

**VOLUME I**

**AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF EXTANT LITERATURE PERTINENT TO  
NURTURE GROUPS AND AN EXPLORATORY STUDY, USING GROUNDED  
THEORY METHODS, OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF  
A SECONDARY SCHOOL NURTURE GROUP**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

Harriss, Barlow and Moli (2008) recognise that a considerable number of children and young people in the United Kingdom are attributed with having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBDs). The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE, 2001) explain that children, who experience SEBDs outside the normal range for their age or gender, are at increased risk of experiencing mental health disorders. With these points in mind, Nurture Groups, an in-school intervention aimed at meeting the needs of children and young people experiencing considerable SEBDs is the conceptual domain explored throughout this Volume of work.

The Volume comprises four chapters. Chapter one focuses on the structure, content, remit and rationale of work in the Volume. Chapter Two presents an in-depth examination of extant literature pertinent to Nurture Groups. Key issues are identified and relevant research is explored with critical analysis of a range of sources and suggestions for further research made. Chapter Three presents a research study which uses grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006, Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to explore secondary aged pupils' experiences and views of a secondary school Nurture Group. The study found that the young people involved in the research valued their time in the Nurture Group and theoretical categories which describe what they valued are explored. Chapter Four offers reflections on the work in this Volume.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*To the inspirational children and young people I worked with in England, Romania,  
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appropriate educational opportunities must be a basic right for every child.*

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**CHAPTER ONE**

**VOLUME I: AN OVERVIEW**

## **VOLUME I: AN OVERVIEW**

### **1. Contextual information on the thesis submitted for the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology**

The thesis submitted for the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology comprises two volumes of work completed during Years 2 and 3 of training. In addition, a portfolio of work presenting personal learning over the training course has been submitted to the University. Therefore, Volume I is submitted in part fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Applied Educational and Child Psychology. The focus of work in this volume is on Nurture Groups (NGs) which Cooper and Whitebread (2007) explain are an in-school intervention to meet the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBDs). Further contextual information pertinent to NGs at a national and local level will be presented in Sections 4.4 and 5.

Volume II is separately bound and available upon request from the University of Birmingham. This volume presents five Professional Practice Reports (PPRs) written to doctoral standard. Collectively, the PPRs cover salient domains of educational psychology practice and demonstrate some of the diverse work and learning experiences that have been engaged with over years two and three of training.

## **2. The structure of Volume I**

This Volume comprises of four chapters. This chapter provides an overview to the thesis and particularly focuses on the structure, content, remit and rationale of work in this volume. In accordance with University course requirements the papers in Chapters 2 and 3 needed to be written with submission to a specific target journal in mind. This is discussed in Section 3 of this chapter. Contextual information on how the research area was negotiated and commissioned, the relevance of NGs at national and local level and the importance of gaining the views of children and young people are also explored.

Chapter Two: An in-depth examination of extant literature pertinent to Nurture Groups (NGs). This chapter presents a critical literature review which explores and examines a wide range of theoretical and research literature. As can be seen from the title of the paper, the focus of the literature review is an in-depth examination of extant literature pertinent to Nurture Groups (NGs). The literature review aims to identify key issues and demonstrate awareness of a variety of standpoints. Extant research is explored with critical analysis of a range of sources and suggestions for further research made.

Chapter Three: An exploratory study, using grounded theory methods, of young people's experiences and views of a secondary school Nurture Group (NG). This chapter presents a professionally relevant research study. The research study uses grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006, Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to explore secondary aged pupils' experiences and views of a secondary school NG. In terms of research remit, course requirements

stated that the selected domain of research enquiry needed to have a clear psychological orientation, be feasible within the EPS context, and agreed upon by EPS service managers as work which fell within the remit of Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs). Prior to embarking on the study a research proposal which met the British Psychological Society and British Educational Research Association ethical requirements for research with human subjects was approved by the University of Birmingham.

Chapter Four offers concluding comments on issues such as reflexivity, methodology, the grounded theory constructed in Chapter 3 and final comments on the work in the Volume. Information on how findings from Volume I, have been disseminated to stakeholders is also discussed.

### **3. Target journal for the literature review and research study**

The author has written the literature review and research study papers with the aim of them being suitable, albeit with some adaptations in terms of reduction of breath of information, word count and reference formatting, for submission to the journal entitled ‘Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties’. This journal is the official publication of the Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA). The ‘Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties’ publication is an academic journal and the selection process for submitted articles is rigorous in that there exists a peer review policy whereby all articles accepted have been screened by the editor and at least two other referees (SEBDA, 2009). Appendix 1 provides journal specifications for authors who are interested in submitting work.

This journal was chosen because SEBDA (2009) explain that the intention of “Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties” is to support understanding of SEBDs and knowledge of relevant approaches to responding and preventing SEBDs. This may be in regards to interventions and policy. Thus, it was considered that an in-depth critical literature review and research paper which centre on NGs, an intervention intended to meet the needs of children and young people with SEBDs (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007), would be appropriate material for this journal.

SEBDA (2009) explain that the journal audience includes a wide range of professionals who work with children with SEBDs, including teachers in mainstream and special schools, educational and clinical psychologists, professionals who offer training in the area of SEBDs as well as researchers and academics. It was considered that this audience would find the information offered in the literature review and research study useful in building on their knowledge and understanding of the intervention.

#### **4. The context from which the literature review and research study were derived**

Work for Volume I was negotiated within the following context. The author was part of the first cohort of TEPs accepted onto the Doctoral training course in Applied Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Birmingham. Her training began in September 2006 which, it could be argued, was an exciting but uncertain time for trainees and the educational psychology profession as a whole, because it marked the beginning of the new training route. This meant that instead of completing a one year Masters course people wishing to become Educational Psychologists (EPs) needed to complete a doctoral

programme of study, which included securing jobs as TEPs in a Local Authority Educational Psychology Services (EPS) for years 2 and 3 of the training programme. At the time it was required to begin work for the thesis, the author had just begun new employment in an EPS as an employee of the Local Authority. As a TEP employed for the Local Authority the author needed to begin learning about EPS systems and procedures, form effective working relationships with colleagues and meet service requirements as well as the University course requirements.

#### **4.1 The process of commissioning a research project**

In terms of Volume I the University presented research guidelines to each Local Authority EPS who would be employing TEPs for years 2 and 3 of training. The guidance suggested that the research project should be commissioned by professionals within the Local Authority/EPS or that the EPS should subscribe to one of the research areas being explored at a national level by the National Collaborative Development and Research Programmes in Educational Psychology. It was also recommended that a research supervisor within the EPS would be beneficial to help TEPs make contact with potential stakeholders.

Unfortunately, at the time the author was supposed to begin work for Volume I no specific areas of research had been commissioned by the EPS, nor were they actively subscribing to the National Collaborative Development and Research Programme. Therefore, the task of the author was to seek out and negotiate a research remit which would add an original contribution to knowledge, offer useful research within the field of educational psychology

practice and meet with University and EPS approval. The employing EPS advised TEPs to attend a range of in-service meetings on particular project areas that were under way in the service. The aim of using this approach was to gain insight into theoretical domains which may materialise as possible areas for research and then to negotiate these further. This approach afforded interesting learning experiences but was time consuming.

#### **4.2 The first attempt at commissioning a research project**

Robson (2002) asserts that the path to conducting research in real world contexts can be uncertain and eventful. In terms of negotiating an area to focus the literature review and research study on particular hurdles needed to be tackled. The author attended a range of meetings and then joined an EPS development group concerned with developing a psychological training package on supporting the needs of Newly Arrived Pupils. The author decided to pursue research in this domain and organised a meeting with the Senior Educational Psychologist (SEP) responsible for the development group in order to discuss possible research areas. While waiting for the meeting, time was spent reading relevant literature and planning a research proposal. However, when the author met with the SEP it came to light that the work he was involved with would be finished by the time the TEP was required to begin her research project.

Robson (2002, p.54) advises researchers to acknowledge 'real world constraints' when negotiating research. This involves being realistic of time, resource, access and co-operation pressures (Robson, 2002). Taking on board Robson's guidance, the author

concluded that in order to conduct a research project within the time frame available, it would be necessary to negotiate research which would fit well with on-going EPS projects and/or research that could be negotiated in an area where close links with the research setting could be established. This would help to ensure feasibility in terms of setting and sample recruitment.

#### **4.3 Focussing on Nurture Groups (NGs) as an area to research**

Shortly after it was decided to negotiate a research remit within a setting in which close links could be maintained, the author attended a conference on NGs run by a member of the EPS. At the NG conference (Birmingham City Council (BCC), 2008) the Director of Inclusion Services, the directorate within which the author was employed, discussed the importance of evaluating outcomes of interventions, which might be able to support vulnerable children within the Local Authority. She also discussed the importance of researching what the outcomes of NGs were and defined an outcome as “something the child or young person feels inside.”

Although the NG intervention was new to the author, the enthusiasm for the approach, which was evident at the conference day, encouraged the author to explore this area. The author recognised that she might be able to conduct research which would support Local Authority impetus for the approach and contribute to extending knowledge and understanding within the Local Authority. Moreover, one of the secondary schools the author worked in had a NG and so it was envisaged that this would help to ensure research feasibility.

Thus, the author began reading about NGs to inform the literature review and identify gaps in extant research. She discovered that research on a secondary school NG would demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge because NGs in secondary school contexts were a new enterprise and at the time no research which explored the experiences and views of young people who had attended a NG based in a secondary school had been conducted.

School stakeholders were approached and possible areas of research discussed. A research proposal was submitted to the University of Birmingham, the EPS, and the school. Informed consent to conduct research, which explored the experiences and views of secondary aged pupils who had attended the NG was gained from the University, the EPS and school stakeholders (including school staff, the young people involved in the NG and their parents). Thus, work in this conceptual domain forms the body of Volume I.

#### **4.4 Consequences of negotiating the research**

The fact that research areas had not been commissioned by the EPS before the TEP began employment meant that the author had a greater freedom of choice in terms of conceptual domains to research but also meant that considerable time needed to be spent exploring potential research areas and negotiating possible research projects that would meet University requirements, be agreed upon by the EPS and stakeholders from the setting in which the research would be conducted. Thus, a consequence of the author brokering a research project was that the time available to carry out the research was curtailed,

particularly in regards to data collection. Furthermore, although the EPS and school were happy for the research to take place the fact that they had not commissioned the research placed restrictions on the amount of support the author could expect. Nevertheless, as a result of the research commissioning process the author believes she has been able to carry out worthwhile research by negotiating a research area which contributes to the body of knowledge and understanding in the NG domain.

## **5 The relevance of the research area at a local and national level**

At the NG development day conference (BCC, 2008) the Director of Inclusion Services discussed a strategic Local Authority document entitled “A Brighter Future for Children and Young People: The Birmingham Strategy” (BCC, 2007), which is the Local Authority’s response to the national Every Child Matters (ECM) Agenda (Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2004a). The ECM Agenda (DfES, 2004a) underpins government policy relating to children and young people from birth to 19 years old. It aims to secure for every child and young person the support they need to achieve the following five outcomes: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. It is this agenda professionals in Children’s Services should be working towards to ensure outcomes for children and young people. The Birmingham Strategy (BCC, 2007) links with the ECM Agenda (DfES, 2004a) because it incorporates the five outcomes while at the same time meeting local needs. The Strategy identifies the need to measurably improve outcomes of children and young people in the Local Authority over a five year period in the following areas: physical health, behaviour, emotional health, literacy and numeracy, and social literacy.

Cooper and Lovey (1999) explain that the NG intervention focuses on supporting social and emotional development but at the same time maintains a focus on providing educational opportunities. Therefore, NGs have the potential to link well with the Birmingham Strategy (BCC, 2007) because the intervention has the capacity to meet several of the identified Local Authority priority areas, for example behaviour, emotional health, literacy and numeracy, and social literacy.

The Director of Inclusion Services spoke at the NG development day conference (BCC, 2008) about introducing NGs into the city in a measured way. Indeed, time has been taken to develop mechanisms within the Local Authority to support the introduction of NGs to school settings. There is for example an EP who works as a NG co-ordinator for one day a week. His role is to raise awareness of NGs in the Local Authority which involves approaching school settings about the NG intervention, training schools interested in the intervention and offering ongoing support. He is also involved in evaluating the effectiveness of existing NGs and meeting with the Director of Inclusion Services to feed back on NG progress within the Local Authority and more recently providing information on how they link with The Birmingham Strategy (BCC, 2007). In addition, two more EPs spend some time each week working as NG consultants, also offering support and training to schools.

The number of NGs in the Local Authority is growing steadily. Documentation for the Brighter Futures Interagency Group Meeting (BCC, 2009) demonstrates that the first NGs in the Local Authority were established in 2006 and the number has steadily grown, which illustrates their popularity. In March 2009 there were approximately 30 NGs which could

be found in children's centres, infant and primary schools, and secondary schools. The majority of NGs are based in infant and primary schools and at the time of writing there were 3 NGs running in secondary schools in the Local Authority.

## **6 The importance of gaining young people's views**

As mentioned previously, the research study presented in Chapter 3 is concerned with exploring the views and experiences of young people who have been involved in a secondary school NG intervention. The importance of gaining the views of children and young people is discussed in statutory government legislation and guidance as well as academic literature.

Twenty years ago the Children Act (1989) stated that when decisions are made about a child their wishes and feelings need to be taken into consideration. The United Nations (1989) Conventions on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted by the UK government in 1991 explained that children should have the right to express their views freely on all matters which affect them and, with regard to their age and maturity, due weight be given to their views.

Pupil participation has been an integral part of the development of the Every Child Matters Agenda (DfES, 2004a). Young people were asked for their views and opinions on government suggestions to improve services for children and young people in England. Over 3,000 responses, mostly from young people under the age of 18, were received. In addition 750 children were met with during 62 meetings (DfES 2004b). One of the

outcomes of consultation with children and young people and the ECM Agenda (DfES, 2004a) was proposed changes to legislation. This was then followed through in the Children Act (2004), which allowed for the establishment of a Children's Commissioner to promote awareness of the views and interests of children in England. His role includes speaking and listening to children to ensure they have a voice.

Birmingham City Council (2009) explains that children attending NG provision are usually on the Early Years Action Plus or School Action Plus stage of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (DfES, 2001). Local Authorities must pay regard to the SEN Code of Practice (2001) because it provides guidance on the discharge of Part IV of the Education Act (1996) which pertains to children with SEN. The SEN Code of Practice (2001, 3.2, p.27) emphasises the importance of schools consulting with children regarding their perceptions of special educational provision. It states that;

Children and young people with special educational needs have a unique knowledge of their own needs and circumstances and their own views about what sort of help they would like to help them make the most of their education.

In terms of academic literature, Messiou (2002) explains that a key element of inclusion is the right for children to be listened to. Harding and Atkinson (2009) explore the role EPs have in listening to and including the voice of the child in their work. They acknowledge that this is an important part of EP practice. Wise and Upton (1998) write that it is important that schools listen to the views of pupils so as to understand pupils' social difficulties in school and Gersch and Nolan (1994) emphasise that listening to pupils is a tool to improve educational experiences for them. Gersch (1996) maintains that pupil feedback offers a unique evaluation perspective which can aid teacher effectiveness.

In view of government legislation and academic literature it is evident that exploring the views and experiences of children and young people remains a fundamentally important area in which to conduct research. It seems imperative that the views of young people are listened to, explored, included, and represented fairly and accurately so as to ensure their voice is heard and any necessary changes to practice are made.

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## Appendix 1: Instructions for Authors

Instructions for Authors [online] copied from the SEBDA website  
<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/journal.asp?issn=1363-2752&linktype=44> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2009]

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**CHAPTER TWO**  
**AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF EXTANT LITERATURE PERTINENT TO**  
**NURTURE GROUPS**

## ABSTRACT

Nurture Groups (NGs) are an intervention to meet the needs of children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBDs) (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007). In order to justify further research on NGs this paper presents a critical examination of extant NG literature.

Literature pertinent to answering two questions raised by Orna and Stevens (1995, p. 175): ‘What is the story of the literature about?’ and ‘What are the main ideas and who is responsible for them?’ was explored and critiqued. A wealth of descriptive literature, which provides in-depth contextual information about the intervention, and a broad range of NG research which uses quantitative and qualitative research methods was found.

This paper demonstrates that NG literature is complex and covers a large and diverse volume of information. Critical exploration of research has resulted in the author concluding that some NG research has shortcomings in terms of research design, lack of clear explanation about research methods, and lack of information about how data analysis frameworks have been applied. Notwithstanding these shortcomings it is concluded that NG research, reviewed in this paper, generally demonstrates that NGs have the potential to be an effective intervention to meet the needs of children with SEBDs as well as the wider school community. Suggestions on how to extend theoretical knowledge in the field of NG research, for example by gaining and exploring the views of young people who have attended secondary school NG provisions, are made.

# **AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF EXTANT LITERATURE PERTINENT TO NURTURE GROUPS**

## **1. Introduction**

NGs are an in-school intervention to meet the needs of children and young people experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBDs) (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007). Arguably, NGs are proving to be a popular intervention and according to the Nurture Group Network (2009) there are now approximately 1,000 NGs in the United Kingdom.

