

> *'You can see it in the way that they are with you, if they are comfortable with you, their body language, if they're affectionate with you.' (Nikki)*

Trust facilitates the child to feel safe, which further increases the feelings of trust in the practitioner.

Child feels safe to approach the practitioner and share their thoughts

The trust and safety that the child feels towards the practitioner, enables the child to feel safe to share personal and often difficult thoughts, feelings and experiences with the practitioner.

'They will come up and just talk about themselves, or their families, and erm, and I think, any sort of worries.' (Claire)

'Because they know, this is almost like a safe base, they will come to you. You know, and they will share their thoughts and erm whatever they're feeling with you. So you have to definitely build that trust with them' (Antonia)

Trust in the relationship is vital for the child to feel comfortable to share aspects of themselves with the practitioner. If trust doesn't exist, the child won't open up.

'If it's somebody you don't trust, then you're not going to open up to them, you're not going to go into school to begin with. You're just gonna wanna keep away. But the more trust you have with someone, the more you want them to be involved in, how shall I put it? Problem? And then, knowing that you're not alone, you've got someone there who understands you.' (Sofia)

As the quote above demonstrates, as the child begins to open up to the practitioner, the child begins to feel that they are understood.

Child feels understood

As demonstrated towards the end of the previous quote, the child begins to feel understood. They recognise that the practitioner understands their needs, senses when they need support, and knows how to best provide that support to meet their individual needs. In recognising that the practitioner understands them, this further facilitates the development of trust towards the practitioner.

4.3.3.3.   Challenges

As described in 4.2, the practitioner and child can face challenges along their journey, which disrupts the relationship or prevents the journey from being one that is smooth. As with all stories, challenges arise, but can be overcome. Figure 8 below, depicts these challenges, and how they relate to each other and the other parts of the theory.
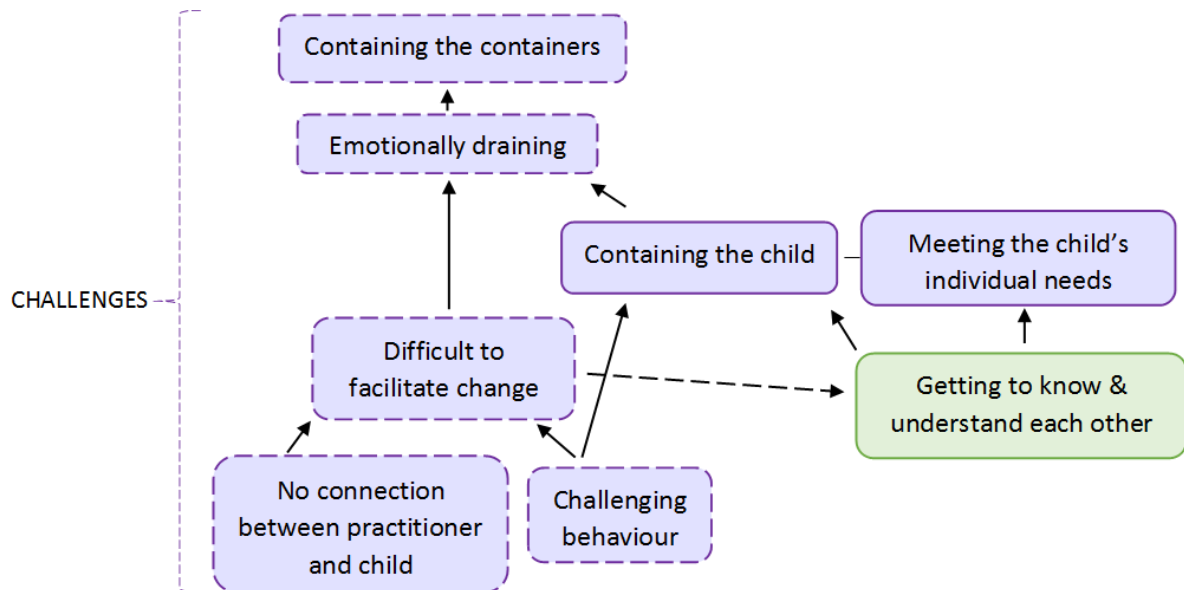
Figure 8. Challenges faced during the practitioner-child relationship journey.

The key sub-categories of the main category of challenge include:

1. The child's behaviour feeling challenging

2. There being no connection between the practitioner and child

3. Difficulties facilitating change for the child

The reader will notice that there is a pathway out from 'difficulties facilitating change for the child', to 'getting to know and understand each other'. This indicates that as a result of the challenges that are faced, the practitioner takes steps to get to know and understand the child more, so that they can better support the needs of the child and provide containment. In 4.2, this is described as the practitioner sometimes backtracking on their journey to find a smoother path. However, for some practitioners, this doesn't take place. Instead a difficult path is continued through the challenges.

All the above sub-categories, along with the sub-category of containment, lead to the following:

4. The relationship being emotionally draining for the practitioner

The emotional draining experience felt by the practitioner in their role, leads to:

5. The practitioner (the container) seeking containment themselves

I feel it is important to highlight that all participants communicated challenges in the practitioner-child relationship, not just through spoken word, but through sighs, and talking in a lower tone of voice, and at a slower pace, as if having to carefully deliberate over what felt important to say. To me, this suggested that challenges were difficult to think about and make sense of. I feel it is important for the reader to hold this in mind while reading about this category of 'challenges'.

The child's behaviour is challenging

This sub-category reflects when a child's behaviour is viewed as challenging by the practitioner. Properties of this sub-category include misbehaviour, defiance, and arguments between children in the Nurture Group, hurtful comments being directed at the practitioner, and 'violent' behaviour e.g. kicking others, throwing objects around the room. This challenging behaviour can seem to reflect when the child is experiencing heightened and uncomfortable emotions.

> *'His behaviour is extreme, and he's very violent, and very aggressive. He can be very defiant, and unsafe.' (Antonia)*

> *'He was quite challeng...it was his behaviour that was quite challenging.' (Karen)*

The practitioner responds to the child by trying to contain their feelings (see arrow from 'challenging behaviour' to 'containing the child' in Figure 8), and identifying the best way to respond to them. This involves being patient, providing space for the child to calm down.

> *'Again it's giving the child time and space, and being patient. If a child wants to kind of punch and kick and whatever, you kind of let them get it out of their system.' (Sofia)*

The nature of the child's challenging behaviour can feel unsafe and unpredictable. Unsafe and unpredictable are two dimensions of 'challenging behaviour'. If the reader refers back to 4.2, this is represented by a volcano which can erupt at any moment, with emotions always being close to the surface, which put those around it at risk. The unsafe and unpredictable nature of the child's behaviour jeopardises the Nurture Group as a safe base.

> *'He does get very aggressive and violent, the children here in nurture are not safe. And nurture is meant to be a safe base, you know. And so for them to witness the violence, and throwing of chairs, and turning tables, it's quite scary' (Antonia)*

The practitioner might respond by being vigilant towards the child. The unsafe and unpredictable feelings evoked seem to suggest that the practitioner senses that the relationship they have with the child, feels unpredictable, unsafe, and difficult.

No connection between practitioner and child

This sub-category of challenges, reflects times when the child seems to push the practitioner away. In 4.2, the reader will notice that this part of the theory is described as the practitioner and child venturing into a forest, and losing each other along the way. Properties of this sub-category are a lack of the child communicating, engaging with, or responding to the practitioner.

> *'It was quite hard to like build that bond with her. Because she just knew, she just wanted her mum… she was just like, 'get away from me'. 'Who are you'?' (Nikki)*

The practitioner feels unable to build a connection with the child (either in the long or short term). The relationship is disjointed. The child appears to shut themselves off from the practitioner to avoid unearthing difficult, overwhelming feelings, as a form of defence.

> *'Not being able to communicate with them. So if the child's completely shut down, it's difficult knowing that something is wrong, but they don't want to say. That's quite challenging in itself. Knowing that you want to help, but you're not, you can't do anything else then.' (Sofia)*

The practitioner faces the challenge of identifying how to connect with the child, and support the child further along the journey.

Difficult to facilitate change for the child

Both sub-categories of 'the child's behaviour is challenging' and 'no connection between practitioner and child' can lead to the practitioner finding it difficult to facilitate change for the child. When the child's behaviour is experienced as challenging, or when the practitioner struggles to connect with the child, the practitioner can find it difficult to understand, calm, comfort, or reach the child, and therefore support the child through the journey. The child doesn't always appear to respond to the support or approach that the practitioner is using, and consequently no change or development is noticed in the child.

'It was consistent that this child was just, not being very nice to other children, it was just consistently, it was we've just done this yesterday, you've just been told off for it again. Why did you do it? Because it just doesn't make any sense.' (Nikki)

The following quote highlights one participant's concern that they had been unable to make a difference for the child.

'If you've got someone that's quite difficult, then it's like, you do whatever you can, and there's nothing, it doesn't make any difference.' (Claire)

As a result, the practitioner feels frustrated in their perception that they are unable to facilitate change. They can feel they have tried everything, and subsequently feel a sense of exasperation, or feel disheartened. The following quote highlights how exasperated one participant felt, finding that they had tried 'everything'. Feigning a collapse onto the table seems to represent her exasperation.

'But when I went to see him and things, he got like one question wrong and he was like [feigns collapsing onto table], he'd had everything.' (Nikki)

Practitioner questions their approach

Within the practitioner feeling unable to facilitate change, is the practitioner questioning their approach to supporting the child. They often wonder whether their approach is all wrong, and sometimes question whether they are 'good enough' for the role, experiencing doubt and anxiety.

'You start to get a bit, anxious about how you're going to deal with it. Or you deal with it and then think afterwards, 'ah that wasn't the right thing to do.' (Karen)

Questioning their approach can be useful for the practitioner, by reflecting on what the child might be communicating through their behaviour, and being reflexive in their practice e.g. 'how can I [the practitioner] do things differently'.

'You think, 'ok, next time maybe I'll say it like this...' (Claire)

Reflective and reflexive practice enables the practitioner to go back and gain a deeper understanding of the child (represented in the arrow back to 'getting to know and understand each other'). The practitioner gathers more information about the child to help develop a better understanding of the child's needs, and therefore adapt how they might support the child in the future. This is represented in

4.2, by the practitioner and child going back to an earlier point in their relationship journey, to find an alternative path to venture upon.

The relationship is emotionally draining for the practitioner

The role of the Nurture Group practitioner is challenging and places a heavy emotional load on the practitioner. In the story described in 4.2, the emotional load is represented by the practitioner's backpack becoming heavier, as they slowly carry more of the child's load.

There are four dimensions to this sub-category, which contribute to the practitioner-child relationship being emotionally draining for the practitioner:

1. Being a container for the child's difficult feelings

2. Worrying about the child's welfare, wanting to protect them

3. Managing the child's challenging behaviour

4. Self-doubt in the role, as a result of the practitioner questioning their approach

Acting as a container for the child's difficult feelings can be challenging.

'It can be very mentally and physically draining. There's so many things you take in and try to deal with, but at the same time, you can't show certain emotions to the child. You just keep holding things in.' (Sofia)

The practitioner may become filled with worry about the child's wellbeing and home experiences. During the interviews, one participant became upset when sharing her concerns about a child, demonstrating the power of the concerns she held.

'Particularly if there's something going on for a child at home…lot of issues with lateness [voice wobbling from tears], absence, erm, dad smoking pot and driving them to school…Erm, you worry about them. (Karen)

Responding to and trying to manage a child's challenging behaviour can be difficult, and requires the practitioner to draw upon a lot of their resources.

'My antenna is always locked. I'm always watching if another child might upset him, if something might happen…it's hard, it's hard. It is difficult.' (Antonia)

The emotional load that the practitioner carries within the relationship is very strong. The participants often used emotion carrying words such as *stressed, frustrated, scared, anxious, worried, drained*, and *overwhelmed*. The load the practitioner experiences can spill out beyond the walls of the Nurture Group, into the practitioners' personal lives.

> *'I used to leave from work and go home, and keep thinking and thinking about it. And then I just had to draw a line and think 'do you know what, work's work, and now I'm at home with my family, it's time to just switch off, and just focus on my family now'. (Sofia)*

While sharing the emotional load that the practitioners take on board, participants expressed their feelings through sudden outbursts of information, appearing flushed, or their eyes filling with tears.

The small ratio of children in the Nurture Group means that the emotional experience can feel very intense for both the practitioner and the child. One practitioner described feeling that the relationship experience is like being under a microscope.

Containing the containers

Containing the containers is a concept related to the relationship between the practitioner and child being an emotionally draining one. The Nurture Group practitioner finds ways of seeking and receiving support and emotional containment themselves, in response to the heavy emotional load that they are carrying for the child. This is represented in the drawing in Appendix 12, by the support being parachuted in, as well as the practitioner helicptering out for support. Containment for the practitioner is important for them to feel able to carry on in their relationship journey with the nurture child, by lightening the load. There are three dimensions to this concept, which facilitate the containment of the practitioner:

1. Receiving support from the second Nurture Group practitioner
2. Support and reassurance gained from training and peer networks
3. Support from wider school staff

The nurture practitioner receives support from the second practitioner who works closely alongside them. The second practitioner recognises when the practitioner needs support, or a break away from an emotionally challenging situation with a child. The second practitioner understands the nature of the practitioner's experiences, and is able to talk though difficult events.

> *'I'm just glad that I've got my colleague, coz we just bounce off each other. You need somebody with the same kind of personality as you. To understand it. Because there's times when things just become so overwhelming, you just, all you have to do is look at each other and you know it's time for the other person to step in while the other just has 5 minutes out.' (Sofia)*

Training events and peer networks within the Local Authority (sometimes facilitated by an EP) provide a further containing space for the practitioner. Training supports the practitioner to feel more confident in their ability to meet the child's needs, provide affirmation that they are doing a good enough job, and possess the skills to manage and support the child. Meeting with Nurture Group practitioners from other settings provides further emotional containment, as the practitioner is able to offload, share their experiences, seek advice, and become aware of what is going well for them in their role.

> *'So like an EP might be talking to you about things…and reassure me that actually yeh it's fine, coz I did that last year and it was fine. I'll need to continue doing that because it works, so I'm going to do it again and for reassurance as well, that you're actually doing it correctly.' (Sofia)*

Finally, the third dimension of this concept is the practitioner gaining support from wider school staff, especially when a child's behaviour is very challenging, or the practitioner is at a loss as to how they can help the child.

> *'Me and Sofia usually talk about it, and then she'll probably go to Yvonne or Judy, the SENCo. And just talk about his behaviours, what he's doing, then obviously we'll come to some conclusions about what next steps.' (Nikki)*

4.3.4. The end

The ending of the practitioner-child relationship journey is composed of the final overarching category, of a 'close relationship'. The development of the four earlier described key categories over time, leads to this overarching category.

Within the ending of the practitioner-child relationship journey are two small outputs, which can be seen in Figure 9, below.
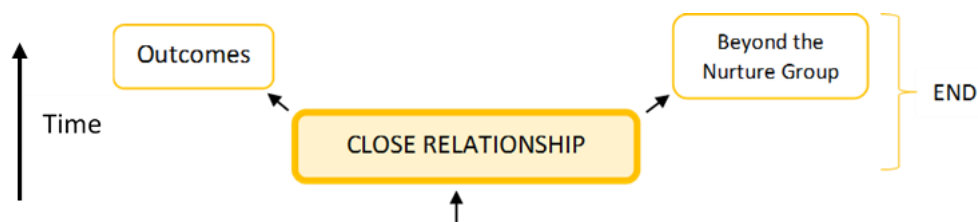
Figure 9. Ending of the practitioner-child relationship journey.

4.3.4.1.   Close relationship

Over time, the relationship between the practitioner and child develops into a 'close relationship'. It is one which is connected through trust, sharing the same relationship journey, and the practitioner having a strong and personal understanding of the child. Properties of this overarching category include the relationship being special and personal, where there is a bond or a connection.

> *'It's one that's quite special. And because you have that closeness and you see them every day, but you work closely with them…And so for me it's definitely, yeh, special! I would say it's quite a special one.' (Antonia)*

> *'It's a very close relationship. So we get to know the children very well, so we get to know their personalities, get to know triggers to their behaviour, their sort of patterns, things that might set them off.' (Karen)*

The feelings that the relationship evokes are strong.

> *'And then they build their sense of trust in you, they feel like they can come and tell you things. So yeh, and it gets quite personal. It's quite nice, it's quite a nice feeling actually.' (Nikki)*

Time, frequent contact and the small ratio of children in the Nurture Group, are key factors in facilitating the building of a close relationship. A long period of time needs to pass before a close relationship is built.

> *'You have that closeness and you see them every day, but you work closely with them. And it's not just for a few months, but it's for the whole year.' (Antonia)*

The availability of time helps the practitioner to get to know the child, enabling a very personal connection between the practitioner and child.

'It gets quite personal because they are, they're with you almost the whole school day, so once you get to know them, you sort of get an idea, you have to know their home life, their background, erm, their social skills, like what their strengths, their weaknesses. (Nikki)

Shared experiences

The close relationship reflects a sense of shared experiences and feelings between the practitioner and child. This arises through the practitioner and child having spent time together, experiencing a 'shared journey' over time.

'Being a part of that child's journey for the better.' (Sofia)

The shared experiences are felt more strongly by the practitioner when they are new to the role, as they too, set off on an unknown journey.

'We were definitely just on the same journey, because at the same time she was scared of coming in here, I was sort of like scared of her reaction.' (Nikki)

Close relationships can be challenging

A dimension of the close relationship between the practitioner and child, is the existence of challenges within the relationship. Close relationships can be experienced as challenging relationships, while still evoking strong feelings of a bond between the practitioner and child. Many participants talked about challenges, within the context of a strong relationship they had with a child.

'We have a child in our Nurture Group who is extremely challenging. And he is a lovely boy, a really lovely boy. He has an abs, a lovely side to him. Very caring, very helpful. And he's very interested. He's interested in what you say. We have a good bond. A good relationship, a close relationship. I would say close.' (Antonia)

In the above quote, the participant seems to express that a 'close relationship' is the best way to describe the relationship she had with the child, where she faced a number of challenges. The term 'good' didn't seem appropriate to her, when reflecting on the nature of the relationship she had with the child, instead changing her wording to a 'close' relationship.

A challenging yet close relationship, is depicted in 4.2, as the scars that can exist in the relationship.

Contrast to the child's relationship with mainstream staff

The close relationship between the practitioner and child was emphasised by participants, by contrasting it to the child's relationship with their mainstream teachers or support staff. Mainstream staff are seen as having fewer opportunities to get to know and understand the child, and therefore are less attuned to the child, for a close relationship to develop.

> *'They don't get that close relationship with their class teachers because it's not possible…the teachers just don't have the time to get to know those children, get to know what their interests are, and you know, get to recognise when they come in if they're in good mood or a bad mood.' (Karen)*

Relationships are individual

Each practitioner-child relationship is different. This is because each child and practitioner are individual and unique. It is important for the practitioner to understand the uniqueness of each child, and build a relationship around the individual child.

> *'If I'm approaching one child in one way, that relationship might work…But if another one won't respond to that approach in the same way, they probably, they might distrust, they might resent the adult, because they're not listening or understanding.' (Nikki)*

Because each relationship is different, some relationships seem to 'gel' more than others.

> *'If the child gets on, gels better with another adult, and they can, and that can help that child.' (Claire)*

Child feels comfort towards the practitioner (the parental figure)

A dimension of the close relationship between the practitioner and child, is the child's feelings of comfort towards the practitioner, which at times mirrors the comforting feelings that a child may feel towards a parent. At times, the child may call the practitioner 'mum'.

> *'I had one child, a very strong relationship, where I think to the point where, I mean she was calling me mum.' (Antonia)*

The child sees the practitioner as a safe base, seeking close proximity or physical contact with the practitioner, such as through giving and receiving hugs.

> *'You can see it in the way that they are with you, if they are comfortable with you, their body language, if they're affectionate with you.' (Sofia)*

Child recognises the practitioner as supportive and caring

Part of the child feeling comfort towards the (parental) practitioner, is the child recognising the support and care that the practitioner provides for the child. The child knows they can approach the practitioner for reassurance and support.

'And when they are ready, they will come to you coz they know that's what they can do.' (Sofia)

Practitioner feels responsible for protecting the child

On the other side of the relationship, is the practitioner, who takes on a parental role within the practitioner-child relationship. The practitioner feels a great sense of responsibility for protecting, nurturing, containing, safeguarding, and supporting the development of the child, just like a parent might do so.

'It's down to you to kind of help that child. It's your responsibility to make sure nothing bad happens to them.' (Sofia)

'We've got to keep them safe.' (Claire)

The practitioner's feeling of parental responsibility can be a heavy weight on the practitioner, which is reflected in the sub-category of 'emotionally draining'. The practitioners can come to feel that they are solely responsible for protecting the child, in a type of omnipotent sense.

'They need you most.' (Antonia)

'You want to help the child deal with situations better…You have to be there to help the child be reflective. You have to constantly be engaging and interacting with the child at all times.' (Antonia)

4.3.4.2.   Outcomes

Outcomes for the child is one of the outputs of the practitioner-child relationship. The development of the relationship over time contributes towards a positive future, change for the child, and a sense of achievement for the practitioner. Outcomes are reflected in three related dimensions:

1. Towards a positive future?

2. Child develops independence

3. Pride for the practitioner

Towards a positive future?

The relationship between the practitioner and child has an influence over the development of the child's emotional wellbeing and friendships e.g. positive self-image, greater self-esteem and confidence, ability to create and maintain relationships. Many positive outcomes begin to emerge as a result of the practitioner putting appropriate support in place to meet the child's developmental needs, and the presence of trust and the close bond that develops between the practitioner and child.

'By the end of it they really do come out like different children.' (Nikki)

It is important to note that for some children, positive outcomes aren't as plentiful. This is particularly the case when long term challenges have existed within the relationship, particularly when there has been less of a connection between the practitioner and child.

'You think well where does it go from here, because she comes out with things where you're thinking if she's saying those things now, how's she going to be when she's about 10, or older...she was still the same when she left, as when she came in.' (Claire)

Child develops independence

Part of a positive future for the child, is the child becoming more independent, and less reliant on the practitioner. Over time, the child becomes confident to venture away from the safety of the practitioner, developing wider relationships with other children or adults, and being able to manage difficult situations on their own.

'The more you play with them, they gain the confidence, the social skills to play with other children. And it's such a joy. For me it's such a joy when they take over.' (Antonia)

Pride for the practitioner

This dimension of 'outcomes' refers more directly to an outcome for the practitioner. The practitioner experiences a sense of pride, joy and achievement when they notice positive outcomes emerging for the child, recognising that they have played a part in this. The practitioner's pride is similar to that which a parent may feel.

'I feel happy. The child acknowledges you, the child appreciates your presence. The child is confident enough to trust you. You feel happy. Not just in myself, I feel happy for the child, knowing that, you know what, they've come a long way.' (Antonia)

The practitioner also feels pride when they notice that the child trusts them and turns to them for support, or when challenges have been overcome or lived through.

4.3.4.3.   Relationship beyond the Nurture Group

This sub-category of endings refers to the practitioner child relationship after the child has transitioned out of the Nurture Group. This is referred to as the epilogue in 4.2, as it gives insight into the next chapter of the practitioner-child relationship.

The practitioner experiences feelings of loss, knowing that their relationship with the child will inevitably change, and eventually dwindle, but maintains hope that a connection will remain.

'It's like your own children going off and you know, leaving home I think. It is to me sometimes. You think 'oh, they've gone'*.' (Claire)*

There is a change in the nature of the relationship as the child leaves the Nurture Group. For the most part, the relationship continues, but isn't as close, mainly due to there being much less time for the practitioner and child to spend time together.

'[Relationships are not just when they're in here...], it's after they've gone as well.' (Antonia)

For some relationships, the bond between the practitioner and child is broken very suddenly once the child leaves the Nurture Group, where the child cuts themselves off, ignoring the practitioner. The practitioner can find this break painful.

'Sometimes they don't wanna know you [laughs]. Sometimes they go, and you say 'hi', and it's like you're a stranger.' (Antonia)

'Once upon a time they knew you.' (Antonia)

Nevertheless, for the majority of relationships, the practitioner and child try to hold on to the relationship, visiting and looking out for each other around school.

'A lot of the others will still say hello, come up and give you a hug.' (Claire)

'Sometimes even children that have finished from nurture, would then come back, just to say hello.'
(Sofia)

The child sometimes returns to the practitioner and the nurture room, as if seeking reassurance or

containment, knowing that this will be available.

'Quite nice that they know it's their secure base that they can come back to really. Erm, and they
turn up at lunchtime. Sometimes they like to just come and open the door, and they just like to have
a wander around, just look around the room.' (Karen)

Despite the child no longer being in the Nurture Group, the practitioner continues to take a parental

role, checking up on the child and wishing to protect them, especially when they see the child in

difficulty. The practitioner is caught between wanting to maintain a closeness, and also wishing for the

child to become independent.

'And then once they're re-integrated back in, we still make sure that we're still checking on them.'
(Nikki)

'You want to keep that relationship with them but you don't want them to be so dependent on you
after they've left that they can't build relationships with other people.' (Karen)

The feelings evoked for the practitioner and child when the child's time in the Nurture Group comes to

an end, indicates the intensity of the close relationship that develops between the practitioner and child

on their journey together.

4.4. Relating the theory to the research questions

The aim of this research was to explore and explain how Nurture Group practitioners make sense of

their relationship with the Nurture Group child. Three research questions were posed:

1. How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of the relationship between the Nurture Group

   practitioner and Nurture Group child?

2. What enables the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and the Nurture Group

   child?

3. What challenges the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and the Nurture

   Group child?

I will now briefly discuss each question, in light of the theory which has been outlined above.

Question 1: How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child?

The theory outlined above, indicates that Nurture Group practitioners understand their relationship with the Nurture Group child, as one which is a close relationship. The relationship is one which is very special and personal, and evokes strong feelings akin to a parental-child relationship. This close relationship develops over time, through a journey which the practitioner and child experience together. The journey is a shared experience, unique to each practitioner-child relationship. The relationship is different to the relationship that a mainstream teacher has with a child.

The practitioner-child relationship is closely linked to a sense of trust, which develops from the practitioner being attuned to the child's needs and putting careful support in place to gently nurture the child's development and wellbeing. For most children, the relationship facilitates the development of their wellbeing and independence.

While practitioners view the relationship as one which is close, they also recognise that the relationship is filled of varying degrees of challenge. Managing the child's emotional needs is particularly challenging, which puts an emotional strain on the practitioner.

Once the child leaves the Nurture Group, the relationship changes, but still evokes strong feelings for both the practitioner and child.

Questions 2 and 3: What enables and challenges the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child.

When considering research questions 2 and 3 in light of my results, I feel that the two questions are somewhat interlinked, and therefore difficult to answer separately. Therefore, I feel that they both need to be discussed together, which demonstrates the interaction between the factors which enable and challenge the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

The contextual factors and categories which fall within the beginning and middle sections of the theory (see Figure 5), all feed into the development of a close relationship. These can be viewed as the enabling factors of the practitioner-child relationship. In particular spending time together, getting to know and understand each other, the practitioner supporting the developmental needs of the child, and trust, all help to enable the relationship.

An aspect of supporting the developmental needs of the child, is containing the child. This is a difficult and challenging process for the practitioner, and is tied into a number of other challenges. These challenges include the child's behaviour being difficult to manage, and no connection being felt between the practitioner and child, both of which can lead to the practitioner feeling unable to facilitate change. Together, these challenges are emotionally draining for the practitioner.

Factors which enable and challenge the relationship exist in all practitioner-child relationships. To an extent, challenges need to exist for the practitioner to be able to respond to and support the emotional needs of the child. Where challenges can be overcome, as best as possible, a close relationship can be formed between the practitioner and child.

4.5. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the results of this grounded theory study, where a theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship emerged. The theory has been described and explained through an analogy of a story, depicting a relationship journey between the practitioner and child. The relationship journey ends with the emergence of a 'close relationship', which is the overarching category of the theory. The theory has been discussed in relation to the three original research questions.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW – Part 2

5.1. Chapter overview

This chapter consists of the second part of the literature review. Part 1 of the literature review (see chapter 2), provided an initial review of research relating to Nurture Group practitioner-child relationships, which helped to justify and inform the current study. Part 2 provides a review of research, based on the results of the current study.

In this chapter, I will review what the literature says about psychological concepts which relate most to my grounded theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship (as outlined in chapter 4), in particular, the psychodynamic concepts of projection and containment. A brief definition of each concept will be provided to help familiarise the reader to the concepts, as understood by the researcher. Towards the end of the chapter, a broad critique of the identified literature will be provided.

I acknowledge that aspects of my theory of the practitioner-child relationship, relate to other psychodynamic concepts and psychological frameworks, in particular, attachment theory. As Nurture Groups are founded in attachment theory (Boxall & Lucas, 2010), it was felt that an exploration of psychodynamic concepts would be useful, to extend the theoretical perspectives that could be applied to this research. Links to attachment theory will be discussed in the final chapter.

5.1. Aim of the literature review

This second literature review seeks to answer the following question:

* What does research say about the concepts of reverie, projection, containment and introjection, in relation to staff working with children and/or young people in schools?

5.2. Definition of the psychodynamic terms

Psychodynamic theory originates from the work of Sigmund Freud, who viewed that the unconscious mind, along with our early interpersonal experiences, shape our internal worlds and our interactions

with the external world (Youell, 2006). Psychoanalysts Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott placed an emphasis on the duality of the parent-infant relationship (Salzberger-Wittenberg, Williams, & Osborne, 1999), aspects of which are later represented in teacher-child relationships, or within the context of this research, the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

Reverie, projection, containment and introjection of the good object

The psychodynamic concepts of reverie, projection, containment, and introjection, relate to the theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, as outlined in chapter 4.

Reverie

Reverie, is a state of mind, where the parent (or practitioner) is attuned to the child's emotional experiences and communications (Bion, 1962). They are able to manage the child's feelings and respond sensitively and in a nourishing way, to minimise the child's distress (Waddell, 2002). This process of reverie enables the child to feel understood and consequently develop self-esteem (Waddell, 2002).

Projection

Projection refers to when the child splits off, and expels their difficult feelings, and 'projects' them into a parent, or other significant figure (Waddell, 2002), as a way of relieving emotional pain (Burgo, 2012). The person receiving the projections may then experience the projected feelings as their own.

Containment

Containment refers to the ability of the parent (or significant other e.g. the practitioner) to hold and manage the child's powerful and difficult emotions (Bion, 1961). It involves the adult being able to make sense of the child's emotions and hold them, without feeling too anxious or overwhelmed themselves. They can then return the feelings back to the child in a digestible and safe manner (Youell, 2006). As a consequence, the child begins to develop feelings of safety and trust towards the adult, and develop the capacity to think for themselves. The need for containment continues into adulthood.

Introjection

Through containment and reverie that is provided from a good enough relationship, an emotional connection develops between the parent and child; the child begins to introject (take in) aspects of the parent (Waddell, 2002). The child develops an internalised representation of the parent's capacity to understand and manage their emotions, and feel safe and secure to explore the world around them.

5.3.   Approach to the literature review

As mentioned, the psychodynamic concepts of reverie, projection, containment, and introjection were viewed to resonate with many aspects of the results outlined in chapter 4. These terms were the focus of the literature search. In April 2017, a full literature search was carried out, searching for articles published since 1969, when Nurture Groups were first established. Initially, the terms *nurture group*, group nurture, nurture class** or *nurture room** AND *reverie, introject*, project** or *contain** were searched in the PEP Archive, PsychINFO and Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection databases. Seven articles were returned (one of which was a duplicate). However, when inclusion criteria were applied (see below), none of these results were found to be relevant.

Since no results were returned when searching Nurture Groups, a decision was made to expand the search, focussing on school settings, rather than Nurture Groups alone. Focussing the search on schools was deemed appropriate since Nurture Groups are school based provisions. Subsequently, the terms *school, education* or *classroom* AND *reverie, introject*, project** and *contain** were entered into the PEP Archive database. The same terms were also applied to PsychINFO, and Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection databases, using the 'subject' field, and full terms of *reverie, introjection*, *projection*, and *containment* (rather than the truncated version marked by *). Because the latter two databases aren't specific to psychodynamic research (as the PEP Archive is), full terms were used, as the truncated terms offered too many irrelevant meanings. In total, 167 results were found. The following inclusion criteria were then applied to identify relevant articles for the literature review:

- The article was based within a UK context

- The article was relevant to a school context, and school staff working with children or young

  people

- The terms reverie, projection, containment and introjection related to the psychodynamic

  concepts, not their other potential meanings

Titles and/or abstracts were read to identify articles which met the inclusion criteria. In some cases, the

full text was read when it was unclear from the abstract, whether inclusion criteria were met. In total,

12 articles were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria, three of which were duplicates, and one of

which as unavailable, leaving eight articles for the literature review. It is important to note that no

relevant articles were found for searches containing the terms *reverie* and *introjection*. Please refer to

Appendix 13 for a summary of articles excluded from the final literature review.

As mentioned in chapter 2, two appraisal tools were drawn upon when critiquing the relevant literature.

Particularly relevant to this chapter, the four principals outlined by Yardley (2000) were used to inform

the literature review. Because many of the papers identified for this part of the literature review are

discursive psychodynamic papers, many of which are case studies, it was felt that Yardley's principles

would be more applicable because of their broad scope, and universal adaptability to any form of

qualitative methodology. Please refer to Appendix 3 for an outline of the four principals, and prompting

questions used. Tables summarising the articles reviewed in this chapter, can also be found in Appendix

14.

When considering how to present the reviewed literature, I looked for common topics or themes which

were conveyed across the literature. It was felt that presenting the literature in themes would help to

convey what the research says about the concepts of reverie, projection, containment, and introjection,

in relation to staff working with children and/or young people in schools. Three topics were identified in

the literature, each of which will now be presented.

5.4.   Reflective space for school staff: Understanding the projections & providing containment

Seven out of the nine articles identified for this literature review, discuss and give insight into the individual child, school staff, and their relationship, via reflective spaces created for staff, facilitated by an outside professional. The concepts of projection and containment are frequently discussed in relation to the content and outcomes of the reflective spaces, primarily;

- Understanding the child through what they project into staff

- Using this understanding to offer containment to the child

- Staff receiving containment through the reflective spaces

Work discussion groups

One form of reflective space discussed in the literature are Work Discussion Groups (WDGs). Jackson (2002) describes WDGs as an opportunity for school staff to develop their observational skills, gain a deeper understanding of what children communicate through their behaviour, and explore the relational dynamic between children and staff in schools. The groups typically consist of a small number of staff who meet regularly, facilitated by someone with knowledge of psychodynamic theory. Jackson (2002) provided an account of a series of WDGs he facilitated as an outside professional in one secondary school, with the purpose of illustrating their impact on staff skills and knowledge of the factors that impact on teaching and learning, behaviour, and staff wellbeing. The school was situated within a context where disadvantage, crime and family breakdown was high within the community, and where a significant number of young people experienced poor mental health and/or were registered as having SEND. Two (and later three) WDGs were set up as part of a wider mental health project, which ran fortnightly, each with eight members of school staff attending.

Jackson (2002) provides a description of how the groups ran, and key themes which commonly arose over a three year period of facilitating the groups. Themes included anxiety towards learning,

relationships between the young people and staff, and underlying emotions expressed by the young people. To support the descriptions, short case examples are provided. This includes case discussions around a young boy on the verge of permanent exclusion, who experienced anxiety towards learning, and a class group whose behaviour was particularly challenging for one teacher to manage. In both these discussions, projection and containment were frequently referenced. For example, in the case of the challenging class, the teacher described several interactions between herself and the class, where their behaviour led to her feeling humiliated and deskilled. Through discussion and analysis of these feelings, the group developed an understanding that the teacher's feelings reflected the classes own collective feelings of humiliation and frustration regarding their own ability and learning. Their own feelings had been projected into the teacher. The author goes on to describe that this new understanding led towards the group identifying potential ways for the teacher to help contain the projections. Jackson (2002) concludes that the WDGs were a powerful method for staff to gain insight into young people's internal experiences, through their interactions with the young people and the feelings they projected. In return, this provided a space for staff to consider ways of responding to young people in ways which offered containment, as well as containing the staff members own feelings of persecution.

This article offers valuable insight into the links between unconscious emotions, relationships, teaching and learning, and behaviour, from an analytical perceptive. The brief case discussions provide a degree of evidence to support the theoretical links made, and support the readers understanding of the concepts of projection and containment. While no follow-up of the case discussions are provided to evidence the long term impact of the WDGs, Jackson (2002) does offer a crude evaluation of the WDG by reporting on questionnaires completed by staff who participated in the groups. The results indicated that 92% of staff felt they had a greater understanding of pupil behaviour; 88% believed their skills in responding to challenging behaviour had improved; 88% found the groups a useful forum to share their experiences; and 72% described a reduction in stress following discussion of a concern. This article is valuable as it highlights how children often project their difficult feelings into school staff, which can be

challenging and uncomfortable to receive. A reflective space, such as a WDG, can enable school staff to notice and develop an understanding of children's projections, by reflecting on their interactions with the young people they work with. Awareness of the child's projections offers insight into the child's underlying experiences and needs, as well as providing containment to the staff, in their roles in school.

Projection and containment in relation to staff working with children/young people in schools, are further discussed in a second article which describes the use of WDGs (McLoughlin, 2010). In this article, the author provides a detailed case study of a 15 year old boy called Tyrone, who attended a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The article focuses on the involvement of a community CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) team, who created levels of containment for Tyrone and the network around him. This was provided through direct therapeutic work with Tyrone, a parent session for his mother, a WDG with the PRU staff, and network meetings. Of particular interest to this aspect of the literature review, is the links to containment and projection via the WDG set up for staff.

Akin to Jackson (2002), the WDG was facilitated by outside professionals. The WDG described was one of a series of regular WDGs run in the school. Similarly to Jackson (2002), discussions enabled staff to share their feelings when working with Tyrone, which included feeling inadequate and angry. The group began to consider whether these feelings reflected Tyrone's feelings of being inadequate, confused and scared (projections). Further discussion led to the group developing a more compassionate view of Tyrone, which McLoughlin (2010) described later led to improved relationships between Tyrone and staff, and a new found ability for Tyrone to focus on his learning. McLoughlin (2010) later relates the process and outcome of the WDG as relating to the concepts of projection and containment, whereby staff developed a capacity to take in and make sense of Tyrone's projections, and then respond in a way which helped to calm or contain his difficult feelings. The author also concludes that the presence of the reflective space of the WDG provided a containing space for the staff themselves.

This study highlights that containment, and an awareness of containment, is useful for both staff and young people, particularly in a setting which caters for a very vulnerable, and often challenging

population. While the article has limitations, due to the fact that insight from a single case study cannot be more widely generalised, it does provide a detailed analytical description, from which further research can explore projection, containment and the value of WDGs in greater detail, especially for populations of vulnerable children and/or young people.

Two further studies have also provided accounts of the use of WDGs as reflective spaces for school staff, where projection and containment are a focus of discussion (Emanuel, 1999; Maliphant & Horner, 2016). Emanuel (1999) describes her work within a special school for children aged 3-18 years, with complex needs, where she facilitated WDGs with staff to support their understanding of children's behaviour. Two short case studies are discussed to exemplify the ongoing nature and impact of the WDGs, which mirror the content of Jackson (2002) and McLoughlin (2010). One case study involved reflecting on a 13 year old, whose interactions with staff often led to staff feeling frustrated and angry. Group discussions led towards considering these feelings as the child's own projections, and potentially seeking to be understood by an attuned adult. This paper has particular value, as it gives insight into the inner world and projections of children with complex needs e.g. autism and developmental delay. It highlights that children with learning needs may not have the skills to manage their own feelings. Instead they project them into school staff in the hope that they will manage their feelings for them. This paper highlights how children communicate and offload their feelings through their interactions with adults in school.

Maliphant and Horner (2016) also describe the use of WDGs with lunchtime supervisors and listening mentors in an inner London primary school, evidencing their impact through a short case study. The authors describe a WDG where supervisors were able to think about and understand one particular child's fears and interpersonal communication with others. This enabled them to thoughtfully alter the way they interacted with the child to contain his anxiety, and therefore meet his needs, leading to positive change.

Consultation with school staff

The literature also gives accounts of consultations with school staff, where reflective spaces are provided for staff to consider projection and containment in relation to the children they work with, and through this act, receive containment themselves. Both Emanuel (1999) and Maliphant and Horner (2016) discuss the use of consultation with staff, alongside the earlier described WDGs. Emanuel (1999) describes a series of consultations with members of the school's senior leadership team. The aim of the consultations were for senior leadership to consider how they could best support teachers, who in turn would be able to support the children and young people. The author describes scenarios which the management team brought to the consultations, and the reflections which were shared, which often related to the projections that children put into staff, leading them to feel inadequate and deskilled. Further reflections are described around the possible structures which could be provided in the school, to offer staff containment from the children's projections.

Maliphant and Horner (2016), both therapists working in a primary school, also describe the brief use of consultation with school staff, in relation to therapeutic work they were carrying out with children. They give one example of regular consultations with a teacher, which offered a space to reflect on a group of children, identifying their strengths, and highlighting ways the teacher could support the children further. A detailed account of the consultations wasn't given, nor whether projection or containment were discussed with the teacher. However, the authors argue that the reflective space acted as a form of containment for the teacher, which subsequently enabled her to better contain the children. Brief comment is given to the positive impact these consultations had on the teacher's relationship with the children and their learning, which indicates that the containment offered had a positive impact for the teacher and the children she worked with. This, along with the earlier described WDGs, highlights the value of having containing structures in place for school staff, who consequently can offer containment to children. This relates to what Bion (1962) described as 'container-contained.'

Two further papers also give reference to reflective spaces being created via consultation (Mawson, 1986; Music & Hall, 2008), where projection and containment are discussed in relation to staff working with children. However, the focus of these papers is a narrative and analytical account of therapeutic work the authors carried out with individual children or young people in schools, with only brief consultation with school staff as part of this work.

Greenwood (2002) provide more of a theoretical paper, outlining the possible meaning of children's communications, and the value of providing safe, containing spaces, where children can feel emotionally contained by an adult within school. They also discuss the importance of setting up reflective structures for school staff to think about, process, and tolerate children's emotional experiences and projections. Similarly to WDGs, they suggest that this form of reflection enables staff to respond to children in a helpful way, providing emotional containment. The author helpfully cites several theoretical papers to support her claims, and describes that she has regularly provided consultation to school staff to help them consider projection and containment in their work. However, the author doesn't provide any case examples to back up her arguments.

Overall, the articles discussed so far indicate that children in schools often project their unwanted feelings into staff. This can lead staff to experiencing difficult emotions, which when reflected upon, can offer insight into the child's inner world. This then enables school staff to adapt how they relate to the child, or for structures to be set up, which offer the children emotional containment. These reflective spaces (whether through consultation or in a WDG format), also serve as a containing space for staff themselves.

5.5.   Containing structures built around the child

A very small amount of the literature considers containment in relation to the development of structures or interventions which offer containment for the child (Maliphant & Horner, 2016; Waters, 2002).

As well as offering reflective spaces for school staff, Maliphant and Horner (2016) provide evidence of structures that they supported school staff to set up, which had the potential to provide containing support for children across the school. The authors provided training to selected members of staff to become listening mentors. 'Listening posts' were set up across the school, where children could request to talk to a mentor for 10 minutes. In addition, small lunchtime groups were set up by the mentors and teaching assistants, for children who found the playground overwhelming. Maliphant and Horner give brief case examples of children who accessed both structures, and the positive impact they had on the children's social and emotional wellbeing. They conclude that these structures communicated to the children that they were being thought about and understood, which provided a feeling of containment. While indicating the positive impact of containing structures being provided by staff to the children, stronger conclusions and understanding of the containment provided through these interactions, could have been made if further evidence was gathered from the staff and children who were directly involved.

Waters (2002) describes a targeted group intervention she developed and set up in the school she worked in, which aimed to support 9-11 year old children's SEMH and literacy needs. The intervention used metaphor for children to project their feelings into, via story writing. Waters (2002) provides a narrative account of the intervention and its impact, through a case study of a 10 year old selective mute, who had experienced significant trauma. She provides examples and interpretations of the stories the child wrote, which included the child projecting her previous experiences of trauma and feelings of pain into her stories. Waters (2002) describes the changes she noticed in the child over the course of the intervention, which included an increase in confidence, language and communication skills, and attainment in literacy. She argues that the intervention offered a containing, safe space for the child to project her feelings. The safe space was offered through the act of story writing, and having an attuned adult who was available to listen and reflect back her feelings.

Further evidence of the outcomes of this intervention would have been useful to more thoroughly evidence its impact. Furthermore, the exact structure, content and length of the group sessions weren't clearly described, which would be necessary to gain a clearer picture of the nature of the containment that the author claims. However, this study provides a clear indication that the intervention did provide a useful containing space for the child, allowing her to safely project out her past experiences.

Together, these two studies highlight how children can receive containment in schools, through safe structures and thoughtful interactions with staff, which allow for children to project out their difficult feelings and feel understood.

5.6.   Networks of containment

As a final theme which arose in the review of the available literature, two studies discuss the importance of containing networks being set up around individual children (McLoughlin, 2010; Music & Hall, 2008). In their therapeutic work with a seven year old child, Music and Hall (2008) discussed the value of holding regular network meetings with school staff and the child's parents, to develop a shared understanding of the child's needs and methods of further support. This, the authors argue, enabled school staff to offer greater containment to the child through their interactions, and the network to feel held or contained by the shared approach. McLoughlin (2010) provides a similar account of the containing networks they set up around 15 year old Tyrone, where school staff and Tyrone's mother were able to express their views and perspectives, collaboratively plan next steps, and build positive relationships. They argued that this network offered a containing forum, which contributed to the PRU staffs further work with Tyrone.