This literature review aims to examine ‘the story’ of extant academic Nurture Group (NG) literature. As the NG intervention is targeted at supporting children and young people identified as having SEBDs the review will begin by exploring definitions of SEBDs in children and young people, their prevalence and effects. A detailed summary of contextual NG information will be then be presented. As a range of assessments are used as part of the NG intervention limitations of using assessment tools to diagnose SEBDs in children and young people and critical analysis of assessment tools used within NG interventions will be presented. Bruce (1994) writes that a literature review is an important component of a thesis because it provides justification for forthcoming research. In order to identify gaps for further research extant NG research will be appraised and areas for further research suggested.

## **2. Method**

Cooper (1989) argues that a literature review should contain a clear statement of the search processes. Between March and September 2008 a search for literature was conducted using the University of Birmingham's online journal database and library catalogue. The key term 'Nurture Group' was used to search the British Education Index (BEI) (1975 to date), the Australian Education Index (1979 to date) and ERIC (Educational Resources Information Centre) date range 'earliest to current'. A search using ERIC produced 10 publications. However, many of these were replicated in a combined search using the BEI and AEI database which returned 24 publications. Searches on the University's library catalogue used the terms, 'Nurture Groups', 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBDs)' and 'Inclusion.'

Once a number of relevant publications were found their reference lists were scanned and further articles of interest were selected for analysis. During this process the literature was broadened and journal articles, government literature, books and other publications that the author deemed pertinent in answering two questions raised by Orna and Stevens (1995, p. 175): 'What is the story of the literature about?' and 'What are the main ideas and who is responsible for them?' were included.

The research study which follows in the next chapter (see Pintilei 2009b) adopts a grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006 and Strauss and Corbin, 1990). For information about how this methodology has impacted on the literature review see Appendix 1.

### **3. Definitions, prevalence and effects of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBDs) in children and young people**

Visser (2003) explains that since the revision of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) the label ‘emotional and behavioural difficulties’ (EBDs) has widened to include the term ‘social’ equating to the acronym SEBDs. However, in 2003, Visser acknowledged that its use in literature was not yet widespread and some writers continued to use terms such as EBDs, BESDs (behavioural, emotional and social difficulties) and SEBDs. From section 4 onwards, in order to support clarity, this paper will use the term SEBDs.

Poulou (2005) and Daniels et al. (1999) explain that because the term EBDs can be used indiscriminately confusion surrounds its definition. This can result in there being debates about the characteristics of children and young people attributed with the EBD label. However, in spite of this, the term continues to be widely accepted by educationalists (Poulou, 2005).

Daniels et al. (1999) and Poulou (2005) recognise that the term EBDs is often used in a haphazard manner to young people who have or have been attributed with various difficulties. In Cooper’s (1999) opinion EBDs are loose characteristics some of which are located within young people and others caused by disorder in an individual’s environment, such as the home or school setting. He notes that interactions between an individual’s environment and their individual characteristics may manifest as EBDs.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2008) uses the term BESDs and when defining this term they discuss the wide range of SEN it encapsulates. They explain that children and young people with BESDs may have difficulties which can be diagnosed as conduct and hyperkinetic disorders and less obvious disorders such as anxiety, school phobia or depression. The DCSF (2008) also recognises that the term BESDs may be used to describe children and young people with no specific medical diagnosis.

Harriss et al. (2008) discuss the prevalence of SEBDs in children and young people. They recognise that a considerable number of children and young people in the United Kingdom have or are attributed with having SEBDs. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE, 2001) explain that children, who experience SEBDs outside the normal range for their age or gender, are at increased risk of experiencing mental health disorders. The British Medical Association (2006) estimates 20 per cent of young people experience a mental health problem at some point in their development and note that 10 per cent experience these problems to a level that represents a clinically recognisable mental healthy disorder. Figures from the Office for National Statistics (Ofsted, 2005) match those from the British Medical Association (2006). They state that in 2004 one in ten children and young people in Great Britain aged 5 to 16 years old had a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder.

In terms of the effects of EBDs, Cooper (1999) explains that children with EBDs present challenges to their parents, teachers and other professionals who work with them. However, Cooper (1999) notes that the extent to which behaviour is seen as a difficulty

will depend on the perspective of the observer and be influenced by their culture. An outcome for a child with EBDs can be that the young person becomes disliked or a source of resentment and the low opinion other people have of them can become internalised, which can lead to an increase in EBDs or the maintenance of them (Cooper, 1999).

Rutter and Smith (1995) explain that young people who show signs of mental health difficulties and social deviance are likely to have difficulties engaging with school experiences and without access to effective interventions they will have a greater risk of experiencing deterioration with their difficulties as they mature. Harriss et al. (2008) explain that later in life children and young people with SEBDs are more likely to experience challenges in gaining employment and forming personal relationships. They note that research suggests children and young people with SEBDs have an increased risk of entering into criminal activity. Supporting this, Stevenson and Goodman (2001) linked externalising antisocial behaviours, demonstrated from a young age, to violent criminal convictions in adult life. In view of the potential trajectories of children and young people with SEBDs it seems crucially important to explore interventions which seek to support them.

## **4. Contextual information on Nurture Groups**

### **4.1 Nurture Groups: aims, characteristics and principles**

Boxall, (2002, p.1) explains that NGs are ‘an in-school resource for primary school children whose emotional, social, behavioural and formal learning needs cannot be met in mainstream class.’ She writes that NGs aim to:

create the world of earliest childhood in school, and through this build in the basic and essential learning experiences normally gained in the first three years and so enable the children to participate fully in the mainstream class, typically within a year. (Boxall 2002, p. 1)

Other key aims are to offer broad learning experiences within a safe and secure environment which promotes routines, boundaries and repetitive learning activities (Boxall, 2002 and Bennathan 1997). White (2006) recognises that NGs can offer children protection from an overwhelming and over-stimulating classroom environment and provide a setting where a child is able to function at their developmental level.

Different NG variants are explained in section 4.4. However, the ‘classic NG’ could be a classroom which has been adapted to contain a kitchen/dining area where children have breakfast, a comfortable seating area and an area for more formal work. This is to support the aim of combining home and school environments to provide a bridge between these worlds (Iszatt and Wasilewska 1997, Sanders 2007). A group of between 10 to 12 children attend the ‘classic NG’, which is situated in mainstream primary schools, and staffed by a teacher and a learning support assistant (Cooper and Lovey, 1999). Cooper et al. (2001)

produced key characteristics which can be used to identify NGs. These are presented in Table 1.

<b>Key characteristics of NGs</b>
1. A NG is an agreed part of school and/or Local Authority provision for Special Educational Needs and is an integral part of a school or a resource for a group of schools.
2. The curriculum in the NG includes the National Curriculum and takes account of school policies.
3. Staff work towards a child's return to mainstream classes.
4. Children attend the NG for a substantial part of each school day or for regular sessions usually for between 2 to 4 school terms.
5. Two adults work together and model good adult relationships in a structured and predictable environment which fosters trust and learning.
6. A setting where missing or insufficiently internalised early learning experiences are provided.
7. The NG supports positive social and emotional growth and cognitive development by responding to the child at a developmentally appropriate level for the individual child.
8. Language development through intensive interaction with an adult is emphasised.
9. The group is created with social learning through co-operation and play being a central theme.
10. Staff involve parents/carers as early and fully as possible and have a positive attitude towards them.

Table 1: Key characteristics of Nurture Groups (Adapted from Cooper et al. 2001)

Cooper et al. (2001) also note three perceptions which are central to the key characteristics:

- NGs should be fully integrated into mainstream schools and Local Authority structures and policies to avoid them being an exclusionary form of intervention.
- Appropriate diagnostic and evaluative tools, such as The Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) should inform children's admission to the NG, their progress and departure.
- Routine running of the NG is underpinned by an understanding of the developmental needs of the child, the interdependence of social, emotional and cognitive factors and the commitment by NG staff to foster healthy development.

Since the first NGs, The Nurture Group Network (NGN) has been established, and is a national organisation which offers support to schools with NGs. They deliver training programmes, publications, web-based and research information (NGN, 2008a). The NGN (2008a) describe 6 core principles which should guide the practice of NG staff. These are:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally.
- The classroom offers a safe base.
- Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem.
- Language is understood as a vital means of communication.
- All behaviour is communication.
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children.

Cooper and Lovey (1999) argue that NGs differ from other interventions to support children with SEBDs because of the flexible nature of the provision and its focus on supporting social and emotional development, as well as providing educational opportunities. Other unique features are the environmental characteristics of the NG, which aim to provide a nurturing 'home' and school environment and provide a bridge between these worlds (Iszatt and Wasilewska 1997, Sanders 2007).

#### **4.2 Nurture Groups: historical, theoretical, and philosophical perspectives**

NGs were developed by educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall (Iszatt and Wasilewska 1997). Boxall (2002) explains that in the 1960s, when the first NGs were established, East London was experiencing social upheaval because large numbers of families were resettling in the area. Cooper et al. (2001) write that a sudden influx of children with SEBDs began entering schools and this disrupted teaching. Schools in the authority reacted to the influx of children with SEBDs by excluding them, and/or referring large numbers of children for psychiatric assessment (Boxall 2002).

Boxall (2002) goes on to explain that when these children were assessed it was recommended that they would benefit from referral to education resource bases that could offer opportunities to develop personal relationships and provide emotional outlets for them. Therefore, the first NGs were established in a reactive attempt to support the demands on schools during this time. NGs aimed to integrate children with SEBDs into school settings and avoid them being excluded (Iszatt and Wasilewska 1997). Perhaps because of this historical context White (2006) writes that NGs are underpinned by a

philosophy of inclusion. Howes, Emanuel and Farrell (2002) and Bailey (2007) question the inclusiveness of NGs and this is discussed further in Section 9.6.

In terms of the theoretical underpinnings of NGs, Boxall (2002) explains that at the time of the first NG children's difficulties seemed to be related to parental stress which had affected nurturing and learning processes in their early years. Thus, Boxall (2002) writes that although NGs were not created with the intention of working within existing theories, over time connections between theories became apparent. She explains the NG intervention most notably has links with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1965, 1969, 1980 cited in Boxall, 2002).

In terms of NG philosophy, Boxall (2002) writes that the term nurture is used because it describes the children's needs and the nature of the intervention. Bennathan (1997) writes that Marjorie Boxall, perceived the behaviours of children who were commonly labelled 'deviant' to stem from disrupted early learning experiences in homes which could not give children the nurturing they needed rather than inborn characteristics. She states that NGs emphasise emotional growth rather than the pathological diagnosis of children.

Bailey (2007, p.17) criticises NGs, arguing that although NG philosophy claims to focus on emotional growth and not pathology 'growth' is conceptualised in relation to;

'normal development,' 'normal parenting,' 'normal learning experiences,' a 'normal educational continuum,' and the role each can play in averting the 'disastrous future' (Boxall, 2002, p. ix) which these children would otherwise necessarily face.

Therefore, Bailey (2007, p.17) argues that by conceptualising the need for nurture and relating this to dysfunctional families and risks to future development ‘a psycho-medicalised language of risk and the normal/pathological duality’ is adopted. In short, Bailey (2007) argues that NGs seek to construct self-esteem and attachment where a deficit is perceived.

### **4.3 Who are Nurture Groups for?**

Bennathan (1997) explains that NGs are for children whose behaviour may lead to exclusion or placement in a specialist provision. Cooper and Lovey’s research (1999) found that a wide range of children could benefit from NG provision, for example, children who had experienced disrupted care in the early years, children who were unable to adapt to school routines and those who exhibited SEBDs.

As section 4.1 illustrated, Boxall (2002), when devising the first NGs, considered they were for young children who would benefit from early learning experiences usually gained during their first three years of life. Boxall’s (2002) book is based on collated experiences from 1970 to 1989 of more than 50 NGs based in a London Local Authority which were for children attending infant schools. Boxall (2002) writes that the children entering the NGs had considerable emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties and were functioning at a developmental level of less than 3 years old.

Boxall (2002) recommends nurture education at the earliest stages possible but recognises that effective NGs can be established in junior schools. The NGN (2009) explain that NGs can now be found in secondary school settings. Extant NG research has not explored

secondary school NG provisions but Sanders (2007) also acknowledges that NGs are beginning to be implemented in secondary settings and Cooper and Whitebread (2007) include six pupils who attended a NG for secondary school aged pupils in their sample.

#### **4.4 Nurture Group variants**

Four types of NGs (NG variants) have been discussed by Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper and Whitebread (2007). These papers state that the four variants were identified by Cooper et al. (1999) in a paper published by the University of Cambridge. However, although this paper has been cited by Cooper and Whitebread (2007) and Cooper et al. (2001) the author was unable to retrieve a copy via database and internet searches. Neither Cooper et al. (2001) nor Cooper and Whitebread (2007) make reference to the research methods which resulted in the variants being identified. The lack of information concerning the number of NGs sampled and the way in which they were categorised makes it difficult to determine the validity.

A summary of NG variants discussed by Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper and Whitebread (2007) is presented in Table 1.1 below. Variant 1 and 2 NGs can be viewed as genuine NGs. Variant 3 NGs provide social and emotional support but a limitation is that the educational element of NGs is minimised or absent. Variant 4 NGs do not follow NG principles (Cooper and Whitebread 2007). Unfortunately, guidance on NG variants (Cooper et al. 2001, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007) does not make clear how great a departure from Variant 2 can be made before the NG becomes a Variant 3. This can present as a limitation when constructing research designs as researchers may categorise

NGs differently, which could then impact on data analysis and the ability to generalise findings to other NG contexts.

NG Variant	Key Features
<p><b>Variant 1 Classic ‘Boxall’ NG</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Match, in totality, the NG model established by Marjorie Boxall.</li> <li>- An inclusive educational provision, which usually involves a pupil attending for 9 out of 10 half day sessions, which meets the individual’s developmental needs and promotes educational progress.</li> <li>- Staffed by a teacher and teaching assistant and are made up of between 10 to 12 pupils with a range of needs.</li> <li>- Provides a holistic curriculum incorporating the National curriculum with a curriculum which addresses social, emotional and behavioural factors which underpin the child’s academic learning.</li> <li>- The setting incorporates soft furnishings and a predictable routine which includes curricular activities, free play and social activities, for example eating breakfast together.</li> <li>- Pupils remain on roll with their mainstream class and register with them. They also attend one lesson a week with their mainstream class.</li> <li>- The aim of the NG is for pupils to return to mainstream class on a full time basis after 3 or 4 school terms but where appropriate this can take place after one or two terms.</li> <li>- Placement, target setting and monitoring of pupils progress takes place using the Boxall Profile.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Variant 2 New Variant NG</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on principles underpinning Variant 1 and contain core features such as small group size, staffing by a teacher and teaching assistant have a developmental and holistic curriculum emphasis.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May differ from Variant 1 in structure and/or organisational features, the amount of time pupils attend the NG, serve a group of schools rather than an individual school, be located in a special school and vary in the age range of pupils they include, for example, catering for pupils in Key Stage 3.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 3 Informed by NG principles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May bear the name NG but differ from the organisational principles of Variant 1 and 2. For example, take place at lunch times, after school or break times.</li> <li>- Groups may be run by a single member of staff who may not be a teacher.</li> <li>- Activities will focus on social and development issues but not have an academic emphasis as Variant 1 and 2.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 4 Aberrant NGs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are called NGs but distort principles of Variant 1.</li> <li>- Lack an educational and/or developmental emphasis and serve to emphasise control and containment.</li> </ul>

Table 1.1: Nurture Group Variants (Adapted from Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)

Cooper et al. (2001) explain that the small variant between NGs in their study meant it was difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of NG variants but note they did not observe any statistically different outcomes between them. They write that some results from pupils attending half time NGs in the same Local Authority were at or above the mean level achieved by pupils in Variant 1 NGs, who spent 4.5 days in a NG. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) highlight the need for research to investigate the effectiveness NG variants. Indeed, if trends show that NGs which pupils attend on a reduced basis are as effective as NGs which children attend for 4.5 days a week, then this may impact on NG practice, in terms of the length of pupil placements, the number of children attending the provision over an academic year and the cost of running the intervention.

Variant 2 NGs can differ in terms of organisation. White (2006) describes how the logistics of the NG in his research differed from NGs in other qualitative case study research (Bennathan 1997, Lyndon, 1992, Doyle 2005) because the child attended a NG which was attached to a different school. Cooper and Lovey (1999) also describe a NG which was established in one school but included children from a range of schools. Staff reported challenges forming relationships with key staff in the different schools. Gerrard (2005) supports the idea of community resource NG. He suggests that some schools may not want a NG and others may not need one, if they did not have enough children who would benefit from NG provision. Gerrard (2005) suggests that one or two NGs could exist as a community resource. However, he does not provide evidence that this type of NG would be effective, elaborate on how a community NG could be run, the implications for schools, children, parents, NG staff or mainstream teachers.

## **5. Key arguments against using assessment tools to diagnose SEBDs in children and young people**

Before reviewing tools which are used to assess which children and young people may benefit from the NG intervention, set targets for them and measure changes in their behaviour, it is important to make clear arguments against using assessment tools to diagnose SEBDs in children and young people.

Visser (2003, p.27) explains that SEBD literature refers to the dangers of accepting results from 'deficit model' assessment tools as evidence of severe and enduring SEBDs. He discusses limitations surrounding the accuracy of assessment tools, which can lead to

unhelpful diagnoses in children. He notes that many assessment tools do not take account of cultural features within the environment or the background and skill set of people completing assessments. Visser (2003) argues that these factors are important in interpreting the validity of assessment diagnoses.

Furthermore, Visser (2003) identifies arguments in mental health literature against the use of diagnostic models and the medicalisation of SEBDs. Achenbach (1991, p.45 cited by Visser 2003) writes that with respect to mental health syndromes, ‘children are continually changing.’ He recognises that there is no well-validated criterion for categorically distinguishing between children who are ‘normal’ and those who are ‘abnormal.’ Visser (2003) also refers to Barker (1996), a Canadian psychiatrist, who states that creating categories from heterogeneous patterns of behaviour is an attempt to bring about order but this exercise can be artificial because disorders in childhood and adolescence often have multiple causes. Barker argues that categories can present limitations in creating treatment and guiding prognosis and instead recommends that comprehensive formulation of need, on a case by case basis, is more useful than assigning labels and creating categories.

## **6. Critical analysis of assessment tools used within NG interventions**

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) identify that the majority of NG research has used The Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997, 1999) to measure NG effectiveness. More recently, Doyle (2001) created a Reintegration Readiness Scale to help analyse children’s behaviour, measure their readiness to integrate into mainstream class, and highlight target areas for NG staff to work

on during the NG intervention. A review of NG literature shows that critical analysis of these tools has not taken place.

### **6.1 The Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 2007) (See Appendix 2)**

A copy of the Boxall Profile is presented most recently in Bennathan and Boxall (2007). Bennathan and Boxall (2007) acknowledge that some people who use the Profile will question the level scores should be at in order for a child to be classified with SEBDs. Their response is that the focus of the Profile is not to classify SEBDs rather to assess levels of functioning to ascertain what kind of support is needed. They add that decisions about a child's placement in NG should not be based on just one psychometric assessment; rather a variety of assessment procedures, including observations should be used.

Bennathan and Boxall (2007) explain that the Profile was standardised on a sample of 880 children between the ages of 3 years and 4 months and 8 years old. The standardisation was completed in schools in Inner London Education Authority in 1984. Information pertaining to the number of schools, the year groups that children were in, the structure of the NGs (variant, number of children in the group, staffing arrangement, type of activities offered and environmental set up) and background information about the children in the standardization sample (type of difficulty, family circumstances) is not provided. The lack of precise description and outdated standardisation makes it difficult for researchers to determine whether generalisations to their own settings can be made. In Bennathan and Boxall (2007) information concerning how pupils for the standardisation sample were chosen and statistical results from cluster analysis is not provided for the reader.

Information about the type of statistical tests and the significance levels of results from tests is needed so findings can not be analysed objectively and validity determined.

Section 1 of the Profile describes aspects of the developmental process in a number of sub-strands. Each sub-strand has scores from children in the standardisation sample, who were deemed by their teachers to be developing 'normally', averaged across 5 age groups to provide a norm which is indicated on histograms. However, Bennathan and Boxall (2007) do not report how many children were in the category of 'normal development' or the number of scores the analysis is based on. Section 2 of the Profile describes behaviours which inhibit the child's involvement in school. Once again scores of the children deemed by teachers to be functioning well and with 'no problems evident' were averaged in 5 age ranges. Again, the number of children in each of the 5 age ranges is not provided and it is possible that the representation of children in particular ages varied considerably. Precise accounts of age ranges would be useful in determining the reliability with which the standardisation data can be applied to different aged children.

Profile scores completed on children who are older than 8 years old are not comparable with the standardisation sample as there is no basis to assume that average scores obtained would be comparable with children in the standardisation sample, who were between 3 years 4 months and eight years old. This is also recognised as a limitation by O'Connor and Colwell (2002). Bennathan and Boxall (2007) recognise the limitations of the standardisation and comment that standardisation of the Boxall Profile on a wider age range of children is currently under way. The Nurture Group Network (NGN, 2008b) explain that David Colley, a Special Needs Adviser, is working on research which involves

modifying the Profile so that it can be used more reliably with pupils in secondary schools. In a bid to demonstrate validity for the tool Bennathan and Boxall (2007) do state that results achieved from completing the Boxall Profile do concur well with the more recently standardised Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997).

Doyle (2005, p.4) writes that the Boxall Profile is a 'standardised subjective measure of developmental behaviour.' It is based on subjective teacher assessments. Guidance concerning how to measure behaviours and the intensity of behaviour required to award particular numerical scores is not given in Boxall Profile guidance (Bennathan and Boxall, 2007). Boxall and Bennathan (2007) write that the Profile should be filled in when the child is settled and teachers feel comfortable that the behaviours they are observing are typical. They recommend that teachers completing the Profile have a good understanding of the child and consult with colleagues to ensure that they interpret descriptive items accurately. Research which explores whether or not this takes place, how the Profile is completed and what support teachers receive is needed.

Assuming that school staff did work collaboratively to share evidence regarding a child's functioning and their understanding of descriptors, the scoring system would still be based on subjective staff perspectives which may be influenced by their own values or feelings towards the child. O'Connor and Colwell (2002) also recognise the subjective nature of the tool and rater-variability as limitations. They write that ideally the Profile should be rated by someone neutral. In practice this would be unhelpful as the rater needs to be sure the behaviours are typical. Criticisms of the tool which relate to the subjective nature of

scoring can also be applied to the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) and the Reintegration Readiness Scale (Doyle, 2001).

## **6.2 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997, 1999) (See Appendix 2)**

NG research (see Appendix 4) has used the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) to measure changes in pupils' behaviour. It is made up of 25 items, which are based on 5 measurable dimensions: conduct problems, emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, peer relationships, and pro-social behaviour, which comprise 5 items each. Scores can be recorded as being in 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal' categories (see Appendix 2 for further detail). A range of research explores the reliability and validity of the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, Goodman et al. 1998, Goodman et al. 2000, Muris et al 2003 and Muris et al. 2004).

Cooper et al. (2001) write that the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) produces results consistent with more established behaviour rating scales, for example, Achenbach's (1991) Child Behaviour Checklist and Rutter's (1967) Child Behaviour Rating Scale. Goodman (1997) explains that Rutter's (1967) parent and teacher questionnaires are respected and long established tools that have proved to be valid and reliable in a number of contexts (see Elander and Rutter, 1996). Goodman (1997) found that results between the total scores generated by the SDQ (Goodman, 1997) and Rutter (1967) questionnaires illustrated a high correlation. He surmises that this demonstrates concurrent validity for the SDQ. Muir et al. (2004) comment that research has demonstrated that the internal consistency and test-retest stability of the SDQ (Goodman 1997) is satisfactory.

Although the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) is a tool which has been more thoroughly researched and validated than the Doyle (2001) Reintegration Readiness Scale (discussed below) or the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 2007) criticisms of using standardised questionnaires to measure SEBDs summarised in section 5 are still deemed relevant, as well as criticisms concerning the subjective nature of methods used to obtain categorical scores.

### **6.3 Reintegration Readiness Scale (Doyle, 2001) (See Appendix 2)**

Doyle (2001) writes that the Boxall Profile (1998) offered a clear picture of a child's development when administered on a termly basis. However, she asserts that completing the Profile more frequently was unsuccessful in showing significant enough changes for staff to decide whether a pupil was ready to reintegrate into mainstream class. Thus, an alternative quantitative assessment tool was developed to analyse behaviour, measure readiness to reintegrate into mainstream class, and highlight target areas. A description of this tool is provided in Appendix 2.

Doyle (2001) provides two case studies carried out in one setting to exemplify how the scale can be used. She concludes that the scale was effective in helping to develop NG principles throughout the whole school (Doyle, 2003) and in measuring the success of pupils' achievements in NG. Although Doyle's (2001) paper offers useful guidance to NG practitioners, limitations of the Reintegration Readiness Scale (Doyle, 2001) are that it has only been used in one setting and only 2 examples of its use with children are provided. In

addition, it has been designed to be used with infant children thereby restricting its suitability for use with older children.

## **7. Critical analysis of extant Nurture Group research**

Before exploring NG research findings, a critical review of research limitations will take place. In this way the reader can view findings with their caveats in mind. For ease of reference the aims, methods and findings for quantitative studies have been summarised in Appendix 4 and information pertaining to qualitative research methods in Appendix 3.

Usher (1996, p.13) writes that the epistemological assumptions that underlie different research methods have often been unexamined in research processes. Usher (1996) explains that it is important to examine epistemology because it impacts on how data are collected and analysed. None of the research reviewed in this paper has explored the implications of their epistemological assumptions.

The research studies in this paper have been notionally separated into quantitative and qualitative research. However, it is important to note that some NG research uses data and methodological triangulation (for example, Saunders 2007, Cooper and Whitebread 2007 and Gerrard, 2005). There are different types of triangulation: data triangulation involves using more than one method of data collection and methodological triangulation combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. Robson (2002) explains that triangulation can reduce the likelihood of researchers prematurely believing they have found causal links to their research question, because multiple methods produce different types of data to

analyse. Triangulation can also enhance the interpretability of the research for example supplementing quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative narrative accounts.

### **7.1 Limitations specific to quantitative Nurture Group research**

Flick (2007), in regards to quantitative research, explains that the quality of research design is a major issue because researchers should have a high level of control over the research situation, for example by controlling extraneous variables. Cohen et al. (2007) explain that ‘true’ experimental designs require randomised controlled sampling, where members of populations have an equal probability of being selected for the study. This enables generalisations to be made because the sample better represents the population at large and so has better validity.

However, NG interventions are carried out in real world school settings and not in controlled experimental conditions. Therefore, none of the NG research has been able to incorporate controlled experiments in laboratory settings where there has been a random selection and allocation of pupils to control and experiment groups. Rather the research can be termed ‘quasi-experimental’ (Cohen et al. 2007) taking place in natural settings, but isolating and controlling variables, albeit in a less than ideal experimental manner. Quasi-experimental designs limit the control researchers have over the research situation and extraneous variables. Consequently, there exist varying degrees of quality in terms of the research’s ability to control for bias.

Some research (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007, Gerrard, 2005, Sanders, 2007 and Izatta and Wasilewska 1997), instead of randomly selecting and assigning participants to categories and thereby producing equivalence over a wide range of variables, has matched variables. In matched designs members of the control group are matched to the experimental group on important independent variables (Cohen et al. 2007). Matching variables increases validity; however it is still more difficult to claim generalisations than if participants were randomly allocated to experimental groups. Moreover, Woolgar (1996, cited by White, 2006) recognises that it can also be challenging to find closely matched groups.

Gerrard (2005) recognises that the 2 control schools in his study may not have been well matched to the experimental groups. They were matched on levels of deprivation and this was measured by the standard deprivation indicator of free school meals. Cooper and Whitbread (2007) matched some participants in terms of age, gender and perceived academic ability and Sanders (2007) used one control school which was matched in terms of its size, levels of social and economic deprivation and levels of special educational needs. She matched 9 pupils in the comparison school to pupils who attended the NG but does not identify the exact variables which were matched; nor do Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997).

Therefore, the quantitative research cited above, which has matched participants, can be criticised for not matching important or influential variables. It may have been more important to ensure that participants were matched in terms of the type of SEBDs they were experiencing, the period of time they were experiencing SEBDs, attendance at

school, family context and school ethos. These variables could arguably have affected individual outcomes.

Polgar and Thomas (1997) explain that internal validity is concerned with the soundness of investigations. They list threats to internal validity such as, history, time-dependent internal changes (maturation) and instrument error. These threats limit the extent to which study outcomes can be attributed to the experiment.

History is the occurrence of changes in a participant's environment which do not form part of the investigation (Robson, 2002). O'Connor and Colwell (2002) recognise that they did not research the home lives of children in their sample and reflect that a change in these circumstances may have impacted on the children's gains. This limitation is also applicable to other NG research; for example, Cooper and Whitebread (2007), Sanders (2007) and Izatta and Wasilewska (1997).

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) point out that published NG research has often been retrospective in that it has looked back on the progress pupils have made while they were in NG. Polgar and Thomas (1997) write that in longitudinal studies participants may change naturally over time and that these maturation changes may not be attributable to the intervention.

Robson (2002) discusses instrumentation as a threat to internal validity. He explains this is when aspects of how participants were measured changes between pre-test and post-test data collection. Woolgar (1996, cited by White, 2006) writes it is challenging to apply

diagnostic tools which require qualitative interpretation accurately and consistently. These threats are applicable to NG research as Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) write that most NG research has used the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) or the SDQ (Goodman 1997, 1999). The subjective nature of the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) and the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998), discussed previously, should be borne in mind as a limitation to internal validity.

In Cooper and Whitebread's (2007) research some pre-test SDQ (Goodman 1997, 1999) data were collected by mainstream class teachers. Pupils then spent a significant part of their school week in the NG, reducing the amount of contact with their mainstream teachers, and the likelihood of inappropriate behaviours being observed. This may have affected teachers' marking of the SDQ (Goodman 1997, 1999) post intervention. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) write that NG children improved more than children with SEBDs in the same school. However, this may have been influenced by the fact that pupils with SEBDs, not involved in the NG, remained in class with their teachers. The teachers may have been more likely to observe inappropriate behaviours, which may have influenced their marking of the SDQ (Goodman 1997, 1999).

Reliability is concerned with 'stability or consistency with which we measure something' (Robson, 2002, p.101). Sanders (2007) explains that in her study, staff rated children's academic gains using a pupil assessment form which was devised specifically for her research. She does not discuss the reliability of this tool and a copy is not provided so that her method can be replicated or the assessment form validated by eye (face validity). Binnie and Allen (2008) produce questionnaires specific to their research to gather teacher

and parent views, but these are not shared with the reader so they too cannot be critically appraised.

Cohen et al. (2007, p.101) write ‘generally speaking, the larger the sample the better, as this not only gives greater reliability but also enables more sophisticated statistics to be used.’ The size of samples in quantitative NG research varies (see Appendix 4). Cooper and Whitebread (2007) initially managed to gain a large sample of pupils to measure the effectiveness of NGs but high attrition rates impacted on their research. In term 1 there were 359 children in the NGs but by the end of term 4 there were 120 pupils. Colwell and O’Connor (2002) note the small sample size in their research and request that their results are interpreted with caution. Research by Binnie and Allen (2008), Sanders (2007), Gerrard (2005), O’Connor and Colwell (2002) and Izatta and Wasilewska (1997) was carried out in several primary schools but they each sampled from one Local Authority. All the NG samples, with the exception of six pupils in Cooper and Whitebread’s (2007) research, consisted of children attending NGs in primary school settings (see Appendix 4). Therefore, to date, no research has explored the impact on secondary aged pupils attending a NG which is based in a secondary school.

External validity refers to the extent in which results can be generalised to other contexts and populations. Small sample sizes, samples consisting of only primary aged children, quasi-experimental designs, localised research and high attrition rates limit the external validity of extant NG research.

## **7.2 Limitations specific to qualitative Nurture Group research**

Cohen et al. (2007) write that there are numerous methods which can be used to carry out qualitative research and most of these produce rich and detailed data. It can be argued that qualitative NG research is useful in informing theoretical understanding through the rich data it provides. In qualitative research notions of quality are concerned with the rigour in which the research process (planning, carrying out the research, analysing data and disseminating results) is carried out (Flick, 2007). The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2008) and Flick (2007) write that explanations should be made as to why particular methods are chosen.

In terms of qualitative NG research, information about methodology is scarce. The reader is told about sample size and what type of method is chosen, for example: interviews (White 2006, Cooper and Tiknaz 2005, Cooper 2004a, Cooper et al. 2001 and Bishop and Swain 2000), questionnaires (Cooper 2004a and Cooper and Lovey, 1999) or observation (Bailey 2007, Doyle, 2005, Doyle, 2004, Bennathan 1997 and Lyndon, 1992) but with the exception of White (2006), more precise methodological details such as why particular methods were chosen, how interviews were structured and data interpreted are not provided.

In qualitative research quality becomes assessable on the basis of the study's report (Flick, 2007). Flick (2007) also discusses the importance of transparency, stating that researchers must make clear what processes were used and how. However, steps within data collection procedures are not always clear in qualitative NG research. For example, Cooper and

Tiknaz (2005) do not identify why participants were interviewed on several occasions. Cooper and Lovey (1999) write that 35 practitioners whom they considered had expertise in NGs were questioned, but do not offer detail about the type of expertise they had. Bishop and Swain (2000) state that participants who were best able to express their views were chosen but do not make clear on what grounds the participants were best able to express their views.