These containing networks highlight the value of thinking about and developing an understanding of a vulnerable child/young person's individual needs, which enables thought to be given regarding how to support these needs. The outcome of this is adults being able to offer containment to the child, and contain themselves in the process.

5.7. Broad critique of the literature

It is important to highlight the challenges or flaws which exist within the literature that has been discussed in this chapter. First and foremost, all articles described and cases discussed, are written from the respective authors own perspectives. The authors themselves provided data through their own narrative accounts and reflections, rather than seeking the views of the staff, children and young people who were the focus of the papers. This may be due to the style in which psychodynamic papers are traditionally written. The only exception to this was Jackson (2002), who provided some limited evidence from questionnaires with staff. It would be interesting for further research to discuss projection and containment from data gathered from the participants themselves.

In addition, while the articles reviewed each made reference to theoretical papers and concepts to support their arguments, very little applied research was discussed. Some research around the application of WDGs was mentioned (e.g. Jackson, 2002), but this was very brief and not often relevant to the school context. This highlights a limitation in the type of papers discussed (and the wider psychodynamic literature), which are more discursive in nature.

5.8. Chapter summary

This chapter set out to answer the question, *what does research say about the concepts of reverie, projection, containment and introjection, in relation to staff working with children and/or young people in schools?* No literature relating to reverie and introjection was identified. The concepts of projection and containment have therefore been the focus of this review.

The available literature indicates the value of providing containment at multiple levels; at the level of the individual child, school staff and the network around the child. This relates to Winnicott's (1965) notion of systems of containment, or circles of containment as described by McLoughlin (2010). The literature has indicated that children often project their difficult and unwanted feelings into school staff. Whilst challenging for staff, these projections communicate valuable insight into the child's internal world, which supports greater understanding of the child. In turn, school staff can adapt the way they

relate to the child, or structures of support that are available, to offer containment to the child and meet their needs. The cohorts of children discussed in the literature, are predominantly highly vulnerable children or young people, who have been experiencing significant SEMH needs. The concepts of projection and containment discussed in this literature review, in relation to school staff working with children in schools, sit within the context of this vulnerable population of children. Links could be drawn between the characteristics of these cohorts, and children who access Nurture Groups.

Research describing the use of reflective spaces, offers the greatest insight into projection and containment in relation to staff working with children in schools. The reflective spaces have been described as useful forums for staff to make sense of children's projections, and consequently provide containment as a format for supporting the children's emotional needs. The literature also highlights that these reflective spaces, as well as the development of networks around a child, offer containment to school staff who work with vulnerable children/young people. Finally, the literature also indicates how certain interventions or structures provided in schools, provide containing spaces for children to safely project their feelings and experiences, and feel more emotionally secure and contained.

While the literature gives insight into projection and containment in relation to staff working with children in schools, the availability of the literature is limited, and hasn't yet explored these concepts from the perspectives of children or school staff. Furthermore, the lack of literature into reverie and introjection within the school context, highlights a gap in the research.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Chapter overview

This chapter will review and discuss the findings of this research into the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, making links to relevant psychological theory; mainly psychodynamic theory and attachment theory. The findings will also be discussed in relation to the literature presented in chapters 2 and 5. Each category of the grounded theory will be presented in turn, before the research questions are addressed and answered.

Implications for results of this research to Nurture Group practitioners, LA stakeholders, and the research field will be discussed, with consideration given to the transferability of the findings. Implications for EP practice will also be given. Reflections on the trustworthiness and limitations of the study will be provided, before discussing areas of further research. This chapter will end with a brief overview of how the findings of this research will be disseminated.

6.2. Discussion of results

This research set out to explore and explain the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child, by asking how Nurture Group practitioners make sense of the relationship. The research sought to identify the factors which enable and/or facilitate the relationship, revealing what a successful relationship looks and feels like, and how the relationship develops. Insight into the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child was gained through the perspectives of five Nurture Group practitioners working in three KS1 Nurture Groups, where a classic 'Boxall' Nurture Group model (Bennathan & Boxall, 2000) was followed.

Three research questions were posed:

1. How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child?

2. What enables the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child?

3. What challenges the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child?

Through a grounded theory method of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), a theory of the practitioner-child relationship emerged. The theory describes and explains a relationship journey between the practitioner and child, which leads towards the development of a 'close relationship'. The theory is comprised of four interlinked categories; 'beginnings', 'supporting the child's development', 'trust', and 'challenges', which feed into the final overarching category of a 'close relationship'. The theory reflects that of a story book, where there is a clear beginning, middle and end to the relationship journey, with conflict or challenge experienced along the way. The story of the Nurture Group practitioner-child journey is used to help the reader make sense of the theory. This story analogy will be referenced in the following discussion to give further meaning to the results.

6.2.1. Beginnings

'Beginnings' is the first of the key categories within the theory of the practitioner-child relationship, representing the early part of the relationship journey. Beginnings comprise of the child 'transitioning into the Nurture Group', and the practitioner and child 'spending time together' and starting to 'get to know and understand each other'.

As the child 'transitions into the Nurture Group', great feelings of anxiety and uncertainty are experienced by both the practitioner and child. As described by Youell (2006), all beginnings evoke feelings of anxiety of the unknown. Not only do children experience feelings of anxiety when facing beginnings; teachers also experience feelings of dread and anxiety when receiving a new class (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1999), akin to the practitioner receiving a new child or group of children into the Nurture Group. The Nurture Group setting is unfamiliar to the child, and both the practitioner and child know little of what to expect from each other. The results of the grounded theory describe a

structured environment, with boundaries and the presence of reliable, consistent adults. Salzberger-Wittenberg et al. (1999) describe the importance of boundaries and consistency to help children to feel safe and secure during new transitions.

As the practitioner and child 'spend time together', the practitioner offers attention to the child. Previous research into Nurture Groups has indicated the value of the practitioner being attentive to the child (Kourmoulaki, 2013; Pyle & Rae, 2015). Through the time spent together, and the attention offered by the practitioner, the practitioner and child begin to 'get to know and understand each other', which helps to reduce the initial feelings of anxiety. Of particular importance is the practitioner developing an understanding of what the child may be communicating through their behaviour, and their needs and internal world.

> *'We get to know their personalities, get to know triggers to their behaviour, their sort of patterns, things that might set them off.' (Karen).*

Understanding what the child is communicating through their behaviour is one of the six principles of nurture (see Appendix 15) outlined by the Nurture Group Network (Lucas, Insley, & Buckland, 2006). By observing, paying attention to, and reflecting on the child's verbal and non-verbal communications, the practitioner can develop an understanding of the child's needs and emotional experiences. This attunement to the child fits with the psychodynamic concept of reverie. As described in chapter 5, reverie is the capacity for a caregiver or significant adult e.g. a Nurture Group practitioner, to be sensitive and attuned to the child's emotional experiences and communications (Bion, 1962). This attunement provides insight into the child, helping the adult to develop an understanding of the child and their needs e.g. how the child views themselves, or what causes the child to feel scared or upset. Previous research into school staff interactions with children and young people has indicated the importance of adults being able to notice and make sense of what children communicate through their behaviour, to develop a greater understanding of the child and their needs (e.g. Emanuel, 1999). Being attuned and sensitive to the child's needs has also been highlighted in previous research, as a key characteristic of the Nurture Group practitioner (Kourmoulaki, 2013). Kourmoulaki (2013) identified that

Nurture Group practitioners offered attention to the child, were attuned to their needs, and took time to get to know the child so they could sensitively respond to their needs. However, what makes the findings of the current research different to that of Kourmoulaki (2013), is the linking of each of these factors together. The current research shows how the attention the practitioner gives to the child, enables the practitioner to get to know the child, and therefore develop an attuned understanding of the child's needs and internal world, and subsequently identify how to support the needs of the child. The current research also places a greater emphasis on the importance of *understanding* the child, not just getting to know them, highlighting the depth of insight the practitioner gains about the child.

6.2.2.   Supporting the child's development

The second key category within the theory of the practitioner-child relationship, is 'supporting the child's development'. This category represents the part of the story whereby the practitioner begins to provide nourishment to the child to extend their development and wellbeing. 'Supporting the child's development' consists of 'meeting the child's needs', enabling the 'child to feel noticed', and 'containing the child'.

As a result of the practitioner getting to know and understand the child, the practitioner is able to sensitively respond to and support the emotional needs of the child, and plan learning activities to suit their level of social and emotional development. This links to another of the nurture principles (Lucas et al., 2006); the importance of understanding the child developmentally.

> *'I usually plan individually to meet the child's need. So I plan according to the child's ability or social need, or emotional need.' (Antonia)*

Previous research has highlighted that Nurture Group children have their needs met through their relationship with the practitioner (Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013), although detail of how this is done is limited. The current research extends findings from past research to indicate that children's needs are met by, for example, the practitioner setting up new opportunities and experiences for the child, allowing the child a voice, and giving the child small responsibilities.

The child also begins to feel noticed and listened to. Previous Nurture Group research has highlighted a similar finding (Garner & Thomas, 2011; Pyle & Rae, 2015). The current research highlights how being noticed and listened to, is part of the practitioner supporting the child's development.

> 'They do know that what they've told you, we haven't forgotten…they know that you do, you do care about what they say.'(Claire)

Of particular significance to 'supporting the child's development' is the sub-category of 'containing the child'. This sub-category explains that the practitioner has the capacity to recognise and understand the child's feelings (which are often painful and scary), and 'hold' or manage these feelings before helping the child to understand their feelings and/or emotional experiences. This sub-category was named 'containing the child' because of the similarity to the psychodynamic concept of containment. Containment refers to the capacity for a person to notice and understand another's powerful and difficult emotions, and respond to these emotions in a way which helps to reduce that person's pain and distress (Bion, 1962). An adult (such as a nurture practitioner) can help to contain a child by taking in, making sense of, and holding a child's difficult feelings, and then helping the child to safely understand their feelings (Youell, 2006). Containment can be linked to reverie (Waddell, 2002), where the emotional attunement of the practitioner enables them to make sense of and tolerate the child's emotional experiences, and provide a containing response.

Greenwood (2002) describes the importance of school staff being containers for children who have experienced trauma or difficult early nurturing experiences. They highlight that some children require 'emotional holding' by an adult, to feel safe and reduce feelings of anxiety. The adult must be able to think about, process and tolerate the child's experiences. Maliphant and Horner (2016) indicate the value of containing spaces and structures being available in schools to help manage children's emotional experiences. The theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship suggests that nurture practitioners support the development of the child by providing containment for the child.

> 'If you don't understand how they're feeling, then you can't really help them move away from what they're thinking.' (Sofia)

One of the contextual factors of the theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, is the presence of reliable, consistent adults, who are emotionally and physically available. The reliability, consistency and availability of the practitioner is likely to supplement their capacity to offer containment to the child. This research therefore adds to previous studies that have also highlighted the value of Nurture Group practitioners being available, and consistent in their approach (Griffiths et al., 2014; Kourmoulaki, 2013).

6.2.3. Trust

Through the act of containment, a child can begin to develop feelings of trust and safety in an adult (Youell, 2006). Containment and reverie also help the child to feel understood by the adult, enabling the child to develop self-esteem and feelings of success (Waddell, 2002). The theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship outlines that through 'supporting the child's development', where the child is contained, has their needs met, and feels noticed, 'trust' develops within the relationship.

The category of 'trust' is key to the development of the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child, which builds over time. This category comprises of the child feeling comfortable and safe around the practitioner, where they feel able to open up and share more about themselves, and be understood. The child recognises the support and consistency that the practitioner provides, enabling them to feel safe enough to learn from the practitioner. These feelings of safety and trust enable the child to confide in the practitioner, and share more about their experiences and anxieties. In relation to the concept of containment (Bion, 1962), the child safely recognises that the practitioner understands them and can provide containment, and thus will minimise their anxieties and fears. Through containment, the child is offered emotional security, setting up conditions for the child to learn (Bion, 1961). In reference to the current research, as the Nurture Group child shares more about themselves with the practitioner, the practitioner develops deeper knowledge and understanding of the child.

Previous research carried out into Nurture Groups has highlighted the presence of trust within the Nurture Group relationship. Griffiths et al. (2014) and Chiappella (2015) found that trust was a key theme within relationships between young people themselves, and between practitioners and young people. More specifically, Kourmoulaki (2013) identified trusting relationships to develop between the Nurture Group practitioner and child over time. Furthermore, Kourmoulaki identified that the presence of trust within the Nurture Group enabled the young people to share their vulnerabilities and thoughts more often. This strongly supports the results of this current study, where trust was identified as a key aspect of the practitioner-child relationship, enabling the child to share more of their personal self with the nurture practitioner. Similarities between the current study and Kourmoulaki (2013) can also be seen, in terms of trust between the practitioner and child developing over time.

6.2.4. Challenges

The grounded theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, also indicates a number of challenges which can be experienced through the relationship journey. 'Challenges' represent the fourth category within the theory. Challenges disrupt the relationship journey between the practitioner and child, and can cause the relationship to venture onto treacherous paths. In the drawing in Appendix 12, challenges are represented by the practitioner and child entering a dark forest, where they become separated and lose their way, or head up a steep, rocky volcano, where the relationship feels unpredictable and unsafe. Through the journey, the practitioner becomes heavy with the weight of supporting the child, and can struggle to know what path to take next. Consequently the practitioner seeks support for themselves. In the research interviews, accounts of the challenges were very significant and emotive for the participants.

Two types of challenges described within the theory, refer to the child's behaviour and how the practitioner and child relate to one another. For some relationships, the practitioner may struggle to form a 'connection with the child'. The child seems to push the practitioner away, and emotionally shut themselves off.

'It was quite hard to like build that bond with her.' (Nikki)

For other relationships, the child's behaviour can feel challenging. The child may harm others, misbehave, or become involved in arguments, all of which can lead to the relationship feeling unsafe and unpredictable.

'He was quite challeng…it was his behaviour that was quite challenging.'(Karen)

These differences in the way the child presents and relates to the practitioner could be understood in terms of different forms of attachment patterns and relationships.

Attachment theory outlines how the relationship between a child and their caregiver (or significant other) shapes how the child perceives and relates to the world around them, and the way they view and understand themselves (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). A child's attachment acts as a blueprint for further relationships across the lifespan and in different social contexts (Crittenden, 2006), including the child's relationship with adults in schools (Geddes, 2006). Research has indicated different patterns or styles of attachment between a child and an attachment figure (Ainsworth, Wall, Waters, & Blehar, 1978; Geddes, 2003, 2005). Ainsworth et al. (1978) describes three different types of insecure attachment styles; insecure ambivalent, insecure avoidant and disorganised. For a child with an insecure avoidant attachment style, they often avoid contact with an attachment figure, especially when experiencing feelings of anxiety (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Research by Geddes (2005) has indicated that within a school context, a child with an insecure avoidant attachment style will be sensitive to contact with a teacher, avoiding support from an adult, which can lead to the adult feeling ignored or pushed away.

This insecure avoidant attachment style mirrors the lack of connection that Nurture Group practitioners experience in some relationships with nurture children. Therefore the type of relationship challenge experienced, could be understood in terms of the style of attachment that the child holds.

When the practitioner experiences little connection with the child, or the child's behaviour feels challenging, this impacts on the practitioner feeling able to contain the child, support their

development, and 'facilitate change'. This can cause the practitioner to feel frustrated and anxious, and full of doubt of not being good enough.

> *'You start to get a bit, anxious about how you're going to deal with it. Or you deal with it and then think afterwards, 'ah that wasn't the right thing to do.' (Karen)*

These feelings experienced by the practitioner relate to the psychodynamic concept of projection. Projection is a form of communication, where a person transfers their unbearable feelings into another as a way of relieving their own emotional load (Burgo, 2012). The person who receives the projections can feel attacked, and experience the projected feelings as their own. In relation to the challenges experienced within the practitioner-child relationship, the practitioners' feelings of anxiety, frustration and not being good enough may in fact be the child's own feelings, which they have projected into the practitioner. School based research has highlighted that children often project their unbearable, unwanted feelings into staff (Emanuel, 1999; Jackson, 2002; McLoughlin, 2010). Jackson (2002) gives an account of a series of WDGs with school staff, where staff were able to develop an understanding of children's emotional experiences and internal worlds, by reflecting on the projections they received from the children. McLoughlin (2010) describes working with school staff who felt angry and inadequate when working with a particular child. Upon reflection, these feelings were understood as being the child's own projections, which had been absorbed by the staff. This supports the experiences of the Nurture Group practitioner, who can feel anxious, frustrated, and not good enough to facilitate change for the child. As one participant aptly described,

> *'I'm taking on their problems as well.' (Sofia)*

Projection could also be used to give further meaning to times when the child's behaviour feels challenging to the practitioner. As mentioned, challenging behaviour can lead to the relationship feeling unsafe and unpredictable. These feelings could represent the child's own feelings of the world around them being unsafe and unpredictable. Children who experience the world as unsafe and unpredictable are likely to hold an insecure attachment style (Geddes, 2006). These feelings are likely to be too painful for the child to manage on their own, so they project them into the practitioner.

This research importantly highlights the nature of challenges which exist in the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, which previous research (as outlined in chapter 2), doesn't provide.

While challenges in the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child can lead to the practitioner feeling 'unable to facilitate change', and therefore question their approach to supporting the child, this can helpfully prompt the practitioner to seek greater understanding of the child. Participants in this study often described taking the time to reflect on what the child might be communicating through their behaviour. Reflecting on a child's communications was highlighted in chapter 5 as important, to develop greater insight into the child's internal world, and use this insight to identify ways to support the child further (Jackson, 2002; Maliphant & Horner, 2016). The current research indicates that reflecting on a child's communications is a helpful method for the practitioner, to develop greater understanding of the child, and manage the challenges they face.

The challenges within the practitioner-child relationship, contribute to a significant 'emotionally draining' experience for the Nurture Group practitioner. This emotionally draining experience is a consequence of the practitioner managing 'challenging behaviour', feeling 'unable to facilitate change', worrying about the child's welfare, and 'containing the child'. Within the story of the practitioner-child relationship, the emotional strain on the practitioner is represented as the practitioner's own backpack becoming heavier as they carry more of the emotional load of the child. The practitioner acts as a container for the child's difficult feelings, or projections. Participants frequently used strong emotion carrying words, such as *stressed*, *worried*, *frustrated*, and *overwhelmed*. From a psychodynamic theoretical perspective, these feelings represent the children's own feelings, projected into the practitioner, who becomes a container for their unwanted, unbearable feelings (Bion, 1962). Participants gave very powerful descriptions of the emotional strain that the practitioner-child relationship can have, which was further emphasised through their non-verbal communications. Their challenging emotional experiences could be felt very strongly within the interview room.

Some earlier Nurture Group research (Birch, 2016; Kourmoulaki, 2013) has indicated the emotional toll for the practitioner when working with the Nurture Group child. Birch (2016) identified that the emotional strain of the role was a particular challenge for Nurture Group staff, supporting the results of this current study. Nurture Group practitioners interviewed by Birch (2016), described difficulties in 'switching off' at the end of the day. Participants in this current research described similar experiences.

'I used to leave from work and go home, and keep thinking and thinking about it.' (Sofia)

Other literature, as mentioned in chapter 5, discusses the emotional challenges that school staff experience as a result of projections they receive from children and young people they work with (e.g. Jackson, 2002). However, the current research gives a more detailed and powerful description of the emotional experience of working with a vulnerable child. The current research also offers a detailed insight into the emotional experience of working within a Nurture Group setting, which previous research into Nurture Groups hasn't provided. Because this research focussed specifically on the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child, detailed exploration of these challenges could be gained. This research offers detail about the challenges and nature of the emotional strain held by practitioners, whereas previous research has simply indicated the emotional challenge (Birch, 2016), without providing further exploration or insight into these experiences.

Related to the relationship being 'emotionally draining', is a sub-category of 'containing the containers'. The theory indicates the importance of practitioners (the containers) being contained themselves. Participants highlighted the necessity of seeking and receiving support for themselves, so they could continue to carry the child's emotional load, along the journey together. The practitioner seeks and receives support through the second Nurture Group practitioner, from wider staff in school, and via LA training and peer networks. This support provides a space for practitioners to off-load, discuss challenges and worries, and acknowledge their strengths in being able to meet nurture children's needs. In particular, the LA networks and training were identified as important for practitioners to reflect on their work, and to identify that they are good enough, despite the constant uncomfortable feelings they

experience in the role. One participant described the benefit of having an EP to consult with, providing reassurance that they have the skills to go on supporting a child.

Bion (1985) discussed the notion of *container-contained*, whereby for an adult to provide containment to a child, they must themselves feel emotionally secure (contained). In reference to the current research, the notion of container-contained can be viewed in light of the practitioner-child relationship, where the practitioner must feel contained themselves, to continue to provide emotional security to the Nurture Group child, and therefore support the child's development.

Research by Birch (2016) and Kourmoulaki (2013) has highlighted that Nurture Group practitioners value the support they receive from each other, wider school staff, and their school EP, complementing the sub-category of 'containing the containers'. The literature in chapter 5, also highlights the importance for school staff to receive containment when working with vulnerable or challenging children. For example, McLoughlin (2010) discussed the importance of building concentric circles of containment around a child, where structures were available for school staff to receive containment, in order to provide containment to the child. These structures provided reflective spaces for staff to develop an understanding and awareness of the projections they received from the child, and in doing so, helped the staff to remove the persecutory feelings away from themselves, and feel supported by one another. This is reflected in the current research, which highlights the importance of practitioners receiving or seeking containment from each other, wider school staff, and LA training and networks, and subsequently be in a position to provide containment to the Nurture Group child. This research provides strong evidence for the importance and value of containing the nurture practitioner.

6.2.5. A close relationship

The final, overarching category of the Nurture Group practitioner-child theory, is the 'close relationship' which develops between the practitioner and child, which represents the end of the relationship journey. The previously discussed categories are connected together over time, leading to the development of this 'close relationship'. Participants often used the terms *special*, a *connection,* and

close, to describe the relationship that they develop with the child. Previous studies have also described the practitioner-child relationship as one which is *close* (Balisteri, 2016; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013). This research highlights that the close relationship is one where the practitioner and child experience a shared journey over time, which is unique to each and every relationship. The current research is the first to highlight a uniqueness of each practitioner-child relationship. This relationship is closer in nature, and different, to the type of relationship formed between a mainstream class teacher and child. This is emphasised further by Chiappella (2015), who argued that the practitioner-child relationship contains greater sensitivity and feelings of being cared for than a teacher-child relationship.

The 'close relationship' resembles that of a parent-child relationship. The child experiences feelings of comfort, safety, and being cared for by the practitioner, just as a child may feel towards their parent. The practitioner seeks to protect the child, contain their anxieties and fears, and support their development, as a parent would to their child.