Qualitative NG research has engaged with methods which can be subject to confirmatory bias depending on how questions are asked, data collected, interpreted and reported, and depending on the identity of the researcher. In order to combat confirmatory bias it is important to make clear data analysis frameworks. The BPS (2008) support this by recommending that research includes clear descriptions of analytic frameworks and discusses how themes and categories are generated from data. White (2006) states that he used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to analyse his data but other researchers do not discuss their analytical frameworks (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Cooper 2004a, Cooper et al. 2001, Bishop and Swain 2000 and Cooper and Lovey 1999). This makes it challenging to critically determine how the researcher's insights and reflections map on to data and validate claims.

The BPS (2008) state that studies should be clearly contextualised. It would have been helpful for researchers presenting case study research on specific NGs such as White (2006), Doyle (2005), and Lyndon (1992) to discuss systemic and organisational factors within the school and how these supported or presented barriers to the NG intervention.

## **8. Pertinent findings from quantitative Nurture Group research (See also Appendix 4)**

In terms of quantitative data which measured changes in pupil behaviour using the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) pre and post NG intervention, Binnie and Allen (2008) and O'Connor and Colwell (2002) found significant improvements for each sub-strand of the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) for all pupils at the end of their NG placement. The children involved in these research studies were of primary school age.

Moreover, Binnie and Allen's (2008) research collated SDQs (Goodman, 1997, 1999) which were completed by staff and parents. Staff SDQs indicated statistically significant improvements for all pupils in the sample. Five out of the 6 schools returned parental questionnaires which equated to results for 23 of the 35 children involved. Parental questionnaires would have gained parent's perspectives of their children's behaviour in the home setting. Results showed a statistically significant improvement for all children. Binnie and Allen (2008) also report statistically significant scores from the Behavioural Indicators of Self-esteem Scale (Burnett, 1998) which they write, indicates increased self-esteem post NG intervention.

Sanders (2007) collected data from 2 schools with NGs which provided data on 29 Key Stage 1 children. One primary school was used as a comparison school. A comparison of Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) scores for children in the intervention group (attending NG) with children in the comparison group showed a significant difference indicating that the intervention group did make significantly greater gains.

Gerrard (2005) conducted research on primary school NGs in Glasgow. He gained SDQ data for 133 children from 15 primary schools and data from Boxall Profiles for 13 primary schools which included 108 pupils. Two schools without NGs were matched as controls. Gerrard (2005) found that 7 schools with NGs made statistically significant changes across all the dimensions of the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and 5 schools with NGs made significant changes in some areas. One of the 13 schools, which included 8 children, did not make statistically significant changes in the behaviour of children in the NG. In terms of SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) data, 11 schools showed statistically improved scores and 1 school almost reached significance. This totalled 110 children out of 133. Data were collected on 11 children in the control schools, who did not have involvement in the NG intervention. After 6 months no significant changes in their scores was found using the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) or the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999). Exploration of NG provisions which did not feed back positive findings may have helped to determine what the essential elements of NG provision and/or the culture of the host school are.

O'Connor and Colwell (2002) wanted to determine whether improvements made in NGs were maintained after at least 2 years. Data were available on only 12 children out of the sample of 68. Results showed that no significant relapse had occurred for 16 out of the 20 sub strands of the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998). They conclude that there is evidence of maintenance gains over time but agree with Cooper (2004a) that some children may still need nurturing input when back in mainstream class.

Other interesting research findings have been reported. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) suggest that NGs which have been in place for more than two years were significantly more effective than NGs that had been established for less time. They also found, after 2 terms, a highly significant difference between the scores of pupils with SEBDs in mainstream classes in schools which had NGs established for more than 2 years, and pupils with SEBDs in mainstream classes in schools without NGs. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) explain that pupils with SEBDs attending mainstream classes in schools with NGs made progress albeit of a lower magnitude than pupils who attended the NG. They argue that this is an important finding as it may suggest that having a NG in a school setting generalises gains to the whole school as supported by qualitative research (see section 9.7). Results from previous studies also show greater progress for pupils with SEBDs in mainstream schools where there was a NG in place (Cooper 2004a, Cooper 2004b and Cooper et al. 2001).

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) explain that a review of Boxall Profile scores shows that significant improvements were made by children in NGs between terms 1 and 4. Cooper (2004a) found that although significant improvements were made between terms 1 and 4 the greatest improvements in SEBDs was in the first two terms.

In terms of research on the effectiveness of NGs on different type of SEBDs, Cooper (2004a) and Cooper (2004b) report that pupils with 'global SEBDs' and anti-social and disruptive behaviours, as identified on the SDQ, tended to generalise improvements made

in NG to the mainstream setting. However, pupils with social and emotional difficulties and hyperactive pupils made improvements in the NG setting but tended not to generalise these to the mainstream setting. Cooper (2004b) contemplates that the failure of sub-groups of pupils to generalise gains made in the NG may highlight the context dependent nature of their difficulties. He suggests the need for attention to be paid to promoting NG approaches within the whole school.

Finally in terms of the cost effectiveness of NGs and their ability to be a preventative intervention, Iszatt and Wasilewska's (1997) research suggests that NGs are an effective way of preventing Statutory Assessments and Statements (DfES, 2001). Out of 308 children placed in NGs between 1984 and 1992 87% returned to mainstream class after a placement of less than one year in the NG. Follow up of control groups in 2 comparable schools found that the proportion of pupils requiring Statutory Assessment was more than 3 times greater and the proportion of pupils requiring placement in schools for pupils with SEBDs was almost seven times greater. Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997) concluded that NGs are a cost effective provision which could meet the needs of large numbers of pupils.

## **9. Pertinent findings from qualitative Nurture Group research (See also Appendix 3)**

Qualitative NG research has been illuminative because it has focussed on exploring the experiences and perceptions of NGs from the perspectives of parents, school staff and children. Themes generated from qualitative research are explored below.

## **9.1 Perceptions of anticipated outcomes for children experiencing Nurture Group placement**

Cooper and Lovey (1999) surveyed 35 practitioners whom they considered had expert knowledge of NGs. Anticipated outcomes for pupils attending NGs included the expectation that children will become more confident, be able to develop trusting relationships, feel secure and develop positive self images. White (2006) interviewed the NG leader, the school SENCo, the EP and a parent. He found that anticipated outcomes included reintegration into mainstream education for the child, the child's ability to manage his emotions and cope in school leading to personal happiness and academic progress, positive development for the feeder school and parents in terms of improved knowledge and skills in dealing with challenging behaviour, reduced tension, identification and understanding of the child's needs and working together effectively.

## **9.2 Mainstream teachers and Nurture Group staffs' views of Nurture Groups**

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that NG staff conceptualised pupil progress holistically in terms of pupils' behaviour, self-esteem, confidence, engagement in classroom learning and literacy. They report that there were times when class teachers identified pupils as not making progress but NG staff felt attendance at NG had led to a deeper understanding of pupils' needs as well as providing time to gather evidence to facilitate help for the children through identifying other support agencies.

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) and Sanders (2007) report that although mainstream teachers had positive comments to make in relation to the NG, some of their comments were qualified with concerns about the educational progress made by the children when they were in NG. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that generally mainstream teachers did not regard the NG as successful in increasing academic performance compared to progress made with social and behavioural functioning. Sanders (2007) reports that two thirds of the staff in her study thought that children had made academic gains while in NG but they felt they were less able to assess their academic attainment. She notes that class teachers found that NG children could boast about their experiences in NG which made some of their peers jealous. They also commented that they felt they knew the NG children less well than other children in the class.

### **9.3 Children's views of Nurture Groups**

Sanders (2007), Cooper et al. (2001 extended in Cooper 2004a) and Bishop and Swain (2000) gathered children's views of their time in a NG. Cooper (2004a) writes that he gained views from 227 pupils. Saunders (2007) gained the views of seven pupils and Bishop and Swain (2000) interviewed only 2 (see Appendix 3).

Cooper et al. (2001) note that the children, who were primary aged, seemed reluctant to provide answers to questions which required them to compare experiences in mainstream class to those in the NG, reflecting that it appeared they did not want to seem disloyal to their teachers or school. Nevertheless, recurrent themes identified by Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper (2004a) were: the high quality of interpersonal relationships with NG staff,

opportunities in NG for free play and to choose activities, the quiet and calm environment, the physical attributes within the NG environment, the engaging nature of activities such as meal times and the predictability of NGs. These factors were contrasted with mainstream class activities and situations.

Sanders (2007) found that by the end of the NG children reported liking school more and having better friendships. Cooper (2004a) notes that children in NG expressed feeling a sense of calmness associated with opportunities for them to work at their own pace, to avoid becoming frustrated or feeling marginalised, as they expressed they felt in class. Children also reported feeling a sense of ownership of the NG and pride at being associated with it (Cooper 2004a). Bishop and Swain (2000) report that the children stated that they benefited from the support they received, the activities they engaged in and the 'respite' they experienced from being in mainstream class, sharing some common ground with Cooper et al's (2001) and Cooper's (2004a) findings.

#### **9.4 Parents' perceptions of Nurture Groups**

Cooper (2004a) included interview data from 139 parents which include data collected by Cooper et al. (2001). They found that parents' perceptions of NGs varied from negative to highly positive. It should be noted that negative perceptions were associated with lack of progress towards their child's identified targets, rather than a deterioration of skills, and the belief that their children should have access to NG for a greater proportion of the school week (Cooper, 2004a). The majority of parents felt that the NG had a positive effect on the social, emotional and behavioural development of their child and many parents felt that the

same progress would not have been made in the mainstream classroom (Cooper et al. 2001). Moreover, Cooper et al. (2001) noted parents expressed feeling less anxious and more optimistic about their child's development.

Sanders (2007) found that school staff reported parents visiting school more frequently since their child was in NG and that NG allowed positive feedback to be relayed to parents. They stated that this broke through the negative feedback cycle which had previously been in place. Sanders (2007) notes that parents remarked on a growth in their child's confidence, suggested that their children enjoyed school more and were better behaved at home. Cooper (2004a) noted that a strong theme emerging from data was the value that parents placed on their interactions with NG staff and that parents felt NG staff had developed a unique insight into their child.

### **9.5 Establishing effective Nurture Groups**

Although White (2006) carried out his research in only one setting, he identified school staff having a positive understanding and appreciation of other people's perspectives, concern for identifying what the child's needs were, having a support network for other people involved with the child, sharing the philosophy of NGs, and promoting communication, to be important variables for NG success.

Cooper (2004a) found that NG staff felt that there was a need for clarity about the nature and purposes of NG and its role within school. Thus success of the NG, at a whole school level, was associated with sharing a common understanding of NG principles with

colleagues and parents. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that NG staff felt it important to explain the necessity of having a small, balanced group of pupils who exhibited internalising and externalising difficulties and two full time staff members to school staff. This was because they felt that tension within school may be created because of the group size limit and the demand for NG places. Howes et al. (2002), from a review of 3 case studies, also report that the size of the group, the age of the children and the mixture of emotional and behavioural needs were important factors contributing to the effective running of NGs.

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) report other factors affecting the success of the NG were: pupils' relationships with one another, individual staff members' skill repertoire, target setting to ensure pupil progress, and interactions between staff and pupils. Additionally, NG teachers thought that working collaboratively and having a shared vision with NG teaching assistants was crucial for the success of the NG. NG staff also discussed the importance of having head teacher support.

Differences in attitudes in the home and school environment were stated as affecting NG pupil progress. Other challenges were that NG teachers commented they could be forced into reactive teaching strategies in response to challenging behaviour which did not concur with strategies advocated by NG principles such as co-constructing positive behaviour (Cooper and Tiknaz 2005). Sanders (2007) discusses that NG staff could feel isolated and other staff could perceive that they had an easier job to do as they managed a small class of children. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that some teachers were not aware of what

pupils were doing in NG and they highlight the need to improve communication between NG staff and teachers.

## **9.6 Inclusion**

Bailey (2007) and Howes et al. (2002) criticise NGs by stating on a day to day basis the model is not inclusive because children are withdrawn from their mainstream class over a long period of time. Howes et al. (2002) argue that children involved with NGs are separated from the positive influence of their peers. Moreover, Howes et al. (2002) write that by forming a separate group children may be subject to labelling for inappropriate behaviour which may fuel perceptions from the rest of the school that their behaviour warrants isolation. They write that this may lead to a reduction of responsibility in teachers adapting their teaching styles to meet the needs of the children in their class. Bishop and Swain (2000) provide an example of a head teacher who suggested that respite for teachers was the primary aim of NGs. This comment caused Bishop and Swain (2000, p.23) to contemplate whether exclusion may be fostered under 'the flag of inclusion.' Bailey's (2007) research identifies an example of NGs being used inappropriately when a class teacher instructed a pupil who was misbehaving to go to the NG.

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) counteract these arguments by writing that NGs are not places where pupils are separated from peers on a permanent basis but are a temporary provision for children unable to benefit from full-time attendance in mainstream classes. However, Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) do report that some children experienced challenges when returning to mainstream class such as the increased difficulty of tasks and less explicit

instructions. This could cause them to feel excluded. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) also state that some mainstream teachers commented that improvements had been made in their classrooms, because of the placement of some pupils in NG, perhaps encouraging an exclusionary approach. In Binnie and Allen's (2008) research pupils attended 4 morning sessions of NG (as opposed to the 9.5 sessions recommended attendance for Variant 1 NGs). They felt this was a more inclusive approach which did not compromise NG gains.

Although research has shown that parents' perceptions of NGs are generally positive (Cooper, 2004a and Cooper et al. 2001) issues around inclusion, in terms of how parents are involved in the NG intervention, are raised in NG literature. Bailey (2007) writes that a recurrent theme within NG philosophy is dysfunction in the home situation creates disorder at school. He quotes terms used by Boxall (2002, p.3) such as 'developmental impoverishment' of the child's home situation, and implicitly criticises the NG intervention for blaming parents for their child's SEBDs. Bishop and Swain (2000) explored how a NG worked with parents using a version of the 'transplant model' (see Cunningham and Davis, 1985), where skills used by teachers are passed on to parents. Although parental feedback pertaining to this NG was positive, Bishop and Swain (2000) point out that the 'transplant model' can fail to take account of wider social, economic and political issues within the family and community.

### **9.7 Nurture Groups impact on the whole school environment**

Cooper (2004a) writes that attention should be paid to promoting NG approaches throughout schools. Doyle (2003) argues that nurturing principles can be applied in

challenging whole school contexts to create a 'Nurturing School.' She outlines how a social development curriculum informed by ideas and approaches used in the NG was implemented in an infant school. Doyle explains that this resulted in a dramatic positive change to school environment and ethos as evidenced by Doyle's qualitative observations of the school environment post introduction of the social development curriculum, and an Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) report (see Doyle, 2003 for more detail).

Binnie and Allen (2008) report, from an analysis of questionnaire results from the six primary schools in their study, an improved school ethos and an increased capacity for the schools to support and understand the needs of children with SEBDs. They conclude that NGs have a positive impact on the wider school environment and argue that this is a defining feature of NGs which distinguishes them from other interventions. Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper (2004a) illustrate that having a NG provision can positively affect the whole school. They report findings from a questionnaire distributed to 70 mainstream teachers. Results found that 96% of mainstream teachers expressed that the NG had a positive impact on the whole school with 46% of staff indicating a strong positive impact. NGs impacted on the whole school by supporting the development of a nurturing attitude and school principles. They noted that having a NG increased staff awareness of developmental issues and knowledge of how social and emotional factors impacted on learning. Staff reported positive changes in how teachers thought and talked about children with SEBDs. Responses also indicated that some teachers felt having a NG in the school provided more opportunities for them to focus their attention on pupils with SEBDs who remained in mainstream class.

Sanders (2007) reports that having a NG enhanced behaviour management in the school, taught class teachers not to set too many targets and caused them to adapt their teaching strategies by engaging children more actively in their learning. Cooper (2004a) reports that as a result of having a NG head teachers had amended school behaviour policies, taking into consideration unmet needs as an underlying cause of problems. Sanders (2007) found that in schools where NGs had been established staff absenteeism and turnover had reduced as had the number of behaviour incidents which had required input from the head teacher. Research from Bishop and Swain (2000) raises the view from head teachers that rather than the NGs instigating changes in the school ethos it was the school's nurturing ethos that attracted them to the NG intervention.

## **10. Summary of findings from quantitative and qualitative research**

Notwithstanding the limitations of extant NG research, which have been discussed in section 7 of this review, the general consensus from quantitative and qualitative NG research is that NGs have the potential to be an effective intervention to meet the needs of children with SEBDs, as well as the needs of the wider school community. Additional findings discussed in this review are summarised in Table 1.2.