> *'We've got to keep them safe.' (Claire)*

Past research has also highlighted similar experiences between Nurture Group practitioners and children, across primary and secondary Nurture Group settings, with children experiencing feelings of security and protection (Balisteri, 2016; Garner & Thomas, 2011), and where the practitioner offers care and an emotional connection to the child (Kourmoulaki, 2013). In the current research, the practitioner and child's experience of a parent-child relationship is akin to a secure attachment relationship (Bowlby, 1969), where the practitioner provides reliable and sensitive emotional security, becoming a 'safe base' for the child. The provision of a safe base is another of the six principles of nurture (Lucas et al., 2006).

As a result of the 'close relationship' which develops between the practitioner and child, positive outcomes emerge (for the most part) for the child, including the development of the child's SEMH. The child also begins to be less reliant on the Nurture Group practitioner, developing a sense of independence in managing situations and relationships on their own.

> *'The more you play with them, they gain the confidence, the social skills to play with other children. And it's such a job. For me it's such a joy when they take over.'* (Antonia)

This further relates to the development of a secure attachment relationship between the practitioner and child, where the child develops an internalised sense of security to venture away from the safe base of the practitioner (Youell, 2006). This internalised representation of the practitioner links to the psychodynamic concept of introjection. Waddell (2002) explains that as an emotional connection develops between a caregiver and child, the child begins to take in, or introject aspects of the caregiver. Where a child had received emotional containment and reverie from the caregiver, they develop an internalised representation of the caregiver's capacity to understand and manage their emotions, and feel safe to explore the world around them. In respect to the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, the child is able to figuratively hold on to the experience of the practitioner being sensitively attuned to the child's needs and emotional world, and providing emotional containment. As one practitioner commented,

> *'There's a part of you that going off with them,'* (Claire)

which suggests that the child holds something of the practitioner within them, allowing them to feel safe to be independent, and feel confidence and esteem in themselves. The child's interactions with the practitioner throughout the relationship journey positively shapes the way the child views and understands themselves, supporting the child's social and emotional development.

Previous studies have also made links between the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship and positive development of the child's SEMH (Garner & Thomas, 2011; Pyle & Rae, 2015). In particular, the results of the current study, are similar to that of Garner and Thomas (2011), who indicated that the relationship between the practitioner and child fostered greater independence for the child, self-esteem and wellbeing. However, the current study indicates what it is about the relationship which leads to these outcomes, including the development of trust, and the sensitive, attuned support that the practitioner offers to the child. This research also indicates that for relationships where challenges have been particularly strong, the outcomes for the child may not be as plentiful.

As with any school based adult-child relationship, there is an ending to the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, marking the final point in the practitioner-child journey. Endings are recognised as evoking conflicting emotions, representing growth and development, as well as loss (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1999; Youell, 2006). Participants described the ending of the practitioner-child relationship to be painful, evoking strong feelings for the practitioner and child. For the practitioner, they experience mixed feelings; maintaining feelings of parental responsibility, seeking to continue to protect the child and wishing to keep a degree of closeness, yet also wishing for the child's independence. The practitioner experiences feelings of loss, which teachers have previously been described as experiencing, following the development of an attachment relationship (Salzberger-Wittenberg et al., 1999). Most relationships survive beyond the Nurture Group, although in a different form. The child occasionally returns to the safe base of the practitioner and nurture room, as if seeking containment and reassurance. Some children choose to cut themselves off from the practitioner, possibly as a way of dealing with the loss. These strong feelings which the ending evokes, indicates the emotional strength of the close relationship that develops between the Nurture Group practitioner and child along their journey together. This research strongly highlights just how powerful the relationship is between the practitioner and child.

6.3.   Answering the research questions

Question 1: How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child?

The theory described in this study, highlights that Nurture Group practitioners view the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child as a 'close relationship'. The relationship evokes strong feelings for both the practitioner and child, similar to the feelings experienced within a parent-child relationship. The child feels a sense of comfort and safety in the practitioner, who is attuned to their needs. The practitioner feels a need to protect the child, and has a sense of pride in the child's achievements. Each relationship is unique, personal and special, and experienced as a shared journey

over time. The development of this close relationship can be understood in terms of a secure attachment relationship, where the practitioner offers a safe base for the child, providing reliable and sensitive emotional security. The child introjects, or internalises the emotional security and containment the practitioner provides, supporting the development of the child's wellbeing and independence.

The close relationship between the practitioner and child develops through the careful attunement of the practitioner to the child's needs (reverie), and providing containment against the child's anxieties and fears. This in turn, supports the development of trust in the relationship between the practitioner and child, leading to the emergence of a close relationship.

Whilst practitioners view the relationship as one which is close, they also recognise that challenges exist within the relationship. These challenges reflect the child's attachment patterns, and the anxieties and fears they project into the practitioner, who continually tries to provide containment, and meet the child's needs. The challenges within this close relationship can be emotionally draining for the practitioner.

Questions 2 and 3: What enables and challenges the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and Nurture Group child?

The results which emerged in this study, suggest that research questions 2 and 3 are interlinked. They will therefore be discussed together.

The contextual factors, and key categories which fall within the beginning and middle sections of the theory of the practitioner-child relationship, lead towards the development of the close relationship between the practitioner and child. At the beginning of the relationship journey, the practitioner and child spend time together, getting to know and understand one another. During this time, the practitioner pays close attention to the child, becoming attuned to and developing and understanding of the child's communications, internal world, and needs, reflecting a form of parental reverie. This reverie enables the practitioner to support the child's development, particularly by offering containment to the child. This containment, alongside the practitioner being reliable, consistent and available to the child,

enables the development of trust in the relationship. Trust fosters feelings of safety and greater understanding between the practitioner and child, leading to the development of a close relationship.

Containing the child is a challenging process for the practitioner, and is linked to other challenges within the relationship. For some relationships, there may be a lack of connection between the practitioner and child, or the child's behaviour may feel challenging to manage. The way the child relates to the practitioner may reflect the child's attachment style. The practitioner is often left feeling de-skilled, anxious and frustrated as a result of these challenges, which reflect possible projections of difficult feelings from the child into the practitioner. These projections, along with the task of containing the child and other worries for the child's welfare, can leave the practitioner feeling emotionally drained, and in need of containment themselves. Practitioners overcome challenges by seeking containment from others, reflecting on the child's behaviour, and seeking to understand the child more. 'Containing the containers' is an important function for the practitioner, to be able to continue to provide emotional containment to the child, and enable a close relationship to develop.

Factors which enable and challenge the relationship between the practitioner and child, exist within all practitioner-child relationships. Challenges are a healthy part of the relationship, as they enable the practitioner to take steps towards developing a greater understanding of the child, and therefore be able to provide carefully attuned support to meet their needs. Care needs to be taken to ensure that challenges don't become too overwhelming for the practitioner, which could potentially jeopardise the relationship journey. Enabling and challenging factors both contribute towards the development of a close relationship.

6.4.   Implications

This next section will discuss the implications of this research to Nurture Group practitioners, the LA within which the research took place, the research field, and for EP practice. As this research used a qualitative methodology, with a small sample, all implications will be discussed in relation to transferability of the findings, rather than generalisability. Generalisability refers to results being

representative of the population or setting under study, and can therefore be generalised beyond the research sample (Robson, 2011). Transferability refers to the applicability of research to a similar context to which the research was carried out (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings of this research can be viewed as transferrable to similar KS1, Boxall model Nurture Groups.

6.4.1. Implications for Nurture Group practitioners, LA structures and the research field

The results of this study add to the body of research into Nurture Groups, providing a detailed insight and explanation of the practitioner-child relationship. The findings build upon research which previously touched upon the nature and impact of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship (Balisteri, 2016; Garner & Thomas, 2011; Kourmoulaki, 2013). Previously, only one other known study had solely focussed on researching the practitioner-child relationship (Balisteri, 2016). The current research adds to this, providing greater breadth and depth of insight into the relationship, offering both a description and explanation of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

The results of this research have implications for Nurture Group practitioners, as the findings suggest what factors contribute to a successful, or 'close' relationship. The results indicate that the relationship develops over time, where key factors such as the practitioner and child spending time together, getting to know and understand one another, the practitioner meeting the child's needs and providing containment, and the development of trust, within the context of a structured, reliable, home/family-like environment, all contribute to the successful development of a close relationship. The findings also highlight that challenges exist, to differing extents, within all practitioner-child relationships, yet indicates supportive structures and methods which help manage these challenges. Nurture Group practitioners in other similar settings could use these factors to inform their approach to building a close relationship with their Nurture Group children, be aware of the challenges, and be informed of ways to manage these challenges. The training offered to Nurture Group practitioners, such as the initial training, or continuing professional development provided by the LA in which this study took place, could be a useful platform for sharing and discussing the factors which enable and challenge the

relationship, to support practitioners to be able to develop successful relationship journeys with their Nurture Group children. Links to psychodynamic theory, as discussed earlier in this chapter, could be given, to enhance practitioners' theoretical understanding of the relationship, for example, reverie that develops between the practitioner and child, and the containing function of the practitioner.

This study highlighted the emotional challenge that Nurture Group practitioners face in caring for, supporting, and containing the fears, anxieties and vulnerabilities that Nurture Group children bring. The findings indicate that practitioners carry a huge emotional load for the child, taking in their projections of anxiety and fear, managing and containing the child's feelings and behaviour, and worrying about the child's general welfare. The emotional load is a significant challenge for the practitioner. This has implications for the importance of structures being put in place to support Nurture Group practitioners to manage the emotional load, and respond to related challenges that were highlighted in this study. Chapter 5 highlights the value of structures being set up within schools which offer staff a safe space to reflect on their relationships with the children they work with, paying note to the projections they receive and what children communicate through their behaviour (Jackson, 2002; Maliphant & Horner, 2016). This level of reflection enables staff to develop a better understanding of the child (Jackson, 2002). Jackson (2002) stresses the importance of school staff having a space to process the emotions they face in their work with children, providing containment and relief from the strains and persecutory feelings they hold. Hulusi and Maggs (2015) argue that these reflective systems enable school staff to break down and make sense of the child and their own experiences, and thus have capacity to continue to work effectively to meet the needs of the child. Reflective supervision enables thinking and learning in how to move forward and better support a child (Youell, 2006). Creating reflective spaces for Nurture Group practitioners would be a valuable method of supporting and providing further containment to them in their roles, and at the same time, develop increased understanding of the child(ren) they work with. Both Birch (2016) and Garner and Thomas (2011) argue that Nurture Group practitioners would benefit from protected support, advice and supervision. Previous research has also indicated that Nurture Groups are most effective when supportive structures are present within individual Nurture

Group settings, and across the LA (Sanders, 2007). This past research, together with the findings of the current study, highlight the importance of reflective structures being made available for Nurture Group practitioners.

Within the LA where this study took place, support is already provided to practitioners through LA Nurture Group networks, and informally through Nurture Group peers and wider school staff. Given the level of emotional challenge highlighted in this research, it would be important to build upon these structures. Reflective, containing spaces could take the shape of regular, individual and/or group supervision, consultation, or WDGs (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015; Jackson, 2002). The LA's own Nurture Group policies and procedures (see Appendix 1) could be enhanced to include clearer, contracted supervisory structures, outlining the frequency, purpose, and format of the support structures, and the professionals involved. These structures would be valuable methods for other Nurture Group settings and LAs to consider setting up, to support practitioners to understand and manage the challenges they face, and consequently, continue to effectively support the children they work with. Furthermore, it would be important for measures to be put in place, for practitioners to access support outside of these formal structures e.g. services and/or named people they can contact.

6.4.2. Implications for the role of the EP

EPs have previously been highlighted as well placed to influence the practice of Nurture Groups, including training, supervision and support, strategic development of Nurture Group policy and practice, and evaluation (Birch, 2016; Kearney et al., 2016; Roffey, 2016; Sanders, 2007). Currently, within the LA within which this study was conducted, EPs have a central role in delivering termly training to Nurture Group practitioners, providing consultation around individual children, and the monitoring and development of Nurture Group practice and policy within the LA (see document in Appendix 1).

Educational psychologists could play a role in using their psychological knowledge, particularly of psychodynamic theory, to deliver training to Nurture Group practitioners, regarding the factors which contribute to the development of a close relationship between the practitioner and child. In particular,

the notion of projection and containment would be useful to share with practitioners (as mentioned in 6.4.1.) to develop and extend their understanding of the unconscious relational dynamic between the practitioner and child.

Furthermore, EPs can apply their psychological knowledge and skills to further shape policy and practice of Nurture Groups, either within individual Nurture Group settings or across LAs. As mentioned above, the results of this study indicate the value of support structures e.g. reflective spaces, being developed, to support the challenges that Nurture Group practitioners face within their roles. EPs could advise schools and/or LAs on appropriate, evidence based structures, forms of staff support e.g. WDGs, and the frequency upon which these should run. EPs could also be commissioned to facilitate these reflective spaces, applying their knowledge of psychology and evidence based practices, to support Nurture Group practitioners to break down and make sense of the children they work with, paying note to the projections they receive, what children communicate through their behaviour, and in turn, receive containment from the challenges they experience. Birch (2016) highlighted the need for Nurture Group practitioners to receive supervision to support them in the relational, emotional, and practical challenges of the role, stating that EPs can take up a position in offering this form of support. Hulusi and Maggs (2015) also argue that EPs are well placed to offer supervision to school staff, to help them make sense of their experiences in working with children. It would therefore be important for EPs to consider working with their LAs or schools to set up reflective, supervision type structures, and offer support to Nurture Group practitioners.

6.5.   Reflections: trustworthiness and limitations of the research

6.5.1.   Research design & sampling

This study sought to explore and explain the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and child, through the perspective of the nurture practitioner. By directly seeking the views and experiences of Nurture Group practitioners, breadth and depth of insight was gained, which a quantitative approach, such as the study by Balisteri (2016) wouldn't have allowed. Applying a grounded theory methodology

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008) provided further richness to the research. Theoretical sampling created scope to seek further gathering of data around emerging concepts which related to the practitioner-child relationship. Moreover, a grounded theory methodology provided an explanatory theory about the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, which further adds to the richness of the research. A grounded theory methodology is therefore considered an appropriate method to research the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

The research participants all had close, direct experiences of the practitioner-child relationship. This study adopted a symbolic interactionist (Blumer, 1969) ontology, viewing the nature of the practitioner-relationship as having meaning based on the events, experiences and social interactions of those experiencing the relationship. Given this ontological position, Nurture Group practitioners were an appropriate sample, as they were directly situated within the relationship. Ensuring participants had at least one year experience working in a Nurture Group ensured they could offer a detailed experiential insight into the relationship.

I acknowledge that the Nurture Group practitioner is just one person within a two person relationship. The views and experiences of the child could have also offered insight into the practitioner-child relationship. As I progressed through the stages of analysis, this was something which entered my thoughts. I was aware that the developing theory of the practitioner-child relationship came solely from the practitioners' perspectives. This research could have sought the perspectives of both the practitioner and child, allowing some triangulation of the data and insight from both sides of the relationship. However, as outlined in 3.2., seeking the perspective of the child most likely wouldn't have offered the same depth of insight into the relationship due to the developmental ages of the children in KS1 Nurture Groups.

A challenge within the existing Nurture Group literature is the lack of consistency and transparency in the type of Nurture Group model studied (Hughes & Schlösser, 2014). Consequently this research took steps to identify a sample of Nurture Groups which followed a shared and consistent model of Nurture

Group practice. This reduced the amount of variation between the participating Nurture Groups, and the number of variables which could influence the results. However, in seeking a sample which followed a highly consistent model (with a requirement for participants to have at least one year of experience in a Nurture Group), this reduced the number of potential participants who could be approached to take part, leading to a small sample size. The small sample is the main limitation of this research. In future, seeking a larger sample, perhaps by expanding the research to Nurture Groups outside of the LA, would provide a greater volume of data, adding to the power and richness of the analysis.

Theoretical sampling is a key aspect of a grounded theory methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015), where initial data generation and the emergence of concepts informs further sampling or exploration of concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The approach to theoretical sampling used in this research, was a soft version of theoretical sampling, where themes noticed in initial interviews were explored further in later interviews if mentioned by the participant. The semi-structured interview questions remained the same. However, perhaps a harder approach to theoretical sampling would have been useful, with the original interview questions being adapted in later interviews, to focus in on the concepts which were emerging.

Linked to theoretical sampling, and sample size is theoretical saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define theoretical saturation as the point in analysis where no further questions can be asked of the data, and theoretical sampling can stop. When reflecting on the analysis, and questions which emerged through the process, I feel that theoretical saturation would have been closer to being met if the challenges within the relationship could have been explored further. This could have allowed tighter description and understanding of the nature of the challenges, especially in regards to how the child relates to the practitioner. This could have been achieved if time and resources had permitted to carry out a second round of interviews with participants, or by seeking a slightly larger sample size, as mentioned above.

6.5.2. Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, Lincoln and Guba's evaluative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were adopted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I was conscious that I had existing knowledge of the theoretical foundations of Nurture Groups, and previous experience working with Nurture Group settings. I felt it important to recognise and reflect on this when carrying out the analysis, to avoid bringing too many prior assumptions into the analytical process, and to maximise the credibility of the research. Additionally, I had an existing working relationship with one participant, through my regular school based work. I recognise that this may have influenced the experiences that this participant shared, and my interpretation of the data. In particular, I had existing knowledge of a child she discussed during the interview. I made careful attempts not to bring my existing knowledge of the child and what I knew about the participant's own relationship with the child, into my interpretations of the data. I did this by focussing on using the analytical tools recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008) to help ground my interpretations in the data, and noting my reflections and potential biases in a research diary. Waiting to conduct a thorough literature review after completion of the analysis, was also a way of reducing potential researcher bias. However, I recognise that to some degree, my own biases may have influenced my interpretations. This is a variable which Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognise as influencing grounded theory research.

When designing and carrying out the interviews, I was careful to use an interview style which would enable me to gain a deep insight into the participants' experiences, without bringing my own interpretations and biases into the interview process. I asked gentle probing questions, which an EP might use during consultation, to dig deeper into the participants' experiences and views e.g. 'could you tell me more about that…?' I asked clarifying questions to check that I had understood the participants' responses and not imposed my own interpretations to their comments. This helped to ensure the credibility of the interview process. During the interviews, I also took care to avoid re-framing participants' responses, in recognition that in doing so would be a form of intervention or imposition of

my interpretations. This was something I found difficult to avoid at times, as it is a technique I often use as part of my EP practice. When reading through the interview transcripts and when coding the data, I was careful to notice times when I had re-framed a participant's response, ensuring I coded the participant's views and not my own. I acknowledge that the few times where I did re-frame the participants' responses may have influenced their later comments. However, I hope that my reflections of this during the analysis helped to remove or reduce potential bias.

As already mentioned above, and in 3.9, a research diary was kept throughout the analysis to ensure the credibility, dependability and confirmability of the research. The research diary provided an audit trail of the analysis process, documenting the emergence of the grounded theory through my reflections, interpretations, questions I wanted to ask of the data, and the pulling together of codes and categories through constant comparison. Alongside the research diary, I found the use of memos and diagrams a particularly helpful way of reflecting on my interpretations of the data, and to ensure a thorough and honest research process. An example excerpt of my research diary can be found in Appendix 16.

6.5.3. Sensitivity to participants' experiences

Something I have frequently reflected on since carrying out the interviews and analysing the data, is the degree of emotional challenge the participants described, as well as the emotions they expressed during the interviews. Despite having several years of experience working with Nurture Group practitioners, I hadn't, until carrying out this research, appreciated the extent of the emotional load that Nurture Group practitioners hold, and just how challenging this can be to manage. The richness of emotion and experience that the participants felt safe enough to share and express during the interviews, was profound to hear and feel. For the one participant who broke into quiet tears during the interview, her emotional experience really struck me, and drew me to look back at the emotion expressed in all the interviews. My own personal experiences of the interviews, and the insight into the practitioners' emotional experiences as shown in the theory of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, has

led to me reflect on just how sensitive one must be during interviews, and when working with Nurture Group practitioners or professionals within a similar field.

6.6.   Further research

To build upon the results of this grounded theory study of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, the next step would be to test this theory out, increasing the reliability of the results. This could be carried out by seeking Nurture Group practitioners' views of the theory, exploring whether the theory reflects their own experiences. Focus groups, or a survey using semi-structured interviews or questionnaires, could be used to verify the categories, sub-categories and smaller concepts within the theory.

As the current research studied the practitioner-child relationship from the perspective of the Nurture Group practitioner, it would be interesting for further research to explore the relationship from the child's perspective. Whist Balisteri (2016) previously studied the practitioner-child relationship from the child's perspective, the breadth and depth to which the child's views were sought was narrow, and limitations existed within the quantitative measures used. A qualitative approach to exploring the child's views would add a degree of richness to the current research and the study by Balisteri (2016). In seeking the child's views, similarities and differences to practitioners' views could be identified, adding richness and understanding of the practitioner child relationship. As mentioned in chapter 3, challenges exist when seeking children's views (Bennett, 2015). It may be useful to seek both the child and practitioners' views of the relationship, to triangulate the results, and avoid an overreliance on one source.

Further research could also seek to explore the perspectives of others within the systems surrounding Nurture Groups, focussing on the challenges which were highlighted in this study, and containing support structures. This would identify whether the views of those within the surrounding systems are in line with those of the Nurture Group practitioner, and potentially uncover factors that weren't identified in the current study. This would offer further triangulation of the data. Views of head

teachers, parents, and external professionals linked to Nurture Groups, are examples of people whose perspectives could be sought.

It would be interesting to explore the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship within Nurture Groups which follow a different model of practice, or work with a different age group e.g. KS3. This could identify the extent to which similarities and differences in the practitioner-child relationship exist across differing models and age groups, and allow the views of young people to be more easily gathered. Garner and Thomas (2011) suggest that relationships between the practitioner and child differs between primary and secondary age groups. Consequently, it would be interesting to explore this further. Existing Nurture Group literature has also been criticised for the lack of distinction or separation in findings between models of nurture practice (Hughes & Schlösser, 2014). Repeating this study with a different Nurture Group model or age group would add to a body of knowledge which shows similarities and differences across different practice models.

Research could seek to further explore and explain Nurture Groups in relation to psychodynamic theory. Further exploration and/or application of a psychodynamic perspective could help increase the theoretical understanding of Nurture Groups, and the practitioner-child relationship, alongside attachment theory, which is already central to the foundation of Nurture Groups.

Finally, the current research indicated that the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship leads towards positive outcomes for the child. Future research could further explore this link between the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, and children's outcomes, perhaps by looking at which key aspects of the relationship identified in this research, lead to positive outcomes, and how this might be reflected in the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998).