**NGs have been found to be effective in:**

- Identifying children's needs (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005)
- Supporting academic gains (Sanders, 2007)
- Being enjoyable for children (Bishop and Swain, Cooper et al, 2001, 2004a, Sanders, 2007)
- Providing respite to class teachers, peers and parents (Bishop and Swain, 2000, Cooper and Tiknaz, Cooper et al. 2001, Cooper 2004a, Binnie and Allen, 2008)
- Improving parent and school relationships (Sanders, 2007)
- Reducing Statutory Assessments (Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997)
- Being cost-effective (Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997)
- Maintenance in the longer term of at least some gains (O'Connor and Colwell, 2002, Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997)
- Providing positive outcomes at a whole school level (Lucas,1999, Doyle, 2004, Cooper et al. 2001, Cooper 2004a and Sanders 2007, Binnie and Allen, 2008)
- The majority of parents feeling that the same amount of progress would not have been made without attendance at NG (Cooper et al. 2001)
- Generalising improvements made in NG to the mainstream setting; especially for pupils with global SEBDs and anti-social and disruptive behaviours, as identified on the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999)(Cooper 2004a, 2004b)
- Improving behaviour in the home context (Binnie and Allen, 2008)
- Raising self-esteem (Binnie and Allen, 2008)

**Less positive findings are that:**

- Pupils with social and emotional difficulties and hyperactive behaviours tended not to generalise improvements. (Cooper 2004a, 2004b)
- There are class teacher concerns that children may not make academic gains. (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005)
- Class teachers felt less able to assess academic attainment. (Sanders, 2007)
- Pupils attending NG could boast about their experiences in NG which made some of their peers jealous. (Sanders, 2007)
- Teachers commented that they felt they knew the NG children less well. (Sanders, 2007)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NGs are not an inclusive intervention. (Bailey 2007, Howes et al. 2002)</li> <li>• Some parents were disappointed with the rate of progress. (Cooper, 2004a)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other findings are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NGs which have been in place for more than 2 years are more effective than NGs which have been established for less time. (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)</li> <li>• The support of the head teacher, school staff, the age of children, the gender balance and the mixture of externalising and internalising difficulties children within the group are important variables for effective NG provision. (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005 and Howes et al. 2002)</li> <li>• The failure of sub-groups of pupils to generalise gains made in the NG may highlight the context dependent nature of their difficulties (Cooper, 2004b)</li> <li>• Attention should be made to promoting NG approaches in mainstream schools. (Cooper, 2004a, Doyle, 2003)</li> <li>• Although significant improvements were made between terms 1 and 4 the greatest improvements in SEBDs were in the first two terms (Cooper, 2004b)</li> </ul>

Table 1.2: Summary of key findings from quantitative and qualitative research

## 11. Conclusion

This review has demonstrated that NG literature is complex and covers a large and diverse volume of information. Literature which provides contextual information is important in supporting understanding of the key characteristics, aims and principles of NGs, as well as theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the approach.

A critical analysis of assessments tools used within the NG intervention and NG research has been provided. This is useful because as the review of quantitative NG research demonstrates, the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) and Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall,

1998) are commonly used in research. Therefore, it is important that associated limitations are made clear so that research findings can be critically evaluated.

NG research studies have been subjected to critique at a number of levels, for example shortcomings in research design and failing to demonstrate the validity of data through a clear explanation of methods and data analysis frameworks. This level of critique is important in ensuring that the caveats of NG research are understood and future research can address these. However, notwithstanding the limitations of extant NG research, findings have been positive and generally point towards NGs having the potential to be effective interventions to meet the needs of children with SEBDs, as well as the needs of the wider school community.

Exploration of NG literature has shown that further research is needed. Areas worthy of further exploration include research into how NG variants can be categorised more precisely, and up to date standardisation of the Boxall Profile (1998, 2007) ensuring that it can be used more reliably with children over the age of 8. This review has also demonstrated that the majority of NGs have been established in primary school settings and consequently research has been carried out in these types of settings (see also Appendices 3 and 4). Only Cooper and Whitebread (2007) include pupils attending secondary school NGs in their sample, but this quantitative research did not gain or explore their views of the NG intervention. Section 7.2 of this review criticised qualitative NG research for providing a lack of detail in relation to research methods and data analysis frameworks that were used. It has been argued that this imprecision may impact on the reader's ability to validate research claims.

To add to the body of knowledge within the NG domain, research which gains and explores the experiences and views of young people who have attended NGs based in secondary school settings would be useful. Moreover, to address some of the limitations of extant qualitative NG research, a clear account of methods and frameworks used to analyse data is needed. The research study which follows in the next chapter will endeavour to contribute knowledge and understanding in this area (see Pintilei 2009b).

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## **APPENDIX 1: Literature reviews which form part of grounded theory research**

Smith and Biley (1997) contrast literature reviews conducted as part of grounded theory research with literature reviews which precede quantitative research. In the latter, the first step would be to conduct a detailed literature review enabling testable hypotheses to emerge from the literature. However, for grounded theory research it is important that researchers begin data collection without having made theoretical assumptions. This is because grounded theory epistemology values knowledge which emerges from data collected during the research process. It is in this way grounded theory is discovered (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Therefore, literature reviews in grounded theory research usually take place during and after data collection.

However, amongst grounded theory approaches there exist contrasting opinions concerning at what point literature should be reviewed. Strauss and Corbin (1994) maintain that literature can be reviewed once theories have begun to emerge but Glaser (1978) disagrees, writing that researchers should only access literature when theory has emerged from the data. Hence, a literature review occurs at an even later stage.

The literature review approach used by the author follows guidance from Smith and Biley (1997, p.357) who concede that ‘general reading of the literature may be carried out to obtain a feel for issues at work in the subject area, and identify any gaps to be filled using grounded theory.’ Hutchinson (1993, cited in Cutcliffe, 2000) agrees with the approach advocated by Smith and Biley (1997) and adds that literature reviews can help to provide a

rationale for the research study and help to establish whether grounded theory methods are appropriate.

In terms of the literature review presented as part of the Volume 1 thesis, general reading was carried out to better understand the subject area, identify suitable gaps for further research and establish whether grounded theory methods were appropriate. It should be noted that before in depth analysis of qualitative Nurture Group literature took place the author had begun data collection, analysis and coding. Therefore, following Strauss and Corbin's (1994) approach the qualitative Nurture Group literature was reviewed once theories had begun to emerge from data collection.

## **APPENDIX 2: An overview of assessment tools uses in the Nurture Group intervention**

### **1. The Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 2007)**

Bennathan and Boxall (2007) write that The Boxall Profile offers a framework for structured observation of children in the classroom. It was initially developed in the 1970's and 1980's to be used by teachers and learning support assistants to support work in NGs. The purpose of this tool is to assess areas of difficulty in a child so that NG teachers can plan focussed interventions. Bennathan and Boxall (2007) write that Boxall Profile results concur well with the more recently standardised Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) and Gerrard (2005) notes that the Boxall Profile and the SDQ (Goodman, 1997) are positively correlated. Doyle (2001) explains that recommendations for Variant 1 NGs (Classic Boxall NG) are that the Profile is completed each term for every pupil while they remain in the group, and one term after reintegration into mainstream class in order to monitor and assess.

Bennathan and Boxall (2007) explain that the Profile comprises of 2 sections made up of 34 descriptors of observable behaviours in each section, and 2 histograms. The descriptors in Section 1 and 2 can be grouped into 10 sub-strands. Coded scores are filled in on the histogram and a shaded area on the histogram indicates the norm for each sub-strand. Scores which fall outside the norm indicate difficulties in this area.

Section 1 is made up of Developmental Strands which describe different aspects of the developmental process. Positive features such as 'listens with interest when the teacher explains something to the class' 'awareness of others' needs, 'adaptable behaviours when in a group' and 'engages in conversation with another child' are incorporated into this section. Each item descriptor has a letter next to it and during scoring items with the same letter can be grouped into 2 subsections: organisation of experience and internalisation of controls.

Section 2 comprises the Diagnostic Profile which consists of items that describe behaviours which inhibit the child's involvement in school, for example, 'self-disparaging and self-demeaning' and 'abnormal eye contact and gaze.' Each item descriptor has a letter next to it and during scoring items with the same letter can be grouped into three subsections: self limiting features, under developed behaviours and unsupported development.

## **2. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997, 1999)**

Goodman (1997) points out that the Rutter (1967) questionnaires were developed more than three decades ago and all the items on the scales are concerned with undesirable traits. Goodman's (1997) questionnaire takes account of a child's strengths as well as areas of need, noting that a recent trend in education is to emphasise pupil's strengths. Goodman (1997) points out that the Rutter (1967) questionnaires fail to identify some areas of behaviour which are of contemporary interest such as concentration, impulsivity and having friends. Thus, it is against this backdrop that Goodman (1997) designed the SDQ, a

behavioural screening questionnaire that covers young people's behaviours, emotions, and relationships.

Goodman (1997) reports that the SDQ is shorter than similar psychometric measures. It is made up of 25 items, which are based on 5 measurable dimensions: conduct problems, emotional symptoms, hyperactivity, peer relationships, and pro-social behaviour, which comprise of 5 items each. Out of the 25 items 10 could be thought of as strengths, 14 as difficulties, and one "gets on better with adults than with other children" as neutral. Each item can be marked "not true", "somewhat true" or "certainly true". Scores can be recorded as being in 'normal', 'borderline' and 'abnormal' categories. Goodman (1997) explains that the SDQ was designed to fit onto one side of paper, be applicable to children and young people ranging from 4 to 16 years, be completed by parents and teachers (informant questionnaire) and by pupils (self-report questionnaire).

### **3. Nurture Group Reintegration Readiness Scale (Doyle, 2001)**

Doyle (2001) explains that the scale consists of five areas (self-control and management of behaviour, social skills, self-awareness and confidence, skills for learning and approach to learning), which are subdivided into a series of statements. A pupil is given a numerical score for each statement. These scores are totalled and plotted in a table. Doyle (2001) explains that a maximum possible score of 312 is possible and an overall score of 218 (70%) or above was chosen to indicate readiness for that pupil to begin a programme of reintegration into mainstream class. It is unclear why the bench mark of 70% was chosen.

A range of documents including the Boxall Profile (Bennathan & Boxall, 1998); Portage Early Education Programme (White & Cameron, 1987); a reintegration programme used in an EBD high school (McSherry, 1999); baseline assessment materials and the Early Learning Goals (QCA, 2000) were consulted and customised and influence the construction of the scale.

Doyle (2001) maintains that the Reintegration Readiness Scale was used alongside the Boxall Profile to provide an overall picture of a child's progress towards reintegration and overall developmental progress. The Readiness Scale allows staff (NG and mainstream) to plan a child's transition into mainstream classrooms using small step targets which could be incorporated into Individual Education Plans (IEP) (DfES, 2001). She also writes that the tool is also useful for pupils not allocated to NG placements who would benefit from a skills analysis to support their social and emotional development.

### **APPENDIX 3: An overview of some qualitative NG research: aims and methods**

#### **Case study accounts**

Case studies on NGs have been useful in delineating specific examples of when NG provision has been effective (Doyle 2005, Bennathan 1997 and Lyndon, 1992), gaining participant's views (White, 2006) and outlining activities and strategies which have been implemented to meet children's needs (Doyle, 2005).

White (2006) interviewed the NG leader, the afternoon school SENCo, the EP and a parent. All participants apart from the EP were interviewed at the beginning of the intervention and after 6 weeks apart from the EP who was no longer in post. White (2006) also engaged in observations and document analysis. All participants, apart from the EP, were interviewed at the beginning of the intervention and after 6 weeks apart from the EP who was no longer in post. Doyle (2005) details a child's time in NG. She describes mainstream and NG staff member's feelings towards the child, breakthrough points for the child and how NG staff were able to promote progress. Doyle's (2005) research communicates the importance of consistency, behavioural approaches (such as identifying small behavioural steps to meet bigger targets) and the importance of working from the child's developmental level. She outlines strategies which were used to support the child's development. This is novel information which seems to be lacking in other NG research

Lyndon (1992) provides a descriptive account of a NG for 7 children which was established in an infant school. She describes outcomes of NG placement for the children in her study, writing that after less than 2 terms all the children in the NG were able to return to their mainstream class. Follow up at the end of the next school year showed that five children were making at least satisfactory progress, one child had left the school and one child continued to cause concern for school staff. Children in Lyndon's (1992) study were reintegrated into mainstream class after less than 2 terms but for the case study child in Doyle's (2005) account reintegration started as a gradual process after three terms.

### **Sanders (2007)**

Sanders (2007) writes that in her study 8 teachers, 6 NG staff and 3 head teachers were interviewed about the impact of the NG on participating children, the mainstream class, parents and the whole school. In addition all staff in the NG schools which totalled 29 teachers and learning support assistants completed a questionnaire which involved them rating the impact of a range of social and emotional factors on children's behaviour. Sanders (2007) also interviewed 7 children who had attended NGs about their perceptions of their school, friendships and themselves as learners. She notes that the children were selected by severity of need and NG staff perceived them to have the greatest needs.

### **Cooper and Tiknaz (2005)**

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) report evidence from 3 intensive case studies of NGs based in 2 infant and a primary school in the Midlands. They report that 40 hours of non-participant observation took place but it is not clear how this informs their research. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) focus on perceived progress made by pupils in NGs, challenges staff faced when running the NG and factors which contributed to the effective running of NGs. Interview data was gathered from 9 mainstream teachers, 3 head teachers and 9 NG staff who were interviewed on several occasions. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) provide useful contextual information such as the number of children in each NG, the nature of the children's needs and the time they spent attending the NG.

**Cooper, Boyd and Arnold (2001)**

Cooper, Boyd and Arnold (2001) present interim findings on the perceptions of NGs from interviews with mainstream teachers, pupils and parents. Their research seems to have collated the largest number of school staff and parent's perceptions as they gathered responses from 79 mainstream class teachers, 89 parents and some children, although they do not state how many. Cooper (2004b) briefly expands on the interim findings by discussing results from the final research project. He writes that interview data was gathered from 139 parents, 70 teachers and learning assistants in NGs, 90 mainstream teachers, 36 head teachers of schools with NGs and 227 pupils. The research questions Cooper (2004b) addresses are 'What is the impact of NGs on the mainstream schools they serve, in terms of staff perceptions and mainstream staff perceptions and practice? And 'What are pupils' and parents' perceptions and attitudes towards NGs?

**Bishop and Swain (2000)**

Bishop and Swain (2000) evaluate the effectiveness of a Variant 2 NG based in a primary school for children in Years 1 to 3 from participant's perspectives. They also analyse the education provided within NG in relation to other classes within the school and evaluate NG provision in terms of policies of inclusion and co-operation between parents and the school. A range of pre-structured questions were asked through semi-structured interviews. Documents from staff meetings and other school documents which related to the establishment and closure of the NG were used as a secondary data source. The sample was both a quota sample and purposive.

### **Cooper and Lovey (1999)**

As a preliminary to the national research project carried out by the University of Leicester (see Cooper and Whitebread, 2007) Cooper and Lovey (1999) surveyed 35 practitioners who they considered had expertise in NGs. Four questions were asked of participants:

1. How do NGs differ from other support for children with special needs?
2. How would you describe the child who would benefit from time in NG?
3. What would you expect the child to gain from the group?
4. How do you think the school is affected by having a NG?

As well as including participants who worked in NGs other professionals such as educational psychologists in authorities with NGs, a DfEE representative, a consultant psychiatrist and a nurse-therapist were also included. It is unclear to what extent some of the participants had expertise, for example, whether the educational psychologists, psychiatrist and nurse-therapist were actively involved in NG provision.

**APPENDIX 4: A summary of key research findings from salient quantitative NG research**

Key elements of the research	Summary of findings
<p><b>1. Binnie and Allen (2008)</b></p> <p><b>AIM:</b></p> <p>To evaluate the impact of NG interventions</p> <p><b>SAMPLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 primary schools in one local authority during the academic year 2006-2007</li> <li>• Across the 6 schools a total of 36 children (28 males and 8 females) were involved</li> <li>• Mean age for this group was 7 years 2 months</li> </ul> <p><b>METHOD:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A within-group, repeated measures design</li> <li>• Pupils attended NG for 4 morning sessions a week</li> <li>• The period between pre and post intervention measures was 8 months</li> <li>• The Boxall Profile was used to identify target populations</li> <li>• During the intervention the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) the SDQ (Goodman, 1999) and the Behavioural Indicators of Self-esteem Scale (BIOS, Burnett,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Boxall Profile was completed pre and post intervention for all children. All schools increased the performance on the Developmental Strand, following the intervention. As a group results showed statistical significance. All schools increased performance on the Diagnostic Profile of the Boxall Profile. As a group results showed statistical significance.</li> <li>• Five schools returned SDQ's completed by parents which accounted for 23 children. These scores demonstrated a significant positive change in pupil's social and emotional development following the intervention, as observed by their behaviour at home.</li> <li>• Results from the Behavioural Indicators of Self-esteem Scale (BIOS, Burnett, 1998) showed that all schools demonstrated a significant improvement in the children's self-esteem.</li> <li>• Results from teacher SDQs shows significant positive changes in the children's social and emotional development.</li> </ul>

1998) was completed for each child

- The SDQ was completed for 23 pupils by parents from 5 out of 6 schools.
- Three evaluation questionnaires were devised to obtain the perceptions of staff, parents and 6 head teachers. The questionnaires elicited feedback on the perceived impact of the NGs and also provided opportunities for challenges to be raised.