6.7. Dissemination of the findings

As part of the dissemination of the findings, I hope to convey my results, in part, through the story of the Nurture Group practitioner-child journey as outlined in 4.2, and the accompanying illustration in Appendix 12. I plan to turn the story and the illustration into a short story book, where on each turn of

the page, the next part of the journey is described, explained and illustrated. This will be shared with all those I disseminate the findings to.

A written summary of the research, including a copy of the story of the Nurture Group practitioner-child journey and the accompanying illustration, will be directly sent to the five participants who kindly took part in this research. The same information will also be sent to the Head Teachers and SENCOs in the respective schools.

I aim to share the same summary with the LA representative who has oversight for Nurture Groups in the borough in which this research took place. In liaison with this representative, I also aim to attend one of the LA Nurture Group training or network events, to verbally present my research to Nurture Group practitioners across the borough, and share the story of the Nurture Group practitioner-child journey.

Furthermore, I plan to share a written summary of this research with the Principal Educational Psychologist within the LA. I will also discuss the possibility of presenting my findings to the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) during a team meeting. This would also allow opportunities for further discussion of the role of the EP and EPS in working with Nurture Groups within the borough, and allow reflection upon the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

Finally, I aim to contact the Nurture Group Network, to inform them of my research, and discuss potential forums for dissemination of my findings across the network.

7. CONCLUSION

This research set out to explore and explain how Nurture Group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child, within one outer London Local Authority. This study adds to a limited body of knowledge about the factors which operate within a Nurture Group, providing a focus on the relationship between the practitioner and child. This research provides an explanatory insight into the factors which lead to a successful Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, and the challenges which can arise.

Perspectives and explanations of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship were gained through semi-structured interviews with five practitioners, working in three Key Stage 1 Nurture Groups, following a Boxall model of practice. A grounded theory methodology was adopted.

The grounded theory which emerged, indicated the practitioner-child relationship to be akin to a journey over time, describing a story with a clear beginning, middle and end, and where challenges arise part way through. The theory is composed of five key categories; beginnings, supporting the child's development, trust, challenges and a close relationship. These categories are linked over time, with the category of 'a close relationship' being the overarching category. The theory can be understood in relation to psychodynamic and attachment frameworks.

Beginnings reflect the first part of the practitioner-child journey, from when the child first enters the Nurture Group. The practitioner and child spend time together, getting to know and understand one another. The practitioner becomes attuned to the child, developing an understanding of the child's emotional experiences, and needs. Reverie develops on the part of the practitioner, towards the child.

Reverie, and attuned understanding of the child, leads to the practitioner being able to support and nourish the child's development, by meeting their needs, enabling the child to feel noticed, and providing emotional containment. The containment of the child is significant within the practitioner-child relationship. The practitioner is able to notice, hold and manage the child's difficult feelings,

supporting the child to better understand their emotional experiences. Subsequently, over time the child begins to develop feelings of trust and safety in the practitioner, and feel understood.

This research highlighted that challenges exist within all practitioner-child relationships. Children may display behaviour which feels unsafe and unpredictable, while other children seem to push away from the practitioner, leading to a lack of connection between the practitioner and child. The child's attachment pattern and projections of their own difficult feelings, give meaning to these challenging interactions. Children project their emotional pain and anxiety into the practitioner, leading to the practitioner experiencing feelings of doubt, anxiety and frustration. Together, these challenges, along with the practitioner's ongoing work to contain the child, are emotionally draining for the practitioner, who as a result seeks containment themselves. This research highlights the immense power of difficult and challenging emotions that practitioners experience in their roles.

The grounded theory indicates that over time, and sometimes as a result of challenges being faced, a close relationship develops between the practitioner and child. The relationship is akin to a secure attachment relationship, or a parent-child relationship. This close relationship supports the social and emotional development of the child. The child introjects an internal representation of the practitioner, enabling them to develop a sense of independence in venturing away from their safe base.

The findings of this research offers a psychodynamic view of the relational dynamics of the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship, in addition to existing knowledge of attachment theory. This has implications for training to practitioners around the psychodynamics of their relationship with the child. The findings indicate the importance of supportive structures being available for Nurture Group practitioners to reflect on the nurture child, to develop a greater understanding of their communications and needs, and receive containment from the heavy emotional load of the role. EPs are well placed to shape policy and practice around the provision of reflective spaces for Nurture Group practitioners, and have the skills to offer supervision to individuals or groups of nurture practitioners.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Local Authority Nurture Group Policies and Procedures

The following policy and procedures sit alongside the LA SEN/Inclusion strategy.

1.   PURPOSE/AIM OF THE NURTURE GROUPS

1.1   To provide a flexible and preventative resource which is responsive to the individual and particular needs of the children attending the host school e.g. high mobility, children in need, LAC etc.

1.2   To provide on-going assessment and support for vulnerable children at risk of exclusion, or showing signs of emotional, social and behavioural difficulties. The intended aim is to enable the child to access the curriculum and participate fully in school life.

1.3   To provide a secure and reliable small class setting where children can experience a nurturing curriculum from two consistent adults who actively work towards enabling successful re-integration into the mainstream class.

1.4   To help children raise their self-esteem and develop age appropriate social skills through a close and trusting relationship with 2 adults.

1.5   Nurture group staff and class teachers will develop a joint approach to meeting need and work in partnership with parents and carers.

2.   **DESCRIPTION AND AGREED OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES**

2.1   Nurture Groups are a unique preventative resource based on well documented psychological, social and educational theory and research.

2.2   Each Group will have a designated classroom. The room will be appropriately furnished and resourced to allow for formal learning, creative experiences and social and outdoor curriculum opportunities.

2.3   There should be access to washroom and toilet facilities. The school is responsible for any necessary repairs and maintenance work.

2.4   Children will normally attend for a maximum period of four terms.

2.5   There will be no more than 10, no less than 7 on role in the Nurture Group at any one time.

2.6   The children will be on the register of their mainstream class and they will join their class for appropriate activities.

2.7   The children should spend lunchtime and playtimes with other children in the school. Some children may need extra support at these times.

2.8   The Nurture Group should be staffed at a minimum level of one full-time experienced teacher and a full-time Nurture Group assistant who work as a team. Neither adult should be available to cover for absent staff within the school as the success of the Nurture Group depends on the continuity and consistency it provides for the children.

2.9   At the point of establishing a new Nurture Group schools should identify the   procedures that would take place in the event of one of the NG team being absent.

2.10   In the absence of one of the Nurture Group team, the group may not function and in this case the children will be supported in their mainstream class where possible.

2.11   The Nurture Group will operate with children for 4.5 days per week. The remaining 0.5 day will be used to:

- Liaise with parents/carers

- Keep detailed assessment records

- Carry out mainstream class observations

- Meet with educational psychologists, social workers and other agencies

- Liaise with the school's SENCO and other staff

- Attend any relevant training offered by LA

- Attend NG EP sessions 3x year

- Attend Peer group meetings [min 3 per year]

- Keep detailed planning and assessment records – PPA allocation

3.   FUNDING

The LA delegates funds to enable each of the groups to provide:

- one **experienced** full-time teacher

- one full time (term time only) **experienced** support assistant

- basic consumables

3.1   Pupils attending Nurture Groups are on roll at the school and therefore also receive funding through the usual funding streams. The additional funding for the Nurture Group should not therefore be considered the only resource available for these pupils.

3.2   The Nurture Groups are fully delegated and the funding forms part of the total   budget share of the school. It is available for use by the Governing Body to meet the priorities set by the school, including the provision of a nurture group.

3.3   The LA has clear expectations of how Nurture Groups operate within each school and will monitor the operation of each Group to satisfy itself that the needs of the pupils are being met and that the funding is being used appropriately.

3.4   As part of the annual planning process the LA will decide whether it is necessary to review the location of any of the groups in line with criteria and operational guidelines.

3.5   The decision regarding the location, or re-location, of the Nurture Groups is made in accordance with the criteria attached.

4.   REFERRAL PROCEDURES

4.1   All referrals will be discussed with the head teacher, the Inclusion manager/SENCO, the Nurture group team and school educational psychologist [when appropriate] in collaboration with the parents and the class teacher

4.2   A range of supporting evidence for the referrals will be made using the agreed paperwork i.e. Boxall profile, Observation Records, SDQs etc.

5.   ENTRY/ADMISSION PROCESS

5.1   All schools must clarify and share the NG admission process, within their individual school setting, to ensure consistency of understanding and provision for vulnerable children.

5.2   Parent/Carer agreement is essential

5.3   Nurture Group placements will be considered for vulnerable children at risk of exclusion, or showing signs SEMH.

5.4   The composition of the group will need to be considered at all times e.g. specific needs, gender balance etc.

6.   ARRANGEMENTS FOR REVIEW OF PUPILS

6.1   Each child will be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis and consultations with the Educational Psychologist and other involved professionals will be arranged as appropriate.

6.2   Progress of pupils will be reviewed regularly with parents and dates for formal review will be set in advance so that relevant professionals are given the opportunity to contribute or attend.

7.   REINTEGRATION/EXIT PROCESS

7.1   Reintegration will be determined following consultation with school staff, and parents. The school educational psychologist will also be consulted when appropriate.

7.2   Where reintegration is not considered appropriate, the Head Teacher, Inclusion manager and school educational psychologist will agree an action plan in consultation with parents and other involved professionals. This may involve the application for an EHCP or identification of other provision.

8.   PARENT/CARER LIAISON

8.1   Establishing positive links with and supporting parents/carers is an essential part of the nurturing approach and they will be consulted at all steps in the process

8.2   Nurture group staff will set up frequent formal and informal opportunities to communicate with parents/carers.

8.3 The Head Teacher of the school will be ultimately responsible for dealing with any complaints from parents/carers concerning the Nurture Group. Complaints that remain unresolved will be referred through the school's normal procedures.

9. NURTURE GROUP STEERING COMMITTEE

9.1 The Steering Committee will meet annually and deal with strategic planning in relation to policy of the Nurture Groups staffing and finance. It is responsible for monitoring the work of the groups and for ensuring the implementation, evaluation and review of the LA Nurture Groups.

9.2 Members of the Steering Committee comprise:

- AD Education – [SCS]

- LA Liaison Nurture Group EP

- LA Nurture Group Training and Development Officer

- Head Teachers, or their delegated representative, of the host schools - annual meeting

9.3 The Assistant Director, will be the nominated representative of the Director of Education to supervise the operational policy and procedures, chair the meetings of the Steering Committee and oversee the monitoring process

9.4 Membership of the Steering Committee will be reviewed annually.

9.5 The operational policy and procedures will be reviewed at the annual meeting

10. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES: LA

10.1 **Role of the Principal Educational Psychologist**

- to ensure that the Educational Psychology Service has a nominated educational psychologist to act in a liaison role with all educational psychologists working in schools with Nurture Groups and with the Nurture Group Liaison, Training and Development Officer

10.3 **Role of the LA Liaison Educational Psychologist** for Nurture Groups

- to attend the Nurture Group Steering Committee meetings

- to work in partnership with the Nurture Group Development and Training Officer/ X manager to contribute to the development of NGs in the LA and offer training where appropriate.

- to inform all other educational psychologists of ongoing issues and concerns with regards to LA funded Nurture Groups

- to keep the Principal Educational Psychologist informed about all matters concerning the Nurture Groups

- to deliver training once per term on an aspect of NG work

10.4 **Role of the LA Nurture Group Training and Development Officer**

- to liaise with the LA on behalf of Nurture Group staff

- to support the Nurture Group staff at meetings and co-ordinate curriculum development

- to attend the LA Nurture Group Steering Committee meetings on behalf of the Nurture Group staff

- to organise induction and INSET for Nurture Group staff and to ensure that all NG staff have attended the 2 day course on principles and practice.

- to ensure all NG staff have access to further accredited training as appropriate

- to work in partnership with the Liaison Educational Psychologist

- to contribute to the monitoring and review process

- to organise an LA training programme open to all NG staff

- to prepare agendas for NG staff meetings, evaluate training on offer to NG staff and keep register of course attendees

- to manage and support visits to LA NGs from other schools, LAs, Government Agencies or Foreign Countries.

- To ensure each visitor receives a pack of information with regards to LA 's Nurture Group provision

SCHOOL BASED AND ASSOCIATED STAFF

10.5   **Role of the Head Teacher**

The Head Teacher has overall responsibility for the functioning of the Nurture Group within the school. S/he is responsible for:

- the operational management of the Nurture Group will be overseen by the school's Inclusion Team, including the arrangements in the case of absence of the Nurture Group staff or closure of the Nurture Group

- management of the Nurture Group teacher as a member of the school staff

- management of the Nurture Group assistant as a member of school staff

- oversight of the curriculum planning and monitoring of work within the Nurture Group

- ensuring that the Nurture Group teacher participates in the school's agreed performance management procedures

- ensuring the Health and Safety procedures are followed in accordance with the school's policy

- ensuring that the Nurture Group operates within the guidelines of the LA's policy statement on equal opportunities and the school's SEN Policy documents

- ensuring that the LA annual return forms are completed as required.

- Attending a steering group meeting 1 per term, or sending a delegate who should be a senior manager within the school

- Meeting with the school EP to review and plan, as necessary

10.6 **Role of the School SENCO/Inclusion Manager**

- Responsibilities for Nurture Group as determined by individual schools

- Liaison with the Nurture Group teacher and class teacher – this will include the development and implementation of appropriate Target setting for CYP in the NG

- To be involved in reviews as required.

- To oversee and monitor the running of the Nurture Group

- To oversee, monitor and support the successful reintegration process for a child back into full time mainstream provision

10.7 **Role of the Nurture Group Teacher**

The Nurture Group teacher is responsible for the day-to-day management of the class but also has the following duties:

- to carry out, and contribute to, school policies and procedures, including child protection procedures where appropriate

- to organise and plan the activities of the classroom, bearing in mind the individual needs of each child and drawing from the foundation stage curriculum

- to be an advocate for and to develop Nurture Group principles.

- to keep daily individual records of the children's progress and intended programmes of work

- to co-ordinate the work of the Nurture Group assistant

- to discuss the children regularly with the educational psychologist and other professionals involved at school action plus.

- to actively work in partnership with parents.

- to liaise with the child's class teacher and to attend regular reviews under the Code of Practice

- to identify strategies to help children manage less structured times of the school day such as play and lunch times

- to participate in INSET and joint planning with the class teacher and school SENCO re IEPs/LSPs and reviews

10.8 **Role of the Nurture Group Assistant**

- The Nurture Group assistant is employed in the Nurture Group full-time, working under the direction of the Nurture Group teacher.

- Her/his role is to assist the teacher in whatever tasks are necessary and to participate in the LA training programme as directed by the teacher.

10.9 **Role of the School Educational Psychologist**

- to attend regular meetings with the head teacher/Inclusion Manager and Nurture Group team, if required

- to offer regular consultations and be involved in the selection of children for admission into the NG, their reviews and re-integration programme.

- to contribute to alternative action plans where reintegration is not appropriate.

11. <u>MONITORING AND REVIEW OF PROVISION</u>

- Nurture groups will be evaluated through OFSTED inspection. In line with the LA policy the school will monitor and review the Nurture Group provision as part of its ongoing self-monitoring responsibility. It will ensure that LA operational policy and procedures are followed and that LA criteria are met.

- The LA Nurture Group training and development officer will visit each NG on regularly and the LA Liaison Educational Psychologist will visit as appropriate.

- The Educational Psychologist and or the NG Liaison, Training and Development Officer will be involved in the interview and appointment of Nurture Group staff if requested by the Head Teacher.

- The LA Liaison Educational Psychologist will liaise with the LA Training and Development Officer with regards to collecting data from annual returns and reporting directly to the steering group

- The Assistant Director will ensure the continued development of Nurture Groups in the LA as and when appropriate.

<u>Principles for the allocation of Nurture Groups to schools- should funding become available from LA</u>

- Schools would need to have a minimum of two forms of entry

- Currently 30% or above pupils could claim free school meals

- A minimum of 10 children at Stage 3 on the SEN register within KS1 for whom Nurture Group provision would be appropriate

- Long term whole school commitment to the development is essential, as is the agreement of the governing body

- Location of room is important, there should be clear access to or preferably based within Infant/Early Years part of the school. The children should have access to all the facilities usually available to children of their age within the school

- School's policy for SEN recognises the role of Nurture Groups within the Policy framework and accepts the LA Policy and Procedures for Nurture Groups

- Significant levels of under achievement at entry. (Baseline Assessment levels to be agreed)

- Specific pressures within the local community which impact on the school, e.g. pupil mobility

- High percentage of Children in Need (Children's Act 1989)

Should several schools meet all these criteria and have similar levels of need, the particular circumstances of a school will be considered.

12. Nurture Group Monitoring Framework

Expected Outcomes

- To establish that schools are adhering to the agreed Operational Policy and Procedures document

- To support school self-evaluation of the quality of provision in school settings and across the LA as a whole

- To support the work of the steering group in determining the strategic development of the nurturing approach in LA

Criteria

- Nurture group principles

- Nurture group Operational Policy and Procedures

Process

Information collected through

- Observation

- Interviews.

- Analysis of records

Format

1 monitoring visit per 3yr cycle

Notification to school of date

Pre visit circulation of monitoring proforma

Visit - ½ day

Meet with HT/SENCO /Inclusion Manager

Observe Session

Meet/feedback to NG staff

Audit of records

Written feedback to Head Teacher and NG staff

Record of Visit

Written report/summary of visit to HT

Annual report to Steering group of overall findings

Summary of visits to AD

Monitoring visits to be seen as a joint process between SCS and the host school

13. Code of Research for Researchers Working with Nurture Groups in the LA

- Observe Protocol: Take care to ensure that the relevant persons, committees and authorities have been consulted and informed and that the necessary permission and approval have been obtained.

- Involve participants: Encourage others who have an interest in your research to shape the form of your work.

- Negotiate with those affected: Not everyone will want to be directly involved; your work should take into account the wishes and responsibilities of others.

- Obtain explicit authorisation before you observe, for the purposes of recording the activities of professional colleagues or others. Permission should be sought from parents/carers if individuals are to be used for case studies.

- Obtain explicit authorisation before you examine files, correspondence or other documentation: Take copies only if specific authority to do this is obtained.

- Negotiate descriptions of other people's work: Always allow those described to challenge your accounts on the grounds of fairness, relevance and accuracy.

- Keep information gathered confidential to the person concerned: Until you know whether you want to release it, then negotiate that information with the person concerned. If there is disagreement concerning release of information, withhold release of that information.

Occasionally we have research visitors to LA, from abroad and UK Universities and this protocol has been included to clarify the position with regards to our NGs.

Appendix 2: Summary of exclusion criteria applied to literature review part 1

Reason for exclusion	Number of articles
Research relates to Nurture Groups, but not relevant to the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship	39
Unclear focus of the research	1
Research not directly about Nurture Groups	12
Research not based in the UK	1

Appendix 3: Appraisal tool prompt sheet based on Yardley (2004) principles for critiquing qualitative research

Sensitivity to context

- Theoretical framework used
- Relevant literature, and their theoretical frameworks
- Sociocultural setting e.g. participants, setting, culture, beliefs, interactions
- Participants' perspectives
- Researchers position, characteristics, biases, power
- Ethical issues

Commitment and rigour

- In depth engagement with the topic – participants have experience of the topic area, researcher has spent time engaged/immersed with the topic via analysis
- Methodological competence/skill
- Thorough data collection e.g. saturation, number of participants, addresses variation, triangulation
- Depth/breadth of analysis

Transparency and coherence

- Clarity and power of description/argument - clear reporting of the results
- Transparent methods e.g. sampling
- Transparent data presentation e.g. examples of the data provided
- Good fit between the research question/aims, theory, methodology & analysis
- Reflexivity – researchers position, biases, assumptions

Impact and importance

- Theory, frameworks, past research are drawn upon when discussing the research (enriching understanding)
- Implications and contribution to the context, participants and stakeholders is discussed
- Practical (for participants, community, stakeholders)

Appendix 4: Literature review part 1: Details of critiqued papers

Study	NG studied		Aim(s)	Sample	Design, methodology & analysis approach	RESULTS		Theoretical framework
	Model	Ages				Overall	Relationship factors	
Griffiths, Stenner & Hicks (2014)	Variant model (4 half-day sessions per week) (the researchers falsely claim a classic model)	KS1 (pm) & KS2 (am)	Gather children's constructions of their NG experiences Elicit the voice of the child	Sample taken from 1 NG 8 NG children (2 recently reintegrated). 2 girls, 6 boys, aged 7-11.	Exploratory, qualitative, case study of 1 NG in a mainstream primary Focus group - NG children Thematic analysis	4 themes – relationships, environment, learning, self-regulatory behaviour Children described the impact of the NG, relating to the 4 themes.	Relationship theme identified. Sub-themes of belonging, feeling like a family, availability, predictability, trust, friendship. (child-child, child-staff)	Attachment Socio-cultural theory

Study	NG studied		Aim(s)	Sample	Design, methodology & analysis approach	RESULTS		Theoretical framework
	Model	Ages				Overall	Relationship factors	
Garner & Thomas (2011)	Variant NG. (Mix of 1-1½ sessions per week)	KS3 (mix of year 7-9)	Gaining the views of those involved in NGS, to explore how NG are implemented in KS3 settings and their impact	3 NGs - 6 YP (Y7-9), 5 male - 17 staff (NG & mainstream staff) - 8 parents	Exploratory, qualitative. Focus groups - NG practitioners and school staff - Parents Individual interviews - YP currently in NG or re-integrated in past year) Thematic analysis	4 themes identified – relationships, secure base, outcomes, and communication across systems. Beneficial impact on YPs development.	Relationships identified as a key theme, especially the relationship between the practitioner and YP. Focus on what the practitioners provide e.g. nurture, security and protection, listened to, respect, equality, meeting YPs SEMH and learning needs, close relationship. Practitioners a 'key' factor in the NGs success. Practitioner-child relationship fosters a secure base. Also the support practitioners provide to parents. Discuss potential differences in nature of the p-c relationship in secondary settings vs primary (respect, equality)	Attachment Socio-cultural theory Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Systemic theory (discussion only)

Study	NG studied		Aim(s)	Sample	Design, methodology & analysis approach	RESULTS		Theoretical framework
	Model	Ages				Overall	Relationship factors	
Pyle & Rae (2015)	Classic Boxall or new-variant	Primary	Explore & explain the impact of NGs on the parent-child relationship, from the perspective of parents and NG child	From >3 NGs - 12 parents (of 4-7 year olds) - 11 children (Y1-Y4/6-9 years, 6 male)	Exploratory, explanatory, qualitative Focus groups (children) Individual semi-structured interviews (parents) Grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss)	NG enabled positive change in parent-child interaction e.g. increased communication, warm & positive attachment. Key factors (mechanisms) - Small group size - NG practitioner-child relationship - Development in child's maturity, SEMH	NG has a positive impact on parent-child relationship - Increased communication - Greater attachment - Positive interaction NG practitioner-child relationship (belonging, listened to, attention) is a factor in the development of the parent-child relationship (but only a small part of the analysis), and the child's SEMH. Close relationship with the practitioner is important.	Attachment Transactional model (Christenson)