- Questionnaire responses show that from staff and parents' perspectives a positive impact was made on children post NG in terms of behaviour, confidence and self esteem. Parents noted a positive impact had been made at home.
- Staff reported an improvement in their teaching practice.
- The majority of Head teachers reported that NG had an overall positive impact on the whole school as well as the children attending NG.

Key elements of the research	Summary of findings
<p><b>2. Sanders (2007)</b></p> <p><b>AIMS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigated whether NG children were able to remain in their mainstream schools as many of them were at risk of exclusion.</li> <li>• Researched the gains made by the NG children and compared these to the gains of children in the comparison school and the impact of NGs on the whole school.</li> </ul> <p><b>SAMPLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 primary schools with a significant level of children with SEBDs who had NGs. The majority of children attended on a part time basis for 2 terms.</li> <li>• 2 schools with NGs provided data on 29 Key Stage 1 children</li> <li>• 1 primary school which was used as a comparison school and was matched in terms of size, levels of SEN and deprivation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of children were able to remain within mainstream education.</li> <li>• Generally children were found to make significant progress in all areas measured except in substrands R, S, U, Y and Z (self-negating, makes undifferentiated attachments, craves attachment and reassurance, shows negativism towards others and wants, grabs and disregards others).</li> <li>• The greatest gains were made in the developmental sub-strand, suggesting that children had developed better skills to organise their experiences and control themselves.</li> <li>• For the control group general positive shifts were measured but only the strand ‘shows insightful engagement’ was significant. Three children’s scores indicated a decline in areas measured by the Boxall profile over time.</li> <li>• A comparison of Boxall Profile scores for children in the intervention group with children in the comparison group showed a significant difference at the 0.05 level indicating that the intervention group did make significantly greater gains.</li> </ul>

**METHOD:**

- 2 schools with NGs provided data on the provision that 29 Key Stage 1 children needed on exit using a questionnaire designed by the author.
  - Boxall profile was complete on 17 children before and after they attended NG. Class teachers for 3 schools with the NG provided data on the social, emotional and academic gains for 19 pupils after they had completed 2 terms in the NG.
  - Boxall data for 9 children in reception and key stage 1 at the beginning and end of an academic year in the comparison school.
  - T-tests were completed to compare the scores from the Boxall Profile before and after NG placement, and scores from children in the control school.
- Two thirds of staff indicated that NG children had made academic gains.

Key elements of the research	Summary of findings
<p><b>3. Research by Cooper et al. (Cooper et al. (2001), Cooper and Whitebread (2003), Cooper (2004b) and Cooper and Whitebread (2007)</b></p> <p><b>AIMS:</b></p> <p>A 2 year national longitudinal study by the University of Leicester Nurture Group Research Project which explored the personal, social and educational outcomes associated with NG placement that took place between 1999 and 2001</p> <p>Cooper et al. (2001) state the aims were to investigate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What are the effects of NGs on children’s social, emotional, behavioural and educational functioning?</li> <li>2. How do variants on the NG approach compare in terms of their effectiveness in promoting positive social, emotional and educational development of pupils?</li> <li>3. What is the impact of NG approach on the mainstream schools they serve in terms of mainstream teachers’ perceptions and practice?</li> <li>4. What are children’s and parent’s perceptions and attitudes</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils with SEBDs in mainstream class in schools with NGs made progress but at a lower magnitude than those in NGs. However, tests on improvement rates of NG children and those with SEBD in the same school who did not attend the NG found no significant statistical difference in terms of improvement rates.</li> <li>• NGs which had been in place for more than two years were significantly more effective than groups which had been established for 2 years or less.</li> <li>• Comparisons between the performance of pupils with SEBDs in mainstream classes in schools with established NGs and pupils with SEBDs in mainstream classes in schools without NGs found after 2 terms a highly significant difference in pupil’s scores indicating greater progress for pupils with SEBDs in mainstream schools with NGs. (Cooper et al. 2001, Cooper 2004b and Cooper 2004c)</li> <li>• Cooper (2004b) and Cooper (2004c) report differential effects in relation to the type of problem presented by pupils. Pupils with global SEBDs, anti-social and disruptive</li> </ul>

towards NGs?

**SAMPLE:**

- A collective sample of 546 pupils (mean age 6 years 5 months)
- From 34 schools with NGs based in 11 local authorities.

Pupils were divided into 5 groups:

- Group 1a: 284 pupils attending 23 schools in 8 local authorities who attended NGs which had been established for 2 years or more. 21 of the 22 primary NGs were Variant 1, secondary children were from a Variant 3 NG and the remaining primary school as a Variant 2 NG.
- Group 1b: 75 pupils from 3 local authorities attending 11 newly established NGs (founded for 2 years or less) 2 of the NGs were in secondary school (Variant 3) the other NGs were a mainly Variant 1 NGs with 2 Variant 2 NGs)
- Group 2(Control group 1) 64 pupils with SEBDs attending the same schools as the children in the established NGs.
- Group 3(Control group 2) 62 pupils with no SEBD attending the same mainstream schools as children in the established NGs and matched to a random sample of these children for

behaviours, as identified on the SDQ, tended to generalise improvements made in the NG to the mainstream setting. Pupils with social emotional difficulties and pupils presenting with hyperactivity made improvements in the NG setting but tended not to generalise these to the mainstream setting. Cooper (2004c) contemplates that the failure for particular sub-groups of pupils to generalise gains made in the NG may highlight the context dependent nature of their difficulties and suggest the need for attention to be paid to promoting NG approaches in mainstream schools.

- A review of Boxall Profile scores shows that significant improvements were made by children in NGs between terms 1 and 4. Cooper (2004b) makes specific reference to the indication, from scores, that pupils were more able to engage effectively in learning activities in group situations. He also writes that although significant improvements were made between terms 1 and 4 the greatest improvements in SEBDs was in the first two terms.
- There continued to be a significant improvement on Boxall Profile sub-strand score for ‘organisation experience’

age, gender and perceived academic ability.

- Group 4(Control group 3) 31 pupils with SEBDs attending schools without NG provision and matched to a random sample of these children for age, gender and perceived academic ability.
- Group 5 (Control group 4): 27 pupils with no SEBD attending mainstream school without NG matched to a random sample of group 1a children for age, gender and perceived academic ability.

**METHOD:**

- SDQ completed by mainstream teachers
- Pupils attending the NGs were assessed using the Boxall Profile which was completed by the NG teacher
- A range of statistical analysis including t-tests and chi-square analysis were completed. (See Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)

between terms 2 and 4 indicating that improvements in behaviour associated with learning tasks continued into term 4. (Cooper 2004b)

- Differences between NGs affect pupil's progress. Statistically significant results were found for: The proportion of the week spent in NG, the make up of the group, the stability of NG staffing, English fluency and institutional quality. The research does not provide detail about these findings(see Cooper, 2004b for more details)

Key elements of the research	Summary of findings
<p><b>4. Gerrard (2005)</b></p> <p><b>AIMS:</b> To assess the impact of NGs on pupils</p> <p><b>SAMPLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17 schools in Glasgow were involved in the research.</li> <li>• 15 schools with NGs had accessible SDQ data for 133 children</li> <li>• Two schools were chosen for control schools. The control schools were matched on the level of social deprivation in the area indicated by free school meals. Pupils in the school were chosen by the head teacher at random. Although Gerrard (2005) notes that these schools may not have been well matched to the experimental group.</li> <li>• The control schools provided Boxall profiles for 11 children and results from SDQs (although Gerrard 2005 does not make clear how many children this covered)</li> <li>• Micro-study: 6 pupils from 2 NG schools and 6 pupils from 2 control schools.</li> </ul>	<p>Boxall Profile data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 of the 13 schools did not make statistically significant changes in the behaviour of children in the NG. This totalled 8 children from the sample.</li> <li>• 5 schools made significant changes in some areas of the Boxall Profile</li> <li>• 7 schools made significantly significant changes across all the dimensions of the Boxall Profile.</li> </ul> <p>SDQ data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the 15 NG schools 11 showed statistically improved scores and 1 school almost reached significance. This totalled 110 children out of 133</li> </ul> <p>Control schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After 6 months no significant changes had taken place in the children as demonstrated on the Boxall Profile or the SDQ.</li> </ul> <p>Results from the micro-study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 66% of pupils in the NG improved significantly over 6 months compared to 30% of pupils in the control group.</li> </ul>

**METHOD:**

- Boxall profiles were analysed for 13 out of 17 schools which took part in the research. Boxall Profile data was available on each child before they began NG and on exit. This involved 108 pupils
- SDQ data scores from 15 schools were compared pre and post NG placement.
- The micro-study: The Cognitive Analogical Thinking Modifiability Test (CATM, Tzuriel and Kelin , 1990) was used. This tool assesses independent thinking.
- The CATM was carried out on 3 pupils from 2 NGs and 3 pupils from each of the 2 control schools, which did not have a NG in place.
- Approximately 6 months elapsed between pre and post assessments.

- Conclusions gleamed are that children who attend NG have a significant chance of improving their learning skills.

## Other:

- Gerrard (2005) suggests not every school in the locality the research was carried out in would need a NG. He recommends NGs existing as a community resource.

Key elements of the research	Summary of findings
<p><b>5. Colwell and O'Connor (2003)</b></p> <p><b>AIMS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To compare teacher communication in mainstream classrooms and in Nurture Group</li> <li>• It was predicted that Nurture Groups would produce a climate more likely to enhance self-esteem than in mainstream classrooms.</li> </ul> <p><b>SAMPLE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variant 1 NGs and Year 1 classrooms in 4 schools</li> <li>• On average 7 pupils between the ages of 5 and 7 years old were present in NGs and mainstream classes included approximately 30 children between the ages of 5 to 6 years old.</li> </ul> <p><b>METHOD:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pilot observation was undertaken in Year 1 classrooms in a separate school to establish categories for classifying teacher behaviours. Eleven observational categories were</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 86.4% of statements made by NG teachers reflected behaviours likely to enhance self-esteem compared to 50.7% made by teachers in Year 1 classrooms.</li> <li>• 97.7% of all verbal statements in the NG included positive non verbal praise compared with 64% in mainstream classes.</li> <li>• Praise was more likely to be descriptive in NGs than in mainstream classes and a greater number of behaviours to encourage problem solving skills, autonomy, and convey acceptance and understanding of pupil's feelings were observed in NGs.</li> <li>• Results from the study suggest that when praise is used in NG it is more likely to be descriptive</li> <li>• NG environments are effective environments for supporting the needs of children with SEBDs and more likely to enhance the self-esteem of pupils.</li> <li>• The study results cannot assume that the NG environment raised self-esteem as no measures of self-esteem were taken.</li> </ul>

established from this pilot.

- The 11 categories were fitted into a self-esteem framework which comprised of 9 categories.
- Observations were then conducted in 4 schools. They lasted for 90 minutes during which verbal and non verbal teacher behaviour was recorded at 60 second intervals.
- Analysis of data involved assigning observed teacher behaviours into categories the observational category scores were converted into self esteem category scores
- Chi-square tests were conducted on all nine self esteem categories to compare behaviours in Ng and mainstream classes.

Key elements of the research	Summary of findings
<p data-bbox="230 346 667 379"><b>6. O'Connor and Colwell (2002)</b></p> <p data-bbox="230 459 320 493"><b>AIMS:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="271 517 1104 719" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="271 517 1104 603">• To measure the size and statistical significance of improvements made on exit from NG</li> <li data-bbox="271 627 1104 719">• To determine whether improvements were maintained after 2 years or longer.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="230 738 371 772"><b>SAMPLE:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="271 798 1077 1000" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="271 798 1077 884">• 68 pupils who attended a full-time NG. Pupils were from 2 infant and 3 primary schools.</li> <li data-bbox="271 908 1077 1000">• The mean age of children in the sample was 5.25 years and the mean attendance at NGs was 3 terms.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="230 1019 383 1053"><b>METHOD:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="271 1078 1095 1337" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="271 1078 1095 1222">• One tailed related t-tests were used to compare scores on the Boxall Profile for a sample of 68 children on their entry to the NG and on exit.</li> <li data-bbox="271 1246 1095 1337">• In terms of long term data, the mean time elapsed since NG placement was 2.67 years.</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="1180 346 2020 1385" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1180 346 2020 432">• Significant improvements for each sub-strand of the Boxall Profile at the end of their short-term NG placement.</li> <li data-bbox="1180 456 2020 884">• For long term effects of NG placement data was available on 12 children out of the sample of 68. Results showed that no significant relapse had occurred for 16 out of the 20 sub strands of the Boxall profile. However, a significant difference was found for the sub strands: connects up experiences, has undeveloped/insecure sense of self, shows negativism towards others and wants, grabs, disregarding of others, suggesting a relapse in these areas.</li> <li data-bbox="1180 908 2020 1385">• Comparisons between data gained from pupils on entry to the NG and after reintegration into the mainstream class showed significant improvements in 10 of the sub-strands. For long term maintenance 16 sub strand improvements had been maintained when comparing exit and current data. For 10 of the sub-strands mean scores were significantly different from those on entry. The other sub-strands although not significant the trend indicates a move in the direction of significant improvements.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In terms of maintaining gains there is evidence of maintenance however some children may still need nurturing input in their mainstream class.</li></ul>
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Key elements of the research	Summary of findings
<p data-bbox="271 347 703 379"><b>7. Iszatt and Wasilewska (1997)</b></p> <p data-bbox="226 459 320 491"><b>AIMS:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="271 515 1104 603" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="271 515 1104 603">• To complete follow-up of all children who had attended NGs in Enfield from their inception until July 1992</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="226 627 371 659"><b>SAMPLE:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="271 683 1104 834" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="271 683 1104 722">• 308 children placed in 6 NGs between 1984 and 1992</li> <li data-bbox="271 738 1104 834">• 3 NGs operated within Infant schools and 3 within the infant department of primary schools.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="226 858 383 890"><b>METHOD:</b></p> <ul data-bbox="271 914 1104 1281" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="271 914 1104 1114">• Information concerning the location of children and the Stage of the Code of Practice (DfES, 1994) they were on was collected from annual returns from September 1992 to July 1995</li> <li data-bbox="271 1129 1104 1281">• 2 schools with similar needs as those with NGs identified groups of pupils whom staff felt would benefit from NG if one was available.</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="1178 352 2018 1334" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1178 352 2018 440">• NGs are an effective way of preventing Statutory Assessments and Statements.</li> <li data-bbox="1178 456 2018 544">• 86.7% of pupils returned to their mainstream classes after an average of 3 terms and formal assessment was not required.</li> <li data-bbox="1178 560 2018 831">• Follow up of the control groups in 2 comparable schools found that the proportion of pupils requiring statutory assessment was more than 3 times greater and the proportion of pupils requiring EBD schools was almost seven times greater.</li> <li data-bbox="1178 847 2018 1110">• Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) report that the group of children were revisited in 1995 and found that 83% of the original cohort were still in mainstream school with 4% requiring additional SEN support at Stages 3 and 4 of the DfES Code of Practice (DfES, 1994)</li> <li data-bbox="1178 1126 2018 1334">• NGs were found to be an efficient and effective local authority resource which could meet the need of a large number of pupils and is a cheaper provision than forms of targeted special provision.</li> </ul>

**CHAPTER THREE**

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY, USING GROUNDED THEORY METHODS,  
OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF A SECONDARY  
SCHOOL NURTURE GROUP**

## ABSTRACT

This research study centres on the conceptual domain of Nurture Groups, an in-school intervention aimed at meeting the needs of children and young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007).

The research aims to generate theoretical understanding within the Nurture Group domain by exploring, using grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Charmaz, 2006), the experiences and views of young people who attended a NG based in their secondary school. The initial research aim was broad and concerned with exploring the experiences and views of secondary aged pupils, who attended a secondary school NG intervention. However, as theoretical categories emerged from data collection, coding and analysis, the research aim became focussed on exploring the salient properties of these categories, and developing a core theoretical category which integrated the theoretical sub-categories.

Qualitative observation and interview methods were used to collect data. Analysis of data showed that the young people valued the NG. The core theoretical category constructed from data analysis was that they most valued building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers. Supporting sub-categories were: having a safe base, engaging in a range of activities which they considered to be fun, engaging and diverse, and facilitated communication. The dynamic relationship of these categories forms the grounded theory and this is explored during the course of the paper.

# **AN EXPLORATORY STUDY, USING GROUNDED THEORY METHODS, OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL NURTURE GROUP**

## **1. Introduction**

Cooper and Whitebread (2007) explain that Nurture Groups (NGs) are an intervention to meet the needs of children and young people with considerable social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBDs). NGs are not a new phenomenon. They were established nearly 50 years ago but it is over the past ten years that the number of NGs in the United Kingdom has rapidly increased (Cooper and Whitebread 2007). There has been a wealth of academic research which has explored the effectiveness of NGs (see Pintilei 2009a). As well as academic research, the effectiveness of NGs, as an intervention to meet the needs of children with SEBDs has been publicly proclaimed on national television (Dispatches, 2009).

Majorie Boxall, the founder of NGs, describes them as;

an in-school resource for primary school children whose emotional, social, behavioural and formal learning needs cannot be met in mainstream class. (Boxall 2002, p.1).

Four variants of NGs have been discussed by Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper and Whitebread (2007) and characteristics are presented in Appendix 1. The NG variants are derivatives of the 'classic' NG (Variant 1), which is a class of between 10 and 12 pupils, located within a mainstream school, and staffed by a teacher and a learning support assistant (Cooper and Lovey, 1999). Cooper et al. (2001) explain that children who attend

the 'classic' NG spend a substantial part of each school day in the NG, usually for between 2 to 4 school terms. They point out that children who attend variants of the classic NG can spend considerably less time in the group (Cooper et al. 2001).

Cooper and Lovey (1999) argue that the NG environment is one of the key features of the intervention which differentiates it from other interventions which offer support for children with SEBDs. They explain that that;

the central aim of the NG is to provide children with the kinds of experience that they would receive in a normal nurturing home environment, the form and routines of NGs tend to incorporate some of the qualities that one would normally associate with a family situation rather than an educational institution. (Cooper and Lovey 1999, p.124)

Thus, the NG environment is an important aspect of the intervention. It is designed to be homely, containing a kitchen/dining area where children can have breakfast, a comfortable seating area and an area for more formal work. Another differentiating feature of a NG is that the focus is on supporting social and emotional development while at the same time providing educational opportunities (Cooper and Lovey, 1999).

### **1.1 A summary of extant NG research**

While following grounded theory methodology for literature reviews (see Appendix 2), a review of extant NG literature was undertaken by the author (see Pintilei 2009a) to identify gaps in the field of NG research. The review found that NG literature is complex and covers a wide range of information.

In terms of quantitative research, Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) point out that much of the published NG research has focussed on looking back on the progress pupils have made pre and post NG by measuring changes in pupil behaviour using the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ Goodman, 1997, 1999). Results from quantitative research show that NGs can reduce the need for Special Educational Needs Statutory Assessments (Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2001), and are cost-effective (Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997). Studies have shown that gains made in the NG can be generalised to the mainstream classroom (Cooper 2004a, 2004b). Furthermore, there is maintenance in the longer term of at least some gains made in the NG (see O'Connor and Colwell, 2002, Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997).

Research also includes qualitative studies that have explored parents', school staff and children's experiences and perceptions of NGs. Qualitative research has produced valuable findings. NGs were found to be effective in identifying children's needs (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005), improving behaviour in school and home contexts and raising pupil self-esteem (Binnie and Allen, 2008). Teacher reports state that NG placements have encouraged academic gains in pupils (Sanders, 2007) are enjoyable for children (Sanders, 2007, Cooper et al. 2001, 2004a and Bishop and Swain 2000), and provide respite to class teachers, peers and parents (Binnie and Allen, 2008, Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005, Cooper 2004a , Cooper et al. 2001, Bishop and Swain, 2000). Sanders (2007) found that having a NG can improve relationships between the school and parents of children who attend the NG. Cooper et al. (2001) found that the majority of parents in their study felt that their child would not have made the same amount of progress without a placement in the NG (Cooper et al. 2001). Research has also illustrated that NGs provide positive outcomes at a

whole school level (Binnie and Allen 2008, Sanders 2007 Doyle, 2004, Cooper 2004a, Cooper et al. 2001, and Lucas, 1999).

There are also some less positive findings; for example, pupils with social and emotional difficulties and hyperactive behaviour tended not to generalise improvements to mainstream class (Cooper 2004a, 2004b). Cooper (2004a) reported that some parents were disappointed with the rate of progress their children made in the NG and Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) reported that some class teachers were concerned that children may not make academic gains. Sanders (2007) found that some class teachers felt less able to assess academic attainment, and pupils attending NG could boast about their experiences, which made some of their peers jealous. Bailey (2007) and Howes et al. (2002) criticise NGs for not being an inclusive intervention because children are withdrawn from their mainstream class over a long period of time.

Even though there are limitations to extant NG research; in terms of research design, explanations of methodology and application of methods (see Pintilei, 2009a). The general consensus from quantitative and qualitative NG research is that NGs have the potential to be an effective intervention to meet the needs of children with SEBDs, as well as, the needs of the wider school community.

## **2. Justification for the research study**

Although there is a wealth of NG research there are some limitations to extant NG research and gaps in knowledge within the NG theoretical domain. Methodological criticisms can be directed at extant qualitative NG research. The reader is, for example, told that semi-structured interviews were used (Cooper 2004a, Cooper et al. 2001, Bishop and Swain 2000) but more precise details concerning how data were collected and analysed is not provided. Insufficient detail concerning research methods makes it more challenging to validate research claims (Robson, 2002).

Sanders (2007) recognises that NGs are beginning to be established in secondary school settings. However, as NGs were originally established for children in primary schools there is a very limited amount of research which centres on secondary school NGs (Boxall, 2002). Cooper and Whitebread (2007) include six pupils of secondary school age in their sample but they do not explore their views of the intervention. Cooke et al. (2008) provide an account of a NG for secondary aged pupils. They offer useful information pertaining to the NG but the views and experiences of the young people involved in the intervention are not sought. Therefore there is no published research which explores secondary aged pupils' experiences and views of their involvement in a NG.

Government legislation emphasises the importance of seeking out and listening to young people's views. The SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) states the importance of consulting with children regarding their perceptions of special educational provision. It is noted that:

Children and young people with special educational needs have a unique knowledge of their own needs and circumstances and their own views about what sort of help they would like to help them make the most of their education.

Thus, bearing in mind that NGs are intended to support children and young people, it seems imperative that their views are gained so that they have a voice which can be used in enhancing NG practice.

## **2.1 Research aims**

This research study aims to generate new theoretical understanding in the field of NG research by using grounded theory methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 and Charmaz, 2006) to explore a research area which has been unexplored until this time. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.174) explain that ‘any substantive theory evolves from the study of phenomena situated in one particular situational context.’ In contrast, formal theory comes about from the examination of phenomena in a range of situational contexts. This research aims to produce a substantive theory.

In keeping with grounded theory methodology the initial research aim was broad and concerned with exploring the experiences and views of secondary aged pupils, who had attended a secondary NG provision. Flick (2007) points out that often research questions become more defined during the course of the research. In terms of this research, as theoretical categories emerged from data collection, coding and analysis the research aim became focussed on exploring the salient properties of these categories, and developing a core theoretical category which integrated theoretical sub-categories. It is the interaction

between the theoretical categories which constitutes the grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

## **2.2 Ethical considerations**

The researcher adhered to guidance from Kvale (2007), who explains that ethics should be given importance from the beginning of the research to the final report. This research was constructed in accordance with the University of Birmingham's ethical guidelines; particular consideration was given to the involvement of young people in the research. Other important ethical considerations included: the recruitment of participants, gaining informed consent, explaining withdrawal procedures, ensuring confidentiality, and minimising potential detrimental effects of the research. Prior to beginning the research a detailed ethics proposal was submitted to the University of Birmingham and was approved. Pertinent information from the ethics proposal can be seen in Appendix 3. Further information pertaining to consent is discussed in Section 4.1.1 and ethical considerations raised by the choice of methods are discussed in Section 4.2.2.

## **3. Methodology**

Methodology is concerned with the theoretical analysis of methods; within this context it is important to consider ontological and epistemological assumptions, because ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions, which impact on methods used to carry out research (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995).

Cohen et al. (2000) describe ontological assumptions being concerned with how social reality is perceived. They can be placed on a continuum ranging from nominalist to realist assumptions. To simplify this concept, nominalists believe that what is being researched is not independent from the person who perceives them; whereas realists believe that what is being researched can have an independent existence (Cohen et al. 2000). Epistemological assumptions are concerned with the nature and form of knowledge, particularly how it can be acquired and communicated to others (Cohen et al. 2000). Depending on the researcher's epistemological assumptions anti-positivist or positivist methods can be favoured for gaining knowledge.

Cohen et al. (2000) explain that different methodologies assume different epistemological and ontological stances. In Knight et al.'s opinion;

quantitative methodology examines only constructs generated by the researcher (thus, data and understanding is constrained to such pre-conceived constructs), whereas qualitative methods encourage participants to introduce the factors that they perceive to be important and relevant, allowing new constructs to emerge that are not constrained by the researcher. (Knight et al. 2003, p.2)

As this research aimed to gain knowledge of the experience and views of a NG from the young people's perspective, a qualitative methodology, which favours nominalist ontology and anti-positivist epistemology was used.

If greater specificity is valued, this research study uses a grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Charmaz, 2006). Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that grounded theory methodology is concerned with developing theory from research, rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories. Numerous researchers have used

grounded theory approaches (Kraye et al. 2008, Dearden and Miller, 2006, Huws et al. 2001). Huws et al. (2001) explored parents' experiences of autism and the support that they can offer to other parents through the use of internet email facilities. Their reasons for using grounded theory methods match the rationale underpinning this study: they wanted to explore an area where little research had been carried out, and to move away from offering a descriptive account of the phenomenon under study, to a more theoretical account. Kraye et al. (2008) write that their main aim was to gain participants' perspectives, also matching the aim of this research.

#### **4. Method**

##### **4.1. The sampling process**

In grounded theory research initial and theoretical sampling processes are used (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Charmaz, 2006). The research process begins with initial sampling, which involves establishing sampling criteria, and acts as a starting point for the research (Charmaz, 2006). Initial sampling involved deciding on which settings and participants to begin data collection with. Thus, initial sampling can be described as purposeful (Cutcliffe, 2000). However, in contrast with quantitative research, where a sample size is usually decided from the outset, a grounded theory approach means that the size of the sample is not confirmed before the research begins (Smith and Biley 1997).

This is because data collection is dependent on theoretical sampling. Charmaz (2006, p.102) writes that;

Theoretical sampling involves starting with the data, constructing tentative ideas about the data, and then examining these ideas through further empirical inquiry.

This involves elaborating and refining emerging theory through further data collection, and exploration and development of theoretical categories, which are constructed from data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). As questions and gaps in the data arise the researcher seeks out further data from appropriate sources in order to saturate the theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006). Hence, the size of the sample is dependent on when salient theoretical categories have been identified, and have reached theoretical saturation (Baker et al. 1992). Theoretical saturation is achieved when no new theoretical concepts emerge from the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

Charmaz, (2006) explains that often the process of theoretical sampling is misunderstood. She explains that theoretical sampling focuses on gaining conceptual and theoretical understanding and so the process samples categories of data. It is not used to reflect the distribution of populations. In grounded theory research, 'theory' is constructed through theoretical sampling.

#### **4.1.1 The initial sample; including gaining informed consent from stakeholders**

The review of extant NG literature (see Pintilei 2009a) indicated very little was known about NGs in secondary school settings. Therefore, to begin initial sampling, a secondary school NG was approached to engage in the research. There were 3 secondary NGs

established in the Local Authority at the time of the research. Cooper and Whitebread (2007) found that NGs which had been in place for more than two years were significantly more effective than NGs that had been established for less than 2 years. Therefore, the NG used in this research study was selected because it had been established for the longest time (2 years), and was in session at the time required. Moreover, the researcher was the visiting Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) for the school. Thus, it was reasoned that the research would have a greater chance of success if it was carried out in a setting where close links could be maintained (Robson, 2002). Contextual information about the NG is presented in Appendix 4.

Rapley (2007) explains that people should be aware they are taking part in research, know what it is for, and consent to taking part. Lewis (2002) discusses different types of consent such as informed consent, assent and failure to object. During this research informed consent was gained. This means that the purpose of the research was explained to all participants, as were the research process and what information gained through the research process would be used for.

After the researcher had selected a secondary school to approach, informed consent was sought from a range of stakeholders: the head teacher, the NG staff, the young people involved in the NG and their parents. As a first port of call the researcher discussed the possibility of research with the NG leader who welcomed the research project. A letter was then written to the head teacher of the selected school (see Appendix 5). After, informed consent was gained from her the researcher met again with the NG leader and discussed research ideas in more depth, and gained her informed consent. Following this, all the young people who had experienced the NG intervention, from May 2007 - July 2008 were

approached to participate in the research. This involved 13 young people. Six were from Year 7 and seven from Year 8. One young person had left the school at the time of the research. This meant that 12 young people were still in the school setting. The young people were gathered in their year groups, and information pertaining to the research (who the researcher was, aims of the research, anticipated outcomes of the research, and information about what the research may be used for) was explained by the researcher.

In total, informed consent to observe all participants involved in the Year 7 NG was gained. In terms of interviewing participants, informed consent was gained from 8 young people (6 of whom were female and 2 male) and their parents. The remaining 4 participants showed interest in the research but did not return a signed consent slip to the researcher. Attempts were made to contact their parents over the telephone to gain verbal informed consent but contact could not be made.

Of the 8 participants for whom informed consent was gained 4 had attended the NG when they were in Year 7 and 4 had begun attending at the end of Year 7 until the middle of Year 8. At the time of interview they were in Year 8 and 9 respectively. All the participants attended the NG for 2 terms apart from B3 who attended for 4 terms. The first 2 young people to return their consent forms (participants A1 and B1) were selected for initial sampling. An interview with the NG leader and the NG co-ordinator from the Local Authority, and an observation of an afternoon NG session also comprised initial sampling.

#### **4.1.2 Perspectives on the young people's referral to the NG**

The 8 young people who were interviewed, discussed why they thought they had been referred to the NG. As the interviews were largely directed by the conversation of the young people, the amount of detail participants provided varied. To inform the reader's knowledge of the interview, sample excerpts from interviews which illustrate what the young people chose to communicate with the researcher, in terms of their perceived referral reasons, are presented in Appendix 11. Appendix 11 also includes referral reasons from the NG leader's perspective.

#### **4.1.3 Theoretical sampling**

During theoretical sampling emergent categories were explored in depth. Salient categories which constitute the grounded theory are presented in Section 5. Theoretical sampling involved interviewing 6 pupils, observations of the NG in the morning and afternoon, and another interview with the NG leader.

#### **4.2 Data collection using observation and interview**

Even though Etherington (2004) points out that postmodern times have opened up new freedoms in methodologies and methods of data collection it is important to remember that 'method is a function of purpose' (Feuer et al., 2000, p.11). Thus, researchers need to think about what the purpose of their data collection is, and how best to reach this outcome. It was considered that, in order to gain insight into the NG and the views and experiences of

the young people, observation and interview methods were suitable for meeting the research aims.

#### **4.2.1 Observation**

Robson (2002) writes that observational methods can offer a natural means of watching what people do and recording this information. The observation style which most closely matches the researcher's behaviour is defined as 'participant as observer' by Robson (2002) and Cohen et al. (2007). This meant that the young people present in the NG sessions knew that the researcher was observing them. The NG leader and researcher had explained that the purpose of the observation was so that the researcher could find out more about 'what NG was like.' The young people were advised of the researcher's attendance before the observation and had consented.

Robson (2002) explains that 'participant as observer' observations allow the researcher to observe by taking part in activities, and asking for explanations from members of the group, which is what the researcher did. While taking part in the activities or immediately after an observation the researcher wrote down informal field notes of salient aspects of the session such as topics of conversation, the nature of the activities and information about group dynamics and ambiance. Keywords, phrases and sentences were recorded. Some longer descriptions of the physical environment, events and behaviours were included.

Flick (2007) explains that some research starts with general observation and the research becomes more focussed during the process of data collection. The rationale for conducting the first observation, as part of initial sampling, was for the researcher to gain at least some

degree of insight into the young people's NG experience, and to understand contextual information such as the NG setting, session structure and staffing. Another benefit of observation, recognised by Robson (2002), is that gaining better insight into the nature of the group can inform interview data analysis. The two subsequent observations were to add breath and depth of understanding to concepts which the young people had discussed during interviews. The researcher observed 3 NG sessions in total and each observation lasted up to 2 hours.

At the time of the initial observation one young person in the group had been interviewed, at the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> observation 4 young people had been interviewed, and at the time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> observation 6 young people had been interviewed.

Cohen et al. (2007) explain that participant observation can be usefully combined with other forms of data collection so that this triangulates data collection. In this study observation was combined with the primary mode of data collection, which was interviewing. A main caveat of observation is discussed in Section 4.5.

#### **4.2.2 Interviewing**

Guidance from Kvale (2007), Rapley (2007) and Charmaz (2006) informed the interviews. Kvale (2007 p.1) asks researchers, 'if you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?' He notes that;

interviews are particularly suited to studying participants' understanding and meaning, describing their experiences and self understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world. (Kvale, 2007, p.46)

Qualitative interviews gain knowledge which is expressed using language. Thus, researchers using qualitative interviewing work with words and seek to gain precise descriptions (Kvale, 2007). Kvale (2007) recognises that qualitative interviews can be useful because researchers are able to hear participants' views and opinions in their own words, and find out about school, home and family situations. It is these arguments which solidified the decision for using interview methods in this study.

Charmaz (2006, p.28) asserts that intensive qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods very well because;

both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted.