Study	NG studied		Aim(s)	Sample	Design, methodology & analysis approach	RESULTS		Theoretical framework
	Model	Ages				Overall	Relationship factors	
Chiappella (2015)	Variant NG (no details of how many days or sessions)	Secondary (KS3)	Explore the outcomes and processes taking place in part-time secondary NGs	6 NGs - 49 YP (ages 11-14, 29 male) - 9 NG practitioners	Exploratory, explanatory, mixed methods Questionnaires pre & post - Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998) *teacher report* - SDQ (Goodman, 1997) *YP, parents, teachers* - Social Skills Questionnaire (Spence, 1995) *YP, parents, teachers* Semi-structured interviews (NG practitioners) Thematic analysis	**Quantitative** Significant improvement in overall difficulties and emotional difficulties (SDQ) over time. No significant change on measures of the SSQ and Boxall Profile. **Qualitative** Changes relating to emotional, social, behavioural development as viewed by NG practitioners. Processes included NG structure, relationships, teaching learning opportunities, environment.	*Trusting* relationships identified as a key process (YP-YP, YP-NG practitioner). YP felt cared for, listened to – responded to sensitively. Relationships act as a foundation to further change processes e.g. scaffolding learning & development, YP sharing experiences. Processes in the YP-YP and YP-practitioner relationships aren't separated in the analysis. Practitioner-YP relationship qualitatively different to teacher-YP relationship.	Attachment Social learning theory

Study	NG studied		Aim(s)	Sample	Design, methodology & analysis approach	RESULTS		Theoretical framework
	Model	Ages				Overall	Relationship factors	
Balisteri (2016)	Variant NG	Primary (KS2)	Explore the perceived quality of the NG practitioner-child relationship	Across 5 NGs - 31 children - NG practitioners Matched controls (across 5 matched schools) - 32 children - Class teachers	Quantitative (pre & post measures) Questionnaires - Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta, 1992) *Teacher rating* - Teacher Acceptance Scale (Harrison et al., 2007) *Child rating* - Child drawing task Child-Family Drawing Global Rating Scale (Fury et al., 1997)	NG practitioners perceived greater feelings of closeness with the NG child than controls. For both groups, closer relationships were developed over time. No significant differences in conflict or dependency measures. NG children reported greater feelings of acceptance by their NG teacher than controls. NG children's drawings revealed greater feelings of relationship vulnerability when entering the NG compared to controls, which diminished in line with controls within 8 months. No significant difference in other scales of the drawing task. **Summary** Closer practitioner-child relationships formed within the NG		Attachment

Study	NG studied		Aim(s)	Sample	Design, methodology & analysis approach	RESULTS		Theoretical framework
	Model	Ages				Overall	Relationship factors	
Cooper, Arnold & Boyd (2001)	Mix of classic Boxall & variant NGs	Mostly primary (n=23), some secondary (n=2)	Identify the impact of NGs on the social, emotional, behavioural and academic function of children.	Across 25 NGs - 216 NG children - 64 matched controls classified with SEBD - 62 matched controls without SEBD - 89 parents of NG children - teachers	Mixed methods Questionnaires - SDQ for NG children & controls, pre & post. *Teacher report* - Boxall Profile for NG children, pre & post. *NG practitioner report* - Academic progress of NG children. *Teacher report* Qualitative methods - Semi-structured interviews with parents (n=89) - Individual interviews with teachers (n=79) - Individual interviews with NG children (n=?) Analysis of qualitative methods not reported	NG children made significantly greater gains in measures of the SDQ compared to matched controls with SEBD. Improved scores in all areas of the Boxall Profile. NG practices valued across the school. Parents perceived positive impact on their children's development. NG children reported valuing the relationships, environment, activities and structure of the NG.	NG children reported that the quality of their relationship with the NG practitioner was a key aspect of the NG which they held value to. * Note: this was only stated in one line of the results	Attachment Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Study	NG studied		Aim(s)	Sample	Design, methodology & analysis approach	RESULTS		Theoretical framework
	Model	Ages				Overall	Relationship factors	
Kourmoulaki (2013)	Variant NG (1-5 periods per week)	Secondary (Y7-79)	Explore the structure, function and perceived impact of a secondary school NG. Explore YPs views, practitioner skills & whole-school factors.	Across 1 school - 4 NG practitioners - 16 YP (12 attending the NG, 4 previously attended) - 8 teachers - 2 school support staff - 6 parents/carers	Exploratory, qualitative Semi-structured interviews - Mix of individual, paired and group interviews (staff & YP) - Individual interviews (parents) Thematic analysis	Nature of NGs - Purpose, content, YPs characteristics, NG practitioner characteristics Value of the NG - Feeling safe, sense of belonging, school readiness, development of social-communication skill, anti-bullying strategies Supportive mechanisms - Systemic support, support from individuals Areas for development - Communication, monitoring, systemic factors, transferability of skills, extended nurture support	NG staff are consistent, attentive and attuned to the YPs needs, which enable the development of a *trusting* NG practitioner-child relationship. NG practitioners were viewed as caring towards NG children, calm, and inclusive/took time to hear their perspectives. Practitioners have an emotional attachment towards the child. They get to know the YP and can therefore respond sensitively to their needs. Regular contact in the NG enabled close relationships (child-child, practitioner-child). Trust for YP to share their vulnerabilities & thoughts. Support and friendship developed between the YP.	Attachment – only briefly referenced in the discussion

Appendix 5: Information Sheet for Head Teachers

How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child?

Who I am

I am a second year Educational Psychologist in training, based at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, and currently on placement with XXX. As part of my doctoral training, I am carrying out some research into Nurture Groups within XXX.

What is the research about?

The research aims to explore the relationships held between Nurture Group practitioners and Nurture Group children, specifically exploring what factors enable and challenge this relationship.

Why carry out this research?

Past research has shown that the relationships held within the Nurture Group play a key role in supporting the development of Nurture children's achievement and wellbeing. However, no research has solely focussed on the nature of these relationships, particularly between practitioners and children.

By developing our understanding of the relationship between Nurture Group practitioners and children, we will be able to identify and build upon the factors which support this relationship, and take steps to minimise the factors which challenge this relationship.

Who will take part in the research?

Nurture Group practitioners who work within Key Stage 1, full time Nurture Group settings are being asked to take part in the research.

What is involved?

Nurture Group practitioners will be asked to share their experiences and thoughts about the relationships they hold/have held with children within the Nurture Group. This will involve an individual interview, led by myself. Interviews are expected to last no more than 1 hour, and will be audio-recorded. Interviews will take place within school, or at the Educational Psychology Service if preferred. The interviews can be arranged for a time that is convenient for the participant within the working week, and are likely to take place between May and November of this year.

Do my staff have to take part?

Your staff are not obliged to take part in the research. Participation is voluntary, and is in no way linked to the Local Authority's monitoring of Nurture Group policy and practice. Your staff are being asked to take part because it is believed that they can provide valuable insight into the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship.

Right to withdraw from the research

Participants have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, up until the point of data transcription and analysis. The researcher will inform participants of when data transcription and analysis will take place following the interview. If participants decide to withdraw from the research, they do not need to give a reason for their decision.

Data protection and anonymity

The interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. No other person will have access to the recorded information. Once the interview has been transcribed, all identifying information will be changed and pseudonyms given in order to protect anonymity e.g. participant names, names of children, your school. All information will be collected, stored and protected in line with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust data protection procedures, and in compliance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998).

This research will involve a small number of participants. As a result, this increases the likelihood that they may be recognised in the final write up by those who know them. The researcher will take steps to protect against this by altering any identifying details.

Whilst every care will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants when the findings are shared, total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as the comments made form part of the research.

Safeguarding of yourself and others

In the case that any sensitive topics arise during the course of the interview, the researcher will offer support and debrief at the end of the interview, which may include signposting to necessary services and a follow-up phone call, to ensure participant wellbeing.

In order to safeguard participants and others, if any information that arises during the interview which suggests possible risk or harm, the researcher will have the duty of care to report this information to the appropriate agencies.

Ethical assurance

Ethical approval for this research has been sought and approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundations Trust Research Ethics Committee.

How the findings of the research will be shared

Findings from the research will be shared with all participating Nurture Group practitioners and respective Head Teachers. The findings will also be shared with Local Authority stakeholders to support further development and training of Nurture Groups within the Local Authority. The research will also be written as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis, which may later be published in an academic journal.

Contact and further information

If you would like any further information about this research, please don't hesitate to contact the researcher, Amy Gibb, using the details below. These contact details may also be used if you consent to take part in the research but later choose to withdraw:

    Email: agibb@tavi-port.nhs.uk

    Tel: xxx-xxxx-xxxx (direct line) or xxxxx-xxx-xxx (work mobile)

If you have any further questions or concerns about the researcher or the nature of this research, please contact Louis Toussig (Trust Quality Assurance Officer), at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

    ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk

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Safeguarding of yourself and others

In the case that any sensitive topics arise during the course of the interview, the researcher will offer support and debrief at the end of the interview, which may include signposting to necessary services and a follow-up phone call, to ensure your wellbeing.

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Contact and further information

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> Email: agibb@tavi-port.nhs.uk

> Tel: xxx-xxxx-xxxx (direct line) or xxxxx-xxx-xxx (work mobile)

If you have any further questions or concerns about the researcher or the nature of this research, please contact Louis Toussig (Trust Quality Assurance Officer), at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

> ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix 7: Interview script and schedule

Interview script

My name is Amy, and I'm a trainee Educational Psychologist. As part of my training, I am carrying out some research into Nurture Group in [Local Authority]; in particular KS1, full time nurture groups. The purpose of my research is to explore the relationship between the Nurture Group practitioner and the Nurture Group child, so that we can identify what a successful Nurture Group relationship looks like and/or how to build a strong relationship. I'm really interested in the practitioner-child relationships side of the Nurture Group.

I am interviewing a number of nurture practitioners across [Local Authority]. Each interview will last about an hour. Responses from each interview will be combined and analysed to identify key factors about the Nurture Group practitioner-child relationship. Results will be fed back to all participants and used to support the further development of Nurture Group practice in [Local Authority]. The research will also be written up as part of my doctoral training.

Have you had a chance to look through the participant information sheet?

> *Yes* – Do you understand the information given? Do you have any questions?

> *No* – Could you read it now. Do you understand the information given? Do you have any questions?

As described in the information sheet, your responses will be kept confidential as far as possible. Your responses will be transcribed and any identifying information will be removed or altered to protect your anonymity.

As with school procedures around confidentiality and safeguarding, if anything you say suggests that you or others are at harm, I would need to report this. As well, if anything personally sensitive comes up for you, I am able to offer your support during or following the interview, and can signpost you to relevant agencies.

Can I double check that you are happy to participant in the research? Do you consent to the interview being audio recorded and for me to take occasional notes? *(Check that the consent form is signed)*.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview schedule

1. How would you describe your relationship with the children in your Nurture Group?
2. Can you tell me about how the relationship between a nurture practitioner and Nurture Group child develops?
   - How does the relationship change over time?
   - What do you feel influences this change?
3. Can you recall a Nurture Group child with whom you have held a good relationship with?
   a. Could you describe that relationship?
   b. What enabled that relationship?
4. Can you recall a Nurture Group child with whom you have held more of a challenging relationship with?
   a. Could you describe that relationship?
   b. What do you feel challenged that relationship?
5. Do you think that the relationship(s) held between the Nurture Group practitioner and nurture group child is important?
   - If yes, what do you feel is important about the relationship(s)?
6. As you look back over the relationships you have held as a Nurture Group practitioner, what do you feel has been important about these relationships?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about the relationship?

Appendix 8: Full transcript of interview with Antonia

Can you just describe to me how you would describe the relationship between Nurture Group practitioners and children?

Erm, I would describe the relationship between nurture teachers and students as one that's quite special because in the mainstream classroom you have 30 kids, and you haven't really got the time to give them that much attention. And with Nurture Group you have a smaller group, a smaller number of children. And so you can build relationships easier, I would say to build relationships with children because you are constantly communicating with them, constantly engaging with them. You're constantly meeting their needs. Erm, so I think it's one that's quite special. And because you have that closeness and you see them every day, but you work closely with them. And it's not just for a few months, but it's for the whole year. And so for me it's definitely, yeh, special! I would say it's quite a special one.

Yeh, you used the word 'special' quite a lot.

Yeh I did. Yeh, it is quite special. It is. Because you build a, almost an attachment with them. Erm you know them, you get to know them. You know, their ways, little things about them. You just close your eyes and think, oh, that's that child. And it's in a short space of time where if you were working in a mainstream, big classes, class of 30, it takes you a while to kind of get to know the individuals, individual pupils. Whereas with nurture, you kind of get to know them very quickly.

Yeh, you're really talking about there's a difference between the relationship that the child would maybe have with the teacher in their...

Absolutely, mainstream class. Absolutely.

...mainstream class, vs in nurture.

Absolutely.

And you were saying that it's easier to kind of build that relationship with the child, and it's a closer relationship. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Well, for example. I don't know if it's too early to go into it, it's just the structure, of nurture. For example, in the morning you get to ask the child how they're feeling, so you get to learn as to how they're coming into school, what sort of mood, they're coming into school. And also, because of the fact that we kind of adapt the curriculum to meet their needs. So you get to play with them more, you get to, erm, jut engage with them on a closer level than you would normally in a mainstream classroom. And they trust you, so you have nurture children are very different. You've got the ones who may come in very withdrawn, erm, and they find it difficult to express how they're feeling, or talk to adults. But because they know, this is almost like a safe base, they will come to you. You know, and they will share their thoughts and erm whatever they're feeling with you. So you have to definitely build that trust with them. So, erm, yeh, so, just working with them, just little things, playing, whatever they want you to get involved. So as you're getting involved in what they're doing, they begin to see you like as a trusted adult. You know adult that they can really maybe open up to and know that here, when in this environment, they are safe to share you know, erm, how they're feeling, how they're finding things.

Ok. They're feeling safe, and you said, they're trusting you...

Yep.

...and got to know you a little bit.

Absolutely.

And how do you feel that influences the relationship that you can, that you have between yourself and that child.

Well because we, I think, we erm...Obviously, you're always a role model for them. So for example, they're always two adults in nurture, erm, and we always model a kind of positive behaviour, and you know a kind of acceptable behaviour. And we model that we can, for example if Rebecca and myself, erm, are, if I ask Rebecca to do something, I say 'thank you' and or 'oh that's so kind of you'. You know. So you model that relationship with another adult, and the children see that. And they see that, 'ok that's how', kind of, the, they see it in a positive light. And so they are able to kind of have that relationship with you as well. So I think really modelling, becomes, it's modelling, it interests the other children. If you model the right behaviour, from positive I'd say, erm, behaviour, the children seem to pick up on it. So when they even do role play, you can hear them, they're imitating what you say. You know, they'd be like 'oh you need to say thank you' or you know, they pretend to play schools and ones the teacher, and they mimic what you say. [Laughs]. So erm, its, yeh, I think a lot of its modelling, that kind of positive relationship between adults and children.

That's really interesting. So that kind of that modelling, and you particularly mentioned the relationship between you and Rebecca, who's the other nurture practitioner.

Absolutely.

That the children are kind of copying that, in terms of the relationship that they then have with you, and the way they might be relating with you.

Absolutely. And it's important. It's important to model that. You know, because a lot of them may not have that at home, so they don't see that at home. And so when they come into nurture, they see that 'oh wow, ok I do get told thank you for doing something, or I get asked oh how might I be feeling, so my voice matters'. You know. 'I am seen' you know, not just heard. But 'I'm seen as well, I'm acknowledged'. So it's, it's very important, in doing that. So I always find, the way we influence the relationship between the children, is the adults modelling that positive relationship between each other, so that children can see that. And they can actually see that it's not all doom and gloom.

That modelling of really positive ways of relating...

Yeh, absolutely.

...feels really important to you. It's that relationship aspect.

Absolutely.

And you've touched on this a little bit already. But I'm quite curious as to your views of how your relationship with a Nurture Group child develops and grows, right from when they first join the NG, towards them transitioning back into mainstream. If we think to the beginning, how do you feel that relationship begins to develop?

Erm, and so, let's say we have a new child join us, and we'd obviously, the first thing we'd be like them to feel very welcome, and we just assure them that you know, you don't have to do something that they don't want to, but there are boundaries. We like them to feel very at home, so we allow them to explore the environment around them, we like them to erm, obviously they're new, we encourage the other children to befriend them, to show them where this is, where that is and you know. And we might let them play and get comfortable in the environment they are in. Obviously over time having carpet

sessions, circle time, we get to know what the needs of the child is. And with nurture, because it is a, such a small group, erm, I usually plan individually to meet the child's need. So I plan according to the child's ability or social need, or emotional need. Erm, and then just doing group activity, and then also having one-to-one time with the child. Joining then when they're doing something, making something, positive praise, always acknowledging and making a big deal if they've done something. Making a big deal out of it so that they feel special. And once they have settled in that realm, erm, it's structured. You know, the day is very much structured because I feel they, it helps children. It reduces anxiety I'd say, it reduces anxiety so we keep it very structured, everything has its own, it's the same, we do the same activity every single day. Erm, try to make it, lessons quite interesting, engaging for the children, erm, and then, so over time, yeh, just you know we'll have a routine, we'll go pick the children up from class, take them here, do their [inaudible] have breakfast, share our dish, share thoughts, you know find out the child's interests. And then you kind of, once you get to know what the child's about you, yeh, I say I plan for, to meet the needs of that child. And we, obviously we try to encourage independency, children become independent. First when they come in it's a bit like, fine we offer a hand, we support them with their work and stuff like that. But as they become a bit more confident, we tend to back away, and let the child kind of find who they are. Because the whole purpose of them being in nurture, depending on what their need is, is to build their social and emotional, and perhaps behaviour skills, so they can cope in the classroom finally. So we target where there's weakness in one of those areas, and then we work on that. So that when they go back to their class on a Wednesday afternoon, if they have, I dunno, don't have any friends, we try to encourage them to have friends, build a friendship. So when they go back to class, things like, yeh, they can talk to friends, they can say kind say kind things to them, they don't snatch and you know, they can make friends in their classroom. Erm.

There's lots of things you've just said there, and in particular I picked up on was really getting to know that child over time, and building in that structure, and acknowledging the child, and offering quite a lot of support in the initial stages, is quite key.

Yeh.

And what is it about that that you feel really relates to the relationship that you are building with that child?

Erm [sighs]

How is it impacting or influencing that relationship?

Well [pause], in the [pause]. I'm trying to think how that is influencing.

Or how do you see that as important in terms of the relationship that you're developing?

I see it as very very important because the, you know, the child needs to really understand that they are a valued member of the classroom, whether in here or in the classroom. You know. They can understand that actually they're valued, and a lot of them sadly don't, they really don't. So in here if we [in audible], obviously they're very low, a lot of them come in with low attainment, say they, I dunno, if they can write the letter 'A' it's a big deal. We use a reward system to praise them so they build that confidence and think 'yeh I can do something!' You know. 'I can do it, I know the letter A' or 'I can write it!' Its small steps, but it has to be acknowledge, it has such an impact on the child. It builds their confidence. You know, it helps them grow. And you know, it helps them, it changes their perception of the way they see themselves and so if we can make them feel better about themselves, that will affect the way they behave in class, or wherever they are around school. And it adds to that, so that's I think one way.

Ok. And if those sorts of things weren't in place, like acknowledging them, taking the time to really get to know them, planning for them individually. If that wasn't' in place, or you weren't doing that, what impact do you think it would have on the relationship between yourself and those children?

Erm, it would be hard. It would be hard in a sense that, erm, there's other children as well, and, if one child is sort of, still needy needy needy, it doesn't hel...not that it doesn't help the group, it just leaves the focus on one child all the time. And if you're not careful, not neglect the others, but you wouldn't give them the rest, the rest of the children the attention that they need. So we kind of try to aim at somehow balancing our attention between each child. And you know we never favour, we never show favour to one chid, we just don't do that. Everybody's important. So if that's not there, yeh, is that's what you're saying? If that's not really the praise, then, the child won't progress. You know it will have an impact on the child's academic ability. Progress. And when you's in mainstream class, because they get left out, you know. They get picked on by, they're not really, they're not valued by the class teacher.

And what would your relationship look like if all of those things that you were describing you're doing, you weren't doing them, if we flipped it around, what would your relationship with the child look like?

I don't think it would be a good one.

In what way?

It, erm, I think in a way that the child, I don't think the child would progress, I don't think the child would progress. It wouldn't do anything for the child. The reason for why the child was put into nurture, those areas where the child needs development in, won't develop. If they had for example low self-esteem, and we don't have certain things in place to help build their self-esteem, then the child, you know would continue, would remain to struggle with their self-esteem, whether they're in here especially in class and in the playground where there's lot more children.

The child would really be struggling.

Struggling, it would be a struggle. So the way nurture works, children come into nurture, and they can be here up to 4 terms. And if the child, it doesn't have to be 4 terms, it's up to. But if we have a child who has come in to us, and we've identified what the child's need is, and we've focussed, and put in place things that will help that child, and we see it after 2 terms, and we see that child change, and whatever. Then he or she will just go back to class. There's no point in keeping the child here, because then they can go back and ready to cope with the rest of their class. So that is what we aim, what we want then to successfully take back to class.

So thinking about them, they've joined the NG, and spent a long period of time in here, how do you see that the relationship between you and that child continues to develop, or build or grow or change? We've talked a lot about the beginning, what do you feel happens...?

Oh no, oh ok. Erm, I think that, yeh, over time....I'm trying to think who's been here for a while [pause]. It's really simple. You kind of just have a really good relationship with the child.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

The child, happy to...

How it feels for you, what I would notice, what you would do?

Erm, well, you feel, I feel happy. The child acknowledges you, the child appreciates your presence. The child is confident enough to trust you. You feel happy. Not just in myself, I feel happy for the child, knowing that, you know what, they've come a long way. They've come a long way. We've had children

who are coming here erm, selective mute. Didn't speak, spoke at home, didn't speak in the school grounds. And over time, as that relationship you know, would develop that relationship, would develop that trust, the child begins to open up, whispering at you, and you feel like, 'wow', you've made a bond with the child. So, yeh I always just feel so happy. I always feel so, I enjoy the experience, I really, it's a joy, it's like a glimmer of hope.

Sounds like it brings a lot of powerful feeling for you...

Absolutely.

...when you think back to what bond is that you described.

Absolutely. It's a glimmer of hope, you feel like 'wow it's been effective'. This intervention you know has worked for this child. Has been successful. You know.

And when you say there's a bond that's developed between you and the child, what do you mean about bond?

Well, a bond in a sense, like, if you're walking down the corridor, the child sees you, they want to give you a hug, but we're not really allowed to!!! Yeh, because they, it's not just that they like you, but they know who you are to them. And if there's an incident, or anything like that, adults will refer to you because you know the child. And the child will respond to you. In situations where the children have been in class, and something has happened, and you've been called to deal with a situation, the children respond to you because you are a familiar adult, and you're an adult who kind of had a journey with them, for x amount of time. So, yeh, you feel that you made that, build that connection because that child is confident enough to respond to you when there's a need, when something has happened. And also we never sort of, it's like even if they leave nurture, we always say that they are more than welcome to pop in and see us, or we give them a little something to remember, remember nurture. It's all, it's not like the end is the cut-off point. We want them to know that, look we're always here for them. You know, and we always keep in contact with the teachers, find out how they're progressing, and if something happens, I tell the teacher to tell me. And in assembly they go up to get an award, I'm like thumbs up, 'yeh, it's a nurture child, woohooo!' You know just things like that, it's a continuous, it's continual. Because you always have that bond, you always feel quite proud if they do something. You feel like, 'it's a nurture child, yes!' You feel, yeh, you just have that connection because you know where the child started, and where they are now. It's huge. Huge huge huge progress. Like massive change. They've come a long way. So, yeh, in that way, you always sort of, yeh you always feel proud, you always feel, your heart goes to them if things are not going well, or they're struggling in class. You wanna be able to, if you can, implement strategies that might help, so that they can respond, to help the teacher build the relationship with the child, and get closer so they can have that relationship with the child, you know.

So the bond, you've described something really big there. You're really talking about that there's a connection between you and that child, there's a real bond, and there's a real sense of pride...

Absolutely!

...that you've seen that child make progress, and you've got that bond, that connection with them.

Absolutely.

And you were talking about how, maybe you're sharing some of that with whoever their next teacher is.

Absolutely, always. It's not like a, it's a cut off. Not at all. And even when they go back to class it's staggered. It's not like straight away back. No. It's like there's a timetable, maybe two days that they'll be in class. The following week it'll be three. Three times a week, and then we have this massive celebration, a leaving party. Celebrating that, their successes, not that they're leaving nurture class, but actually they're, you know they've been successful. And they are so ready to go back to class, and ready to be champions.

[Interviewer laughs]

You know that sort of. So there's no negative ending. But it's a conversation, and we say 'we'll see you in assembly, and lunch hall, dinner hall', you see them, you say 'hi how are you? How's it going? Have you done a piece of work? Oh I want to come and see you'. You know.

And that period of time where the child has started to transition out, you started to mention about your relationship with the child then. How, do you see it as being different in that transition period as to when they're full time in nurture?

Yeh, erm sometimes. Sometimes they don't wanna know you [laughs]. Sometimes they go, and you say 'hi', and it's like you're a stranger. Like 'hello, hello?' They're a bit like, they don't really wanna, not that they don't want to know you, they just don't want to wave at you. You've got some, maybe boys. So it's a bit like 'hello?' and I'll walk past and like 'hello, hello'. You know, it varies from child to child. Every child is different, and...

Sorry, how does it feel when maybe they're not responding and...

Oh do you know what, it feels fine. I think 'great', they're good, they've fitted in in class, they're coping, they're managing. I feel great. Yeh, I feel really good. Obviously I'm always, I want to check with the class teacher, how they're doing, what progress they're making, but if they kind of look at you and just like, as long as they're not falling behind, or they're regress. Do you know what I mean? As long as they're not doing that then I think, yeh its fine, get over it. Once upon a time they knew you [both laugh]. But each child's different, each child is different.

That actually something that I want to pick up on. You've talked a lot about every child being different, and planning very different for them, and the way you get to know them is very different. Do you, how do you describe those individual differences, in terms of your relationships that you develop with children? What influence do you think it has?

Right, ok, so for example, some children are, they respond well, they like construction, they like building things so if I'm planning for example maybe a maths lesson, I'll want to encourage you to learn how to count to 5, so I'll say something. I'll say something like 'we're going to build a tower, and we have to count 5 blocks to build it' so erm, because I know that they'll be interested because they like construction, they like to build stuff. Other children are quite girly, especially with Frozen, you know. Just to motivate them. Maybe they're not very, not really confident. They're quite low. So I will adapt the lesson according to their needs, by picking something they are interested in. And getting them to do that piece of work. And then that will, yeh, it influences our relationship because they, because then they know that 'oh, Mrs Adeoye knows what I like!' And you can see the smile on their face. Their eyes brighten up, and you think 'hmm, ok, they're doing the piece of work, they're achieving, it like wow, you know they feel proud'. And we have proud on our feelings chart, and we like to make reference because we want the children to take pride in their work, because it's sometimes it's overlooked because they're so low. It's not really, and so it's like I would then say, oh I feel proud, because you did this, or, I feel proud because of so and so. And so the next day they'll say 'I feel proud because I done this', you know.

So even just working with them, you have that influence. You just influence their, the way they see themselves, the way they work. Because it's something that interests them. And you're tapping into that.

And by you recognising their different interests, and you're relating to them in response to that...

Absolutely

...helps to support their...

Support their learning. Absolutely.

And would you then say that you have different relationship with different children?

Oh most definitely. Absolutely. I have different relationship with all of the children. Erm, because [pause] it always goes back to interests. I go by their interests. Like some children love the home corner, and you get some children who don't even go in the home corner. You've got children who absolutely love the art table. They're constantly making things all the time. The children who will not go to the art table or does that make sense?

So children with different interests.

Yeh, and their personalities are different. You've got one, children who are quite confident to say things, ones that are quite quiet. You've got the ones that you need to prompt them to talk. You really need to prompt, not shy but, you've got to really prompt them to even say something you know. And you've got ones who, little bit, a bit more sensitive. So you've gotta be careful. You know at the point where somebody, another child's got their reward, the other child will feel quite envious. Envy towards another child. But then you've got to come to their level and explain why they've got this. And we explain, when you do something, you'll get that in class. So it's, relationships is different because you need to know each child. Once you know them, you know how to work with them, and you know how to relate to them. Yeh, they're all so diff, my relationships with the children are different. I wouldn't say I'm closer to, no I try to make sure I give my time to each child.

You're distributing your time fairly.

Yeh, absolutely. So I'm not just with one particular child all the time, it's that, you know, that kind of, no child is sort of left out, or [pause], is there. So in that way I just try to spend time, within, especially within this time. Or working with them one-to-one, you get to know them. Yeh, build that relationship with them.

And with those different types of relationships that you're describing, would you say that you've ever had a relationship with a child that seems like a really good, a strong relationship? Have you ever had times where there's a particular child that's stood out, where you have a particularly good relationship with them?

Erm, yeh. Now, I had one child, a very strong relationship, where I think to the point where, I mean she was calling me mum.

Ok.

Yeh, she was calling me mum. Erm.

Can you tell me more about that relationship that you had with her?

Erm, she [pause] I don't know the background, the home background, but, she was a child who, when she was in class, she hardly spoke, she wouldn't talk, not that she was a selective mute, she just chose not to speak. And when she would come to nurture class, although she was quiet in the mornings, by the afternoon, she was talking, she's doing that and that. And often she will say 'mum mum'. And I would have to remind her, you know. But I think just making her laugh, you know playing games with her, just helping her really break out and enjoy, just enjoy playing, enjoy school. It's almost she was in a little bubble, her own, not, I don't know what it's at home, she doesn't, there's nothing much for her to do at home. So when she's at school, you kind of, when you play these games it like, 'wow, this is a new experience'. You know seeing her laugh, she's happy, she'll see you walking and she'll run to you, give you a hug. And I'll say 'no', I'll say 'who am I?' And she'll be like 'mum'. And I'll say 'I'm Mrs Adeoye'. You know [both laugh]. And she'll be like 'mum, mummy', that kind of sort of. And other adults would notice 'oh she's very, she likes you, she's happy when she sees you'. Mum, I've had this conversation with mum, she says 'on my goodness she doesn't stop talking about you, what have you done to my child?' I said 'I've done nothing, I'm just being a teacher'. You know. So, you have ones that really are, they're close, to the point where it goes beyond teacher. They see you as like a parent, like a carer.

And with those particular relationships, what do you feel is particularly good about them?

Do you know what, it's because, its erm...it means that they could... [Pause]. I could tell them for example, if they don't have the confidence to tell another child that they're playing with this toy. And another child says [inaudible] let it go, so, and I've seen, I would go over and say, 'look, so and so you need to say that "I'm playing with this, you need to wait your turn"'. Or if another child is poking or doing something they don't like, I would go and say 'you need to say "no thank you, I don't like it" '. So you can give them that advice and then you see them taking it on board, because then something will happen and they'll go 'no thank you, I don't like it'. So they trust you enough either to take your advice on-board and listen to what you've told them. And you know, and they come out. So the more you play with them, they gain the confidence, the social skills to play with other children. And it's such a joy. For me it's such a joy when they take over, because my heart is although they're here, and you have good relationships with them, but as time goes on, it's good to encourage them to build friendships with other children. So that they will learn the skills when they go back to class, when they're outside on the playground, to build friendships with other children. It's all good and well being close to them, but in the long run, it wouldn't help them, if you was just always close to them. So I've very mindful of that as well. So I like to pair them up, or set an activity, targeted for them to either share something or a game. I model how to play, and 'who would you like to play? Oh that's nice'. Or if another child is playing with a child who doesn't really play with another child, then [inaudible] straight a reward. That's great, we'll recognise, 'wow, you're playing with another child'. It's great. You've modelled, you know, how you can play nice with the adult. And then hopefully those skills are transferred to the child, so they can play with other children. And 'I realise, that actually 'I can play quite nicely, I won't have to struggle with not, sharing, it's actually better when I do share because then I have a friend'. There's not sharing, you don't have anyone to play with, and you're just like, and you have to play with a child because you don't want them to feel left out.

From what you're saying, am I right in hearing that there are times when you've had a particularly good relationship with a child...

Yeh.

...and that you're very much aware that you do have that good relationship...

Absolutely.

...and you're conscious of needing to hold that in your mind, in terms of thinking about the other children you have in nurture.

Absolutely. And that relationship, I like that good relationship between transferred to the child so that the child can have relationships with other children and other adults. You know, so it...

Ok, so your relationship is influencing the child and their relationships with others.

Absolutely.

And what do you see as being the key factors or the key ingredients that help to build up that good relationship that you have with that child?

Erm, I would say [pause] take note of little things that the child does, take note of that, little things, that you may, sort of, go unrecognised. Erm, for example, this is a simple example, but a child coming in to sit nicely, you big that up, and you give that child a reward. 'You come in, sat really nicely, that is fantastic.' You know, because you have children who do sit nicely, but they're very withdrawn. But you can use that and say, actually 'you're sitting really nicely, you're being a good role model to children'. So they feel like 'yeh, I'm sitting nicely, but I'm sort of being recognised'. Does that makes sense? 'You're such a good role model'. And it makes them feel, 'oh, yes I am sitting nicely, and I am being noticed', because sometimes, kids don't sit nice all the time, but they're not really seeing, they're not, they're good, they can be overlooked. You tend to focus on the ones who play up, or...

You're highlighting small little things.

...you know, or yeh! Or vice versa. Yeh, even for ones who sit down, I think, 'fantastic' you know, get yourself [inaudible] reward', acknowledge that they've made something small, they've done something, even if they've given a colouring pencil to another friend. You know. 'How kind of you to do that, it's so nice, give yourself'. You know, we had one child who would throw tantrums all the time, if she didn't have her way, or somebody, another child took something, 'don't mean to', you know she left something on the table, another child came along to her, she'd look, tantrum. You know. And we would just say, 'you need to use your word'. We're not gonna, yeh, unless you tell us what to do, 'what the matter?', what the problem is, we're not gonna to respond to that behaviour. And so when something will happen, when a child is playing and she'll come over and look, and not throw a tantrum. Right, straight away rewards, stickers. Anything. You just make a big deal. 'Well done'. And the child comes out of it. You don't even need to reward the child because it becomes second nature. So they overcome that.

So from what you're saying am I right in hearing that it's noticing little things, and giving them lots of praise...

Praise, oh my goodness.

...that influences you having a good relationship in nurture.

Absolutely.

And are there any other factors or things that you feel feeds into having that good relationship?

Obviously, I'd say time with the children of course is key. Making time to go join them when they're playing a game. You make them feel like, 'oh you're the teacher, but you can play along too'. I don't know, if they're playing sisters or mums, they tell you you can be someone. 'OK!' You feel, you go to, you come to their level. Come in to their level, erm, and they love t', they laugh all the time. They always laugh [giggles], you know you say silly things, and they crack up, dah dah dah. Just giving them the time

and just getting to know them as well. That helps build the relationship, gives them responsibility, it shows them that you can trust them. You say, 'can you pick up the pens?' or whatever. Give them a job. So they think, 'Ok, I'm responsible'. You know. 'I can do', they feel like they can do something.

[Slight disruption - interviewee thinks there might be another meeting on]

So you've talked about the fact like time, coming down to their level, noticing and pointing out little things about them. Really getting to know them...

Absolutely.

...and they really feed into, we talked about trust…

Absolutely key.

…and building that relationship, and that's what helps to build that good relationship.

Absolutely. And you know, erm, their strength as well. Praising them. For example, a child who, I keep thinking about the same thing, sorry. If a child is good with construction, for example, and you're doing an activity that involves something, you can just pick that child and say 'oh you are so good and building stuff, can you just come and show the class how to...' You know, that sort of, so you're focusing on their strengths as well. And where they have their weaknesses, you put in things in place so they can overcome those weaknesses. To a point where you don't even, it doesn't come up anymore.

And when you have that good relationship with that child, how do you think the child feels towards you?

Do you know, I think they feel really safe. I think they feel really safe towards you. And they, they're not, afraid to approach you. When something happens, or, they're not afraid t'. I think safe will be, it's a good word, to really that, just summarises every aspect of it. [Gestures a spherical shape with her hands].

You're kind of modelling it, a spherical thing that seems to be holding in that safeness.

Yeh, that's right. I would definitely say that, yeh, they feel safe. Because, you are an adult that, who, will respond to them if they need, if they need you to. [Pause] And it's, there's no delay so if something happens, we don't delay it we don't go 'oh wait wait, come back.' No, there's no delay, straight away. 'Can you tell me what's happened?' So it's straight, immediate. Attention. What's going on, what's the problem, how can we solve it? We like the children to use their initiative to sort. At first we might help with the initial solution, but then it comes a times, when we give the children the choice, like, 'what do you think? What can we do to make this better? How can...' You know, if they're arguing over a toy, 'what can you do to make sure you both can play nicely?' And they might say 'share'. 'Oh fantastic! Brilliant!' And low and behold, they start sharing and they just get on with it. So getting them to also use their own initiative you know, to solve problems, it's really important.

We've talked a lot about when you have a good relationship with a child. And I'm just curious as to whether there might be times when you have quite a challenging relationship with a child?

Yeh. [Low tone in voice]

You're nodding there, I'm just wondering whether you could...

[Sighs] Erm, yes.

[Both laugh]

Yes, yes yes yes yes. Erm.

Could you describe, or just tell me a bit about them?

Ooh! Erm, ok. [Pause] Well we have a child, we have a child in our Nurture Group who is extremely challenging. And he is a lovely boy, a really lovely boy. He has an abs, a lovely side to him. Very caring, very helpful. And he's very interested. He's interested in what you say. We have a good bond. A good relationship, a close relationship. I would say close. But, because his behaviour is extreme, and he's very violent, and very aggressive. He can be very defiant, and unsafe. [Pause]. It's very important that in the midst of when the child is kicking off, because you've got that relationship with that child, you can reassure that child. They don't have to choose to do what they're doing. And sometimes they respond, well this child, this particular child. Sometimes they respond, sometimes he doesn't. But when it escalates, it's to the point where Rebecca and myself cannot intervene. We will have to call other adults. But, because we have a relationship with him, we are now at a stage where we can get it, we can give him two choices. And we let him reason, like what would happen if you do this, what would happen if you do that. Erm, although he is a challenging child, I would still say, personally for me, I have a good relationship with him. I have because I don't allow his, I don't major on his behaviour when he's here. I major on his strength, and what he's good at. You know. And so he's very helpful, and so I give him opportunities to do things. Erm, very, you know, very kind, you know. And he loves playing, and role play. Things like that. So when he's doing things like that, you know, lots of praise, lots of games, lots of reward and erm. And, also help the child understand that as an adult I understand, and it's ok to get angry. Because adults get angry too. It's ok to express. If he's tired, and he wants to sleep, that's ok. We're not going to hold him back. But however, he still needs boundaries in place which can be difficult. Challenging, a child with challenging behaviour, you know, does not respond well to boundaries. Erm, but, and sometimes because he's so challenging, you've got to use your discretion, certain consequences won't work. It'll only escalate the matter, so you have to use your judgement to decide what consequences, or what would you use as a sort of, yeh, consequence for that child. So there's a child understands that ok, because I did this, therefore, you know, they lose minutes off their busy time. And then give them time to reflect, and come back, and always explain to the child, why they missed their busy time, or why they were put on time out, or why...

So it feels important to help them understand consequences...

Absolutely.

...and reflect on why things happened.

Absolutely.

And with this particular child, what is it for you that feels so challenging in relation to you relationship with him?

I think the challenging aspect in because, the challenging aspect is the fact that the child is very unpredictable. He's very unpredictable. So it depends on the mood he comes in, it depends on if he had a good nights sleep, erm, it depends if a child has walked along the corridor and accidentally brushed his or her elbow against him. And something small can escalate to something extreme. And the fact that if you, when he does get very aggressive and violent, the children here in nurture are not safe. And nurture is meant to be a safe base, you know. And so for them to witness the violence, and throwing of chairs, and turning tables, it's quite a scary on their part. Because if this is a provision that's meant to make them feel safe...Yeh, I'd say because the child is unpredictable, there's no exact trigger. Some, ok, fair enough, if he wants something, or he's not ready to tidy up, then kick off. But some, other times, out of nowhere.

That unpredictability. Am right in thinking that's what makes your relationship feel challenging?

Absolutely. Absolutely.

It sounds like it's been really difficult.

Very very difficult.

I imagine that it's brought up quite a lot of feelings for you.

Most definitely. I mean, one of the things, I feel, you feel you want to help the child, erm, and you want this provision to meet his needs. But, sometimes the child has more, you know, it's more than just behaviour, it's more than just social, emotional aspects of you know, his life. And so it goes back to background, it goes back to what he's seen, what he's witnessed. And, its, it's hard. Because you have to always be mindful of the other children as well. And because his behaviour is so challenging, I find as a teacher, my energy, my attention, is focussed more on this one particular child. And the other children around me are having, I don't have much time to kind of really get to their level and engage with them because I'm more, you know, my, my antenna is always locked. I'm always watching if another child might upset him, if something might happen, because I, obviously I care for the safety of the children. So you know, their, safety first. Erm, so it's, it's hard, it's hard. It is difficult, it's difficult.

Hard, difficult.

Yeh, I'd say difficult. You want the child to progress, you want to do everything in your power, you know, for the child to overcome those behaviours, you know. But sometimes you know, it might not be the right provision for the child. But, you know, you still build a bond, you still build that relationship with the child. You know. Erm.

Something I'm quite struck with, is you're describing a child who you're kind of labelling as having quite a challenging relationship with...

Yeh.

...yet at the same time, you're also talking about having a bond with him...

Absolutely.

...and you said earlier you have a close relationship with him...

Absolutely.

...and I'm wondering whether you can ever just, solely have a challenging relationship, or with every relationship, you have with a child, there are times when it's maybe challenging, or, a good relationship as well.

I think because they need you most, really, so it's hard to not have a close relationship with them, because you're, you know, you wanna be there to diffuse anything. If anything happens, you want to be there to help the child understand, you know, how they're breaching golden rules, or how they're making other children feel because of their behaviour. So you can't, you know, it's inevitable I'd say, erm. It's just something that can't really be ignored. But if anything, erm, then you want the child to know that you understand, that it's ok to be angry, but it's not ok to hurt. It's ok to express if you're tired, and if you wanna stay, just, it's ok. You know. Erm, to try to rearrange, because you haven't had things your way. So, for me it, it is, yeh, it's a lear...although it's challenging, its still, you still have that close. And the child, you definitely still see it with the child. Because the child will come home, and, you know, the parent, or, will say, 'oh I want to go to school because I want to see Mrs Adeoye'. There's an

incident where the child had to go home and mum said he was kicking off outside, started crying, 'Mrs Adeoye', you know. It's like, it's a bit, yeh, its erm, it's a difficult one, it's a difficult one.

Umm, it does sound difficult. And you're describing its challenging, but it's a still a close relationship.

Absolutely. Absolutely, yeh.

Ok.

But you still have a close relationship because you're very, you want the child, you want to help the child deal with situations better. So you have to be there to model it. You have to be there to help the child be reflective. YOU have to constantly be engaging and interacting with the child at all times. So through that, you do build a relationship with the child, you get quite close to the child, you know.

So in that act of modelling, and trying to get to know them and supporting them, that's what's helping to build that relationship with them.

Absolutely. And their understanding, because you've made that, you major on the child's strength, they see you as someone who recognise when I do good, it's not just when I make the wrong choice. So we major on that, like 'wow, that was really nice'. You know that sort of thing, you major on what they can do, rather than what they can't do.

Ok. So you're focussing on those positives.

Absolutely.

And, what do you think it is about the relationships that Nurture Group teachers have with Nurture Group children which is important? What do you see is the biggest value of that relationship?

Erm, I feel that I'm repeating myself. I think the biggest value is trust again. Its building that trusting relationship, with the child and the nurture teacher. Erm, because the group is small, and the number of children are small, you have that advantage to get to know that child better, and that child get to know you. So I, I definitely think its trusting relationship that will be, that's number one.

Trust feels number one...

Yeh.

...in terms of the relationship.

Absolutely, absolutely number one, trusting relationship with the child.

And if trust wasn't there, what would the consequence be?

Erm, [pause] it would just be like working in a smaller group of children like, erm [pause].

What would the consequence be on the relationship you have with that child if there was no trust? How would it impact on your relationship?

Erm, I think, I don't even know how they'd feel because I've not been, you know. Erm, dunno, I don't feel, maybe the child won't really engage with you much. You know, er, maybe the child may not approach you much, or respond to you. I'm just trying to think.

Maybe it's difficult to think about that?

Yeh, it's quite hard, what would it be? Erm.

Perhaps if that trust wasn't there they wouldn't be engaging with you as much, and responding to you?

I don't think so, no. I don't think so.

Ok, we're coming towards the end. It's been really interesting what you've been saying, really valuable. But I want to make sure from you if there's anything we haven't touched upon or you want to come back to something that feels really important that you want to expand on about the relationship between nurture practitioners and children. Is there anything you want to add, or comment on, spend a little time focussing on?

I just want to say, I feel like erm, nurture intervention is such a fantastic scheme, because it really helps children who are withdrawn for example, to build a level of confidence in a short space of time, that probably will take them a long time through the school system. For example, I have one girl who, when she started with us, she was extremely shy, low self-esteem. She was just, you know, she'd never have the confidence to ask for help, or say she was stuck on a piece of work. All you'd see was tears just running down her eyes, and you'd go then and say 'is there something wrong? Duh, duh, duh'. And you would, she wouldn't even tell you, but then you would almost be her mind and say 'is the work too difficult? And you get a nod, you know, things like that. Or when it's PE, don't really want to participate. You know, just haven't got that confidence. And, I mean, four terms on, it's like a different child. Her confidence level is sky high. Bit too confident! Wow! [Both laugh]. But it's amazing because, she does try now. It's not an issue, she's overcome a barrier of, you know, if something is difficult, she can just give it a go, she's ready to take risks. You know, she's learnt skills that perhaps she probably would have taken a long time to learn, across the system. And it's just the benefits of nurture is amazing. And I think we've got a really high, successful reintegration rate for the children. We have seen children just transform, blossom. So I really value the nurture intervention, that's been established in school, because I think it's such...

Really really value it.

Really value it. I think it's so good, it's just so good f', children who will just need that little bit of, I was gonna say not even support, just a little bit of attention. Just to get them to be able to cope in the classroom. To find themselves. So I really really love it. I really love working in nurture.

I can hear from the way you're describing it, and the way your face lights up when you're talking.

Yeh, we've got a list of challenges, highs and low, you know, it is such, it's wonderful, it really amazing. It's really difficult at times. But you know what, the benefits weigh.

The mix of experiences that you have, some are challenging, we've heard some of them before, but it all outweighs.

Absolutely, because you see, you know that you've made a difference, in the life of these children. You know. They can go back into class, and just be, the same, in their class. Valuable members of the class, and get on with things.

And what do you see about your relationship with those children, that really has made that real difference? How does your relationship play into that?

I think, that the relationships with children, that I've had with the children, its, it's been a good tie. Because I have children who I sort of work, lunchtime club, some are nurture children. And they can come to talk to you, they've had issues in the playground, you can approach them. They won't physically come to you, but you can see the expression on their face, and go to them as say 'is everything ok?' And they will open up and say 'duh, duh, duh, learn'. But because you've had that relationship, you've built

that relationship with the children over time, it's ok, you can have the right to look at the child and think 'hmm, something's not right'. And approach the child as say 'oh actually is there something?' Or have the right also to ask if you can see a piece of work, and praise them, give them stickers. Make them feel happy.

Am I right in hearing that the relationship you've had, you're noticing a little bit more about them...

Absolutely.

...and then feeling the right to be able to make comments to them...

Absolutely.

...have conversations with them.

Absolutely. Yeh, it's really good, it's good. I think it's really important. It really is important. But I've learnt, there's one thing I've learnt, you've gotta, even though you've got that close relationship with that child, you've got to think long term, in terms of you know, you've got to think how, yeh, this child is so close to you, but they also have to learn those independence skills. You just can't hold them, no one else but you. You've got to give them that space also for them to blossom in nurture so that they can do other things and have the confidence to approach other adults, and have good relationships with other adults. It's not just you alone. And that's something that gives me joy, I love it. I love it when I see them making friends, I'm just thinking 'wow, that's great'. You've built that closeness and they're branching out, it great because it means you've met their target. You've met the reason why they came into nurture.

Building that, having that close relationship allows them to be able to branch out.

Branch out, absolutely. They have good relationships with adults across the school, because you've modelled that adults are not just negative, they don't just shout, and swear, scream. Adults listen. They're positive, they recognise you. Things like that. But what, a lot of issues probably you might find I think people might flag up the relationship between CT's and nurture children. It's not one that's always a good one, in the sense that they tend to, the children, they tend to push children more, out. They want them to just be in nurture, they don't really have time. But I understand because it's not easy having a class of 30 children. But it's good to have a relationship with the CT as well.

So its sounds like there's a real difference between your relationship with the child, and the mainstream CTs relationship, and something about you having to have that dialogue.

Absolutely. It's great because you can say, 'oh, I've spoken duh, duh, duh'. And they go 'oh, you know that?!' And I'm like, 'yeh I do. I know. I've been told'. I mention the CT so they know you also have a good relationship with the CT, you're modelling to them, so every, literally, it's that constant modelling, you know, so it's not just, the kids are excluded from the rest of the school, 'no'. They are part, part of school, just want them to manage and cope in school. I love it. I love it!!

Appendix 9: Analytical tool prompt sheet

*Based on Corbin and Strauss (2008)

Ask questions of the data.

- What does this mean to the participant?
- What is the participant saying?
- So what?
- What is the issue or concern?

Comparisons.

- How is this different to another similar code
- How are these codes similar & different

Search for meaning(s) of a word or section of text.

What might opposite of this word or section of text be? (Flip-flopping)

Look out for participant bias and my own bias.

What language is being used?

Notice emotions and the meaning they give to the text.

What is the meaning behind metaphors that are used?

Notice references to time. What information does this give in relation to the context of the data?

Look for negative cases to provide different perceptions or explanations.

Property = "characteristics that define and describe concepts" – under what conditions

Dimension = boundaries, "variations within properties"

Appendix 10: Letter of ethical approval

The Tavistock and Portman NHS

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
www.tavi-port.org

Amy Gibb
By Email

10 June 2016

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child?

Dear Amy,

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your research ethics application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Best regards,

Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee
T: 020 938 2699
E: pjeram@tavi-Port.nhs.uk

cc.   Brian Davis, Course Lead

How do Nurture Group practitioners make sense of their relationship with the Nurture Group child?

By signing below, you are agreeing that;

1. You have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.
2. You understand that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any point (up until the interview is analysed) without giving a reason.
3. You agree for the interview to be recorded.
4. You understand that your data will be anonymised using a pseudonym and that this is done to protect your identity as much as possible.
5. You understand that the only time when your confidential data might be shared is when there is an issue of safety around yourself or somebody else.
6. You understand that the research will be written up as a thesis which means it can be accessed through libraries, and that it will be shared with professionals who work with young people.

Your name: ……………………………………. Signed: ……………………………………. Date: …. /…./……..

Researcher name: …….*Amy Gibb…………* Signed: ……………………………………. Date: …. /…./……..

Thank you for your help.

Appendix 12: Illustration of the story of the practitioner-child journey: A pictorial representation of the results.
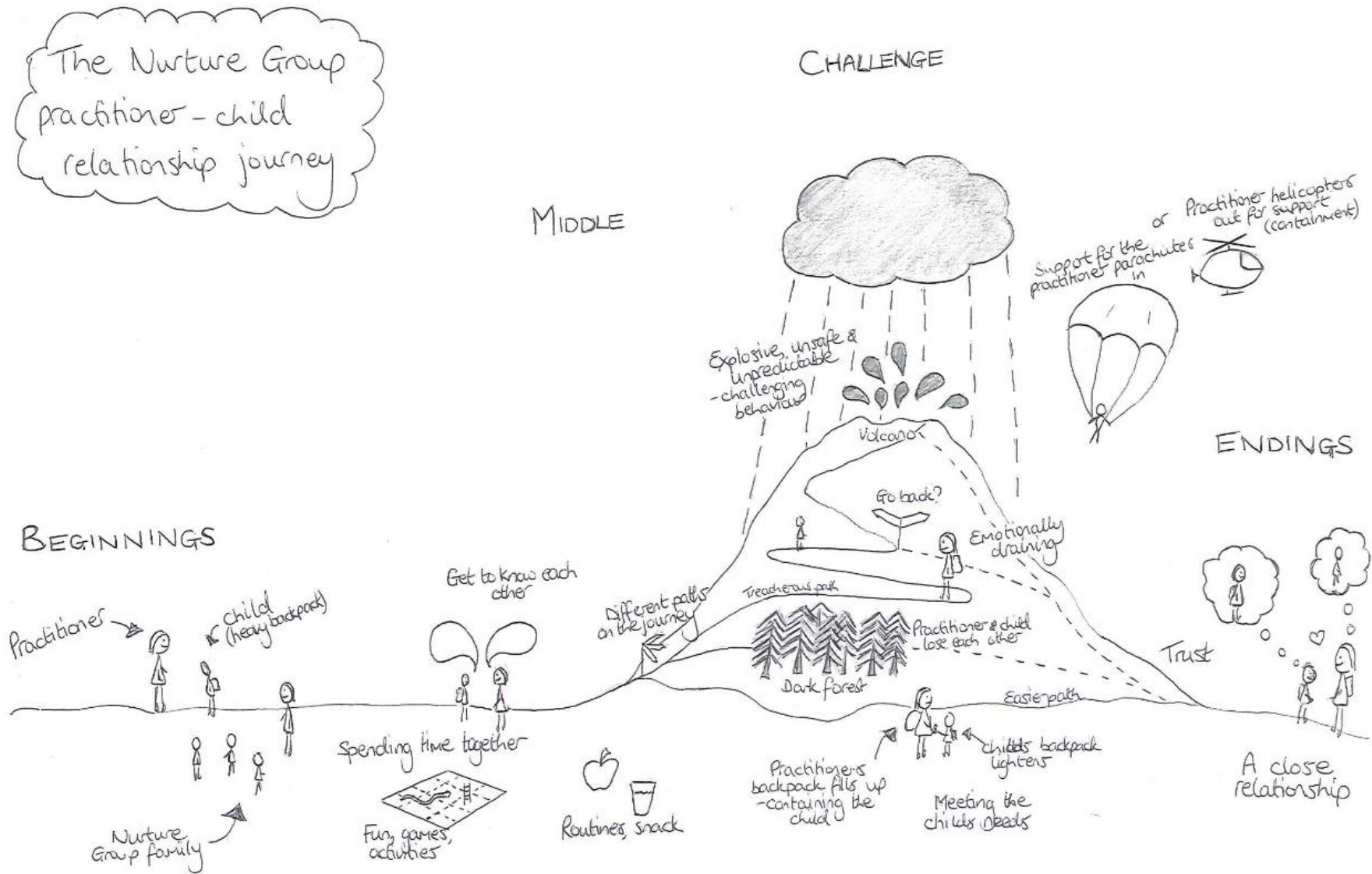
Appendix 13: Summary of exclusion criteria applied to literature review part 2

Initial search relating to Nurture Groups

Reason for exclusion	Number of articles
Research not directly about Nurture Groups	1
Non-psychodynamic meaning of the terms *projection* and *containment*	3
Not a journal article e.g. a book	2

Later search relating to the school settings

Reason for exclusion	Number of articles
Research not relevant to the school setting	111
Non-psychodynamic meaning of the terms *reverie, introjection, projection* and *containment*	24
Research is school based, but not relevant to school staff working directly with children/young people	4
Research not based in the UK	14
Not a journal article e.g. a book	2

Appendix 14: Literature review part 2: Details of critiqued papers

Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
Jackson (2002)	To illustrate the impact of WDGs for staff in secondary schools. Particularly in − Developing skills in observation − Understanding factors that impact on teaching & learning, behaviour & staff wellbeing − Systemic change	Single secondary school, where YP experience poor mental health, disadvantage, SEND, crime, family breakdown. YP, school staff and the organisation were discussed, through work with 44 staff.	Case study of one secondary school setting. Descriptive & analytical account of WDGs (structure, themes that emerged, impact) Practitioner based method of research. Small quantitative reporting of impact via questionnaires with 25 staff.	2 (later 3) WDGs ran fortnightly, each with 8 school staff at a time. Common themes arising in the WDGs included: endings, relationships btw pupils and staff, anxiety towards learning, staff feelings, YPs underlying emotions (sometimes projected into staff), adolescence organisational change. Time for reflection, opportunities to deepen understanding of relationships, interpersonal dynamics, emotional experiences, identifying ways of managing challenging behaviour, improving staff wellbeing.	Psychoanalytic (mention projection, transference & countertransference, states of mind, containment). Mention attachment but unclear whether this refers to attachment theory, or a term for 'link, close relationship etc.'	Discussion of theory in relation to themes, helps enrich the readers understanding. Provides good insight into the links between the unconscious, emotions, relationships, learning, behaviour, teaching and school systems. Implications for similar groups set up in other schools, to support − Staff wellbeing − Understanding and managing behaviour − Systemic change

Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
McLoughlin (2010)	Describe a psychodynamic approach to CAMHS input at a PRU. Provide clinical examples of creating containment for staff, YP and families, and the PRU organisation.	4 PRU settings in Inner London. Cater for 6-16 year olds who have been permanently excluded from school.	In depth case example – psychodynamic input described at multiple levels (with the YP, parent, PRU staff). 2 further very brief examples of clinical work also given. Examples described in relation to theory.	Containment was provided through 4 levels • Direct work with the YP • Parent work • WDGs with PRU staff • Networks around the YP/family YP need space to express and make sense of their experiences. Parents feel contained by being heard, and part of a network. Staff absorb projections from the YP (and parents & each other), leading to persecutory states of mind. Valuable to have a space for them to become aware and make sense of this, and develop a deeper understanding of a child/family. Children form different forms of attachment relationships with PRU staff. Networks are valuable to hold everyone together, especially when the system is very fluid.	Psychodynamic - Containment (Bion) - Psychoanalytic consultation - Projection - Introjection - States of mind & positions Open systems theory Attachment relationships (very brief)	Emphasises a successful approach to providing emotional support (via containment) at different levels, within a challenging community setting. Helps reduce and manage SEMH needs, and support staff. Enriches understanding of PRU settings, their families, and systemic challenges, via theory. Emphasises the importance of a network having the space to think together.

Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
Mawson (1986)	Highlight use of psychodynamic thinking when working with YP and school staff, to aid their understanding of the YP and their own feelings towards the child	15 year old male, with history of learning difficulties and SEMH	Narrative case study of an analysts involvement with the YP	Interpretations of the YPs inner world given. Discussion about relationships, endings, anxiety. Thinking space provided to school staff to aid their understanding of the YP. Space for staff to share their anxieties & experiences of the YP and wider school.	Psychodynamic interpretations throughout e.g. containment	Highlights value of a professional facilitative a thinking space for staff to − Develop understanding of a child − Better understand their own feelings towards the child − Staff to feel more tolerant of the child − Staff to express their own anxieties and receive containment − Extending learning to other YP or the teaching and learning environment

Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
Music & Hall (2008)	Demonstrate how a psychotherapist working in a school can support the child and network around the child	Single Inner London school setting (children, parents, staff, CAMHS professionals)	Case study of a 7 year old child with significant SEMH, close to exclusion. Brief reference to other cases.	Account of the therapists work over time & impact at different levels. Mainly the child's presentation during therapy. Projections held by the child. Therapist working with the network, especially supporting staff understanding of the child, minimising their anxieties, allowing them to contain the child more, and reducing the projections the child receives from the school i.e. not seen as bad. Children can evoke strong, uncomfortable feelings in staff via projection.	Psychodynamic - Splitting - Projection - Containment - Held in mind	Demonstrates the value of bringing together a network around a child to provide a reflective space, minimising projection, and building containment of the child and staff within the school. Indicates the value of having space for staff to share their difficulties/concerns (via containment), to minimise anxiety, and develop understanding.

Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
Maliphant & Horner (2016)	Describe development of a therapeutic team in a primary school.	Multi-cultural inner London primary school. High level of poverty, mobility, and SEMH needs. Head teach and SLT fostered a culture of valuing wellbeing across the whole school community. High level of investment.	Accounts of different type of work run by the therapeutic team (individual work with children, supervision for school staff, observation & consultations with staff, training). Small case examples provided, and one longer case example of individual therapeutic work with a child.	Therapeutic team = therapists, learning mentors, PSAs, trainee social workers (all employed by the school). Listening-mentor service set up for children to receive 10 minute sessions with a team member. Staff trained up to provide support to children. Strategies could be shared with teachers and parents. Identified areas of the school which were less 'containing' (the playground). WDGs and staff consultations (reflective spaces) developed understanding of the children, and how they can become a container for their anxieties, and make subtle changes to support their wellbeing and learning e.g. p.33. Narrative accounts of individual therapy, alongside work with parents.	Psychodynamic – mainly containment, some reference to projection & internalisation.	Highlights the value of having staff in a school who can offer containing spaces for YP, other staff, and parents. Indicates that containing spaces via supervision and group consultation can enable small changes to be made, which benefits the child's social and emotional wellbeing and development, and learning. Use of theory helps to give meaning to the school contexts and situations described.

Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
Emanuel (1999)	Describe consultation to staff in a school which catered for YP with complex needs, where staff and YP often feel great anxieties.	School community, catering for children with complex needs, aged 3-18 years.	Small case examples of WDGs with staff teams and a series of 4 consultations with SLT, using psychodynamic thinking.	Work discussion groups with staff are described. Consultation with SLT are also described, leading to organisational change. Consultations with all staff led to greater understanding of the YPs projections, capacity to think about the YPs communications, staff feeling more contained, and able to help the YP feel better understood. YPs feelings are often projected into staff, leading to feelings of failure, inadequacy, and worthlessness.	Psychodynamic framework - Projection - Containment	Highlights the value of regular WDG with staff, to thinking about the meaning of children's communications and inner world, including projections they put into staff. As a result, staff can feel increased ability to respond to the child to help them feel understood, leading to positive improvements in learning and behaviour. Highlights how consultations with SLT can allow for systemic changes to be made, which has an impact on staff wellbeing (structures of containment) Indicates circles of containment or containing the containers.

Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
Waters (2000)	To describe an intervention for children with SEMH needs, which combines therapeutic and academic writing support.	Junior school, which offers a therapeutic group for 9-11 year olds with SEMH needs.\n\nFocus on one 10 year old child.	Case study of a 10 year old child with selective mutism & early experiences of DV and further trauma.\n\nNarrative account of her changing presentation over the course of the intervention.\n\nInterpretations of her presentation and stories are provided.	The importance of containing a child, to allow them the capacity for learning, processing of difficult feelings, and emotional stability.\n\nThe use of metaphor for children to express their unconscious inner worlds.\n\nTeacher as an attachment figure.\n\nInterventions as a 'holding environment' for the child – boundaries, attuned adult.	Attachment theory\n\nPsychodynamic theory – mainly projection and Bion's concept of containment.	The girl's confidence, language & communication and literacy skill improved over a 2-3 term period. Indication of being more emotionally contained.\n\nSuggests the value of this type of intervention to meet SEMH and academic needs, via a containing space, with an attuned adult, and where children can project their experiences via story metaphors.

| Author (date)	Purpose/aim of paper	Population discussed	Method or approach	Key discussion points	Key theoretical links	Impact & importance
Greenwood (2002)	To give an outline of the underlying causes of children who express emotional distress in school, discuss ways of 'emotionally holding' the child in the school, and staff reflecting on their behaviour.	Children and young people who have experienced trauma or difficult early nurturing experiences.	Theoretical paper. One brief case example of therapeutic work with a year 4 child.	Children who have experienced trauma or difficult early nurturing can express their anxieties and fears, through anger, violence (often when the child feels unsafe). Children can appear to explode, or unable to learn. Painful for the child to think about themselves. Impact of trauma on brain development. Children benefit from a holding environment (containment), where they feel safe and emotionally held by an adult, and structures in place. Reflecting on a child's communications.	Psychodynamic – Bion & Winnicott on containment and holding environments Attachment theory Neurobiology	Positive outcomes from therapeutic work with a Y4 child – more able to access the curriculum, improvement in academic attainment. Highlights the importance in adults in schools being able to think about, tolerate and process the child's emotional experiences (containment). Highlights the value of school staff reflecting on and making sense of a child's communications and projections, and therefore respond to the child in a helpful way (either individually or in groups). (Helps reduce staff stress) School staff need to provide a safe space where the child feels accepted (no fear of rejection), and boundaries enforced.

Appendix 15: Six principles of Nurture

1. Children's learning is understood developmentally

2. The classroom offers a safe base

3. The importance of nurture for the development of self-esteem

4. Language as a vitals means of communication

5. All behaviour is communication

6. The importance of transitions in children's lives

Reference: Lucas et al. (2006).

Appendix 16: Example excerpt from my research journal

<u>21st January</u>

- Should all of emotionally draining sit underneath 'challenges'?
- Does being a container link to 'time and space for child to calm down'? I have temporally put this code within containment, but want to come back to it at a later date to see if it would be better placed elsewhere.
- As I look through the data incidents for 'time and space for the child to calm down', I notice that Sofia and Nikki mostly comprised this code, and the 11 data incidents are about 2 children or examples of how to approach the child. I realise that giving the child time and space to calm down is likely to be one of many approaches/strategies that the practitioner might use, so needs to be seen within the context of a higher order category. This code is perhaps a useful strategy when the practitioner is facing challenges e.g. challenging behaviour, and giving the child time and space allows them time and space to understand the child better.
- I have temporarily put this code within 'containment' but am beginning to wonder if it fits better within 'meeting the child's needs' – perhaps it is a property or dimension of meeting the child's needs, just like 'being sensitive to the child'

- As I looked at the data incidents within 'time and space to calm down', the data seemed to suggest that the practitioner faces challenges with the child, but this is part of the road to developing a close relationship. It made me again think of this diagram
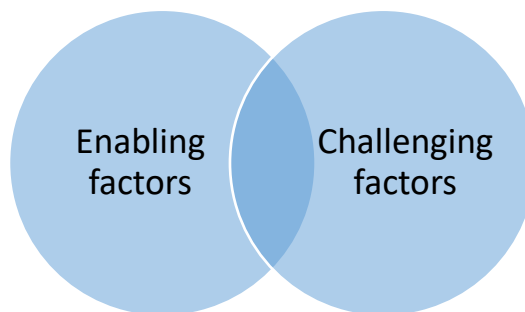
- I wonder if enabling and challenging factors overlap. Does there need to be an element of challenge to enable the relationship e.g.
    - Challenging behaviour or no connection btw practitioner and child, which causes the practitioner to question their approach, ask further questions or adapt their approach to better understand the child and subsequently meet their needs
    - Does the child as a result recognise that the practitioner is helping (consciously and/or unconsciously), which leads to trust developing, child feeling more contained, and thus enables a close relationship to develop?
    - See memo 86, Nikki p101
    - See memo 90, Nikki p123
- There may still be relationships which have few challenges, and some which are mostly challenging. The degree of overlap may differ for each individual child.

- Are containment and meeting the child's needs part of one larger category?
- Understand → attuned → contain/meet the child's needs

Sudden thoughts about 'connection between practitioner and child'

- Close or closeness are terms so frequently used by the practitioner to describe the relationship – this seems very significant
- As I look at the code 'child feels comfort, warmth, motherly practitioner', the content seems to be linked to the relationship being close and the child trusting the practitioner, which is maintained after the child leaves the NG. I wonder if this code is a sub-code of 'connection…', highlighting how the child feels towards the practitioner. Maybe then the practitioners' feelings might be represented by the codes 'family' or 'pride…' or 'special'
- 'beyond the NG' may also a sub-code, dimension or property of 'connection….'

Connection….

Continues beyond the NG　　　Child feels comfort　　　Special　　　Shared