The researcher was mindful of the following advice from Charmaz (2006, p.25-26);

The interviewer seeks to understand the topic and the interview participant has the relevant experience to shed light on it. Thus, the interviewer's questions ask the participant to describe and reflect upon his or her experiences in ways that seldom occur in every day life. The interviewer is there to listen, to observe with sensitivity, and to encourage the person to respond.

In this way, intensive interviews advocate eliciting the participant's interpretation of their experiences (Charmaz, 2006). During the interviews the researcher encouraged participants to express their views, reflect on earlier events, tell their stories (endeavouring to allow participants to choose what to tell and how to tell it), share significant experiences, and be

the experts (Charmaz, 2006). The interviewer began with an open question such as ‘Can you tell me about your time in NG?’ and from this, conversations began and were extended during the course of the interview. During the initial interviews with the young people some of the questions were pre-determined and were taken from a sample interview guide (see Appendix 6). These questions were used flexibly, as prompts for some young people who wanted direction on where their accounts may begin. Participants were however, encouraged to lead the interview and discuss issues which they perceived as important.

A pertinent issue in regards to this research was that the interview sample comprised, in the main, vulnerable young people. Mauthner et al. (2002) explain that ethical problems can come about from interviews because this method involves exploring private lives and then placing information in the public arena. Therefore, ethical considerations, as discussed in Section 2.2, needed to be given careful consideration (see Appendix 3 for more detail).

In keeping with the principles of theoretical sampling (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), as data collection progressed the researcher was able to recognise when conceptual categories were being discussed by participants and would seek elaboration from them. Thus, themes which had been raised in previous interviews were raised and developed in subsequent interviews as appropriate. As data collection and analysis progressed (see Section 4.3) the range of interview questions and category analysis became more specific. Another role for the researcher was to encourage participants to describe the events or feelings they discussed in as much detail as they were comfortable with so that examples of situations and actions could be gathered (see Appendix 6).

All of the interviews were carried out individually with the young person, during school hours, at the secondary school they attended. Seven out of 8 interviews were carried out in the NG leader's room. The young person and the researcher were present. One interview was carried out in a room which was normally used for counselling because the NG leader's room was unavailable. The 2 interviews with the NG leader were carried out in her room, and the interview with the NG co-ordinator was carried out in the researcher's office. Taking guidance from Kraye et al. (2008), rapport was established by setting a positive tone, reflecting on what the participants' discussed and ensuring that the interviews ended positively.

Recorded interviews provide a more detailed account of the interview (Rapley 2007). With the permission of participants, gained when the sample was recruited and before the interview began, all interviews were audio taped. This allowed the researcher to listen intensively and interact with the participant during the interview. The audio tapes were sometimes supplemented by brief notes made during the interview or more extended notes made directly after the interview. Notes concerned salient aspects such as the participant's body language, re-occurring themes or the researcher's ideas about abstract concepts relating to emerging theoretical categories.

The interviews varied in length lasting between 17 and 57 minutes depending on how much participants wanted to share with the researcher. Five interviews were between 40-60 minutes long, 3 interviews were between 30-40 minutes long, 2 interviews were between 20-30 minutes and one was less than 20 minutes. Confidentiality was assured to

all participants and this involved the data being stored in line with ethical guidelines (see Appendix 3 for further details).

### **4.3 Data analysis and coding**

Data analysis, following guidance from Strauss and Corbin (1990), involved three types of coding. These were: open, axial and selective coding. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) definitions of coding terms are presented in Table 1.0. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.58) assert that the 'lines between each type of coding are artificial' and different types of coding do not necessarily take place in separate and specific linear phases.

The constant coding and comparison method (Charmaz, 2006) was used throughout data collection, analysis and coding. This process supports the construction of a theory which emerges from data collection and involves the researcher constantly comparing new data with old data and devising codes and eventually categories which accurately represent the 'story' of the data. Thus, data analysis and coding involved the researcher moving between data collection, analysis and coding, returning to more focussed data collection when theoretical categories began to be constructed, and memo writing, memos being analytic notes written about codes, comparisons and other ideas which the researcher felt were important (Charmaz, 2006).

As coding progressed and theoretical categories were being constructed, the researcher included examination of pertinent theoretical literature in the data collection process

(Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This involved comparing how extant theoretical literature compared with the theory being constructed from the research study.

As explained, coding did not take place in a linear format; nevertheless it is useful to present the definition of coding terms, because following these coding processes led to theory generation.

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Features</b>
Open coding	‘The process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.61).
Axial coding	‘A set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by utilising a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences.’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.96).
Selective coding	‘The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development.’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.116, The Paradigm Model)
Category	‘A classification of concepts. This classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to a similar phenomenon. Thus, the concepts are grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept called a category.’ (Strauss and Corbin 1990, p. 61)

Table 1.0: Straus and Corbin’s (1990) definition of coding terms.

In terms of process, after gathering data from initial sampling the researcher engaged in open coding. This led to theoretical sampling and subsequent data collection, where after each observation or interview, data were analysed and open codes were attributed and compared with codes which had been previously made. In terms of data gained through observations, the field notes were coded with names which sought to summarise key themes within the data. Rapley (2007) explains that interview recordings need to be listened to several times so the researcher is familiar with the data and notices subtleties within it. During data analysis, interviews were listened to up to four times. When listening to the interviews the researcher used reflective and theoretical questions, outlined by Krayer et al. (2008) such as: ‘What’s happening here?’, ‘How does what this young person is saying connect to what has been said by some one else?’ or “What does this represent?”

Open codes were created in different ways, for example from a key point made by a participant during observation or the transcribing of a sentence or phrase. Open codes such as ‘fun’, ‘space’ ‘targets’ and ‘belonging’ were attributed to the data to capture the essence of what was being stated. During the process of open coding similar concepts were found and compared. Subsequent data collection deepened understanding and codes became more conceptual, leading to category formation.

Data collection then entailed exploring categories further to inform theoretical saturation of emerging categories and comparison of these categories with one another. Axial coding, in this way, led to the names of some codes being changed so that they better described the conceptual messages embedded in the data or for data to be put together in new ways, leading to the emergence of a new category or the integration of categories. During axial

coding the researcher used the 'Paradigm Model' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, see Appendix 7) to look for and explore conditions, contexts, action and interactional strategies and consequences which impacted on a category. Using the 'Paradigm Model' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) helped the researcher to explore categories in depth and move towards theoretical saturation.

Finally, through the processes of selective coding, and use of the 'Paradigm Model' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) a core theoretical category was identified, which best communicated the analytical story of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The dynamic interactions of the subcategories and the core category form the constructed grounded theory. The researcher interrogated the data for the core category in order to work towards ensuring theoretical saturation, some sample questions which were asked of the data can be seen in Appendix 8.

#### **4.4 Threats to credibility of the research methodology and methods**

There are critics of grounded theory methodology. Thomas and James (2006) argue against the terms 'discovery', 'grounded' and 'theory.' To them these terms suggest that there is an objective reality which can be discovered rather than a multitude of realities which can be understood. They state that grounded theory methods denigrate the importance of qualitative research because they seek to explain rather than understand social realities. They also assert that too much emphasis is placed on methods as opposed to interpretation and understanding.

Charmaz (2006) acknowledges the issue of semantics raised by Thomas and James (2006) but has surpassed these challenges. Charmaz (2006, p.10) explains;

In the classic grounded theory works, Glaser and Strauss talk about discovering theory as emerging from data separate from the scientific observer. Unlike their position, I assume that neither data nor theories are discovered. Rather, we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We *construct* our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices.

Thus, Charmaz (2006) envisages a theory as being constructed and interpretive rather than a hard, objective reality. This research supports her view of grounded theory, which marries well with the coding and analysis process advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Charmaz (2006) has identified challenges to theoretical sampling. She explains it can be difficult to return to participants for further data collection. Strauss and Corbin (1990) also acknowledge the challenge of achieving theoretical saturation because data may need to be collected even when the research approaches the final research stage. In terms of this research study, it was challenging to achieve theoretical saturation because the research needed to be completed within a specified time frame, meaning that there were limitations on the amount of data that could be collected.

However, in order to saturate theoretical categories as much as possible the author sought to make good use of the 'Paradigm Model' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, see Appendix 7). This allowed data to be analysed in depth. The researcher was also conscious of remaining open to new information, which also helped the research process when it was time to return to the field to collect further data in order to saturate categories (Kvale, 2007). Although

the researcher feels that the theoretical categories constructed from data collection and analysis are 'full' they may be criticised for not illustrating 'theoretical saturation.'

In terms of the coding process, Kvale (2007) notes that the constant comparison method supports credibility because codes are constantly being compared against one another to ensure accurate representation of data. However, to further enhance validity/credibility, a colleague, with some knowledge of grounded theory methods, listened to one of the lengthier interviews and engaged in open coding. Her open codes were compared with the researcher's open codes and matched well. Naturally, through the process of subsequent coding and a move to abstract theory generation, some initial codes changed as categories were saturated with further data. The constructed theory was also shared with the young people involved in the research and their consensus gained (see Appendix 9).

There are also limitations inherent in the chosen methods. A main caveat to using observation, explained by Robson (2002), is that the observer may affect the research situation, meaning that the data collected are not a true representation of the area under study. It is hoped that the relaxed atmosphere in the NG, the researcher's chosen method of observation, 'participant as observer' which meant that the researcher engaged in NG activities alongside the young people, and the gaining of informed consent helped to mitigate reactivity effects (Robson 2002).

In terms of interviews with children, Kvale (2007) recognises that power imbalances, which exist between adults and children, may influence what is shared during an interview in that the interviewee may consciously or subconsciously share what they believe the

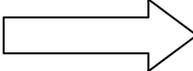
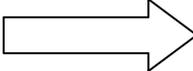
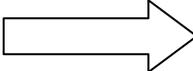
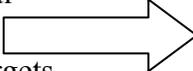
interviewer wants to hear. Thus, the child's understanding of the aim of the interviewer will affect whether they feel that they are able to respond openly (Cooper 1993a). To combat power imbalances, the researcher followed advice from Eder and Fingerson (2002) by trying to ensure participants realised she was not searching for a 'right answer'. Taking on board guidance from Kvale (2007), age appropriate questions were used but the interviewer often followed the young person's line of conversation. Moreover, because the young people understood the research aim, gained through the process of acquiring informed consent, threats to credibility were reduced.

## **5. Results: theoretical categories arising from data collection, analysis and coding**

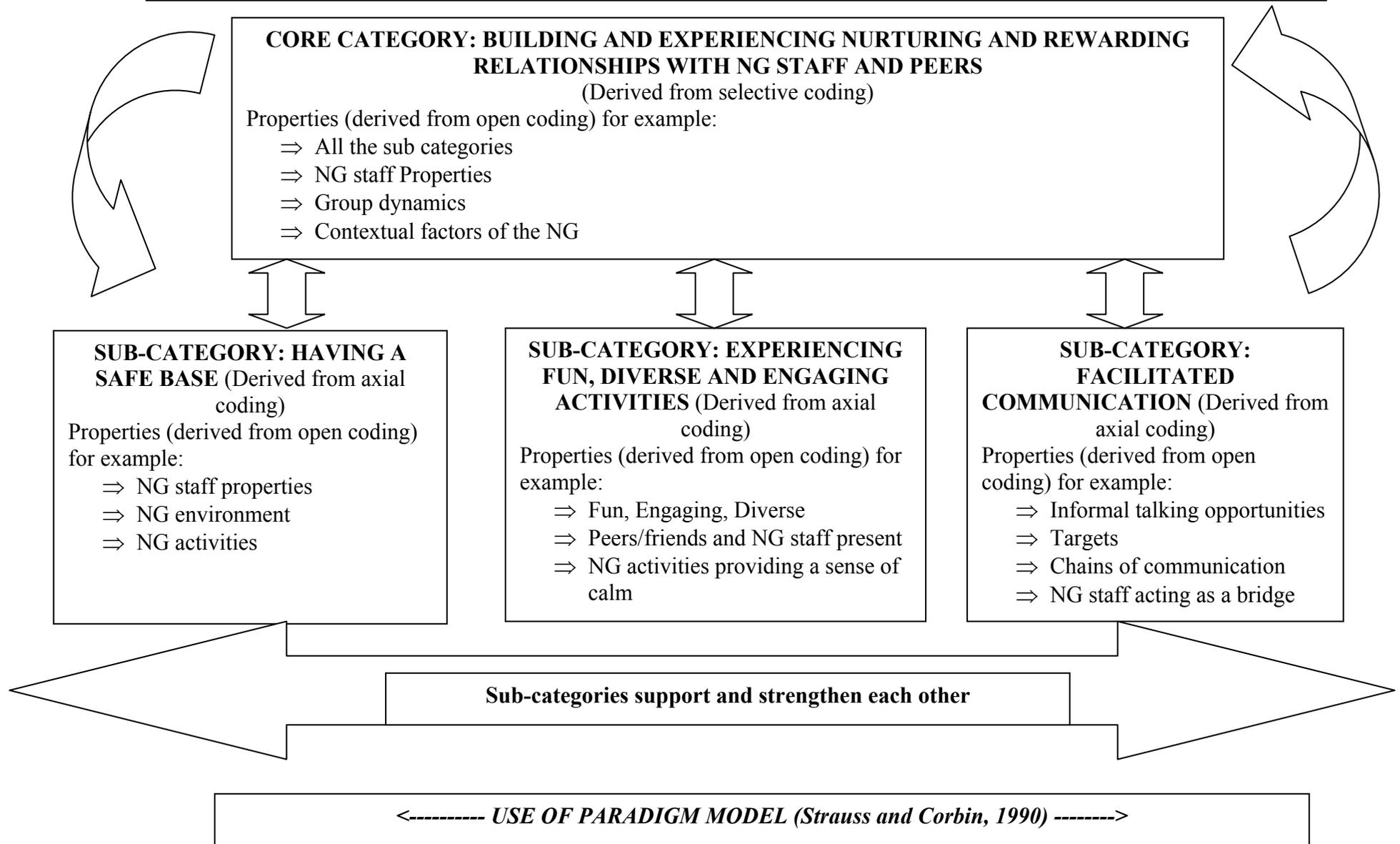
Analysis of data showed that the young people communicated a story of 'value' when they talked about their time in the NG. Once this key message had been constructed from the data, the focus of data collection became concerned with exploring in detail what it was about the NG that the young people valued. From this process the core theoretical category, which most closely tells the analytical story of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), was constructed. The core category shows that the young people most valued their time in NG because it provided them with opportunities to build and experience nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers. The core category encapsulates the theoretical subcategories: "having a safe base", "experiencing fun, diverse and engaging activities," and "facilitated communication". Discussion of the theoretical categories takes place in section 6.

Appendix 12 provides illustrative examples of young people's comments which informed coding and consequently category formation. Examples of open codes, which contributed to the properties of the final categories, are presented in Table 1.1. Figure 1 illustrates how the subcategories support each other and the formation of the core category. The core category in turn supports and strengthens the functioning of the subcategories. The dynamic interaction between categories is depicted by the use of arrows in the figure. As explained previously, Strauss and Corbin's (1990) Paradigm Model was used to assist theoretical saturation of all four categories through detection of actions, interactions and processes and this is also shown in Figure 1.

**Table 1.1: Illustration of open codes which led to categories**

OPEN CODES AND CATEGORY PROPERTIES	WHAT DO THE YOUNG PEOPLE VALUE ABOUT NG?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contextual features of the group (staffing, size, group dynamic, environment)</li> <li>• Properties of NG staff (trustworthy, helpful, identify and judge young people’s needs, considered knowledgeable, staff listen and respond, caring, fun, positive, consistent but creative in their approach to young people)</li> <li>• Feelings of acceptance from NG staff </li> <li>• Success/rewards</li> <li>• Building and sharing memories with NG staff and peers</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Sub-categories and open codes below</li> </ul>	<p>CORE CATEGORY created through selective coding process</p> <p><b>“Building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers”</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of belonging ( safe, space, calm- can relax and feel comfortable with NG staff, quiet)</li> <li>• NG staff present</li> <li>• Rules/ High expectations</li> <li>• Time to think and talk, release emotions </li> <li>• NG and NG staff provide emotional safety</li> <li>• NG activities including activities they can do on their own</li> <li>• Building and sharing memories</li> <li>• NG is concrete and visible</li> </ul>	<p>SUB-CATEGORY created through the axial coding process</p> <p><b>“Having a safe base”</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun , Diverse, Engaging – well-paced and interesting</li> <li>• Facilitated group work</li> <li>• Great range of activities including use of ICT</li> <li>• Peers/friends and NG staff are present</li> <li>• Trips outside of school setting</li> <li>• Eating breakfast with friends</li> <li>• Feeling calm, time to think </li> <li>• Some activities challenging</li> </ul>	<p>SUB-CATEGORY created through the axial coding process</p> <p><b>“Experiencing fun, diverse and engaging activities”</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal talking opportunities often facilitated by NG activities which NG staff incorporated into sessions</li> <li>• Chains of communication (NG staff and parents/carers, NG staff and other teachers, peers and peers, NG staff and young person, young person and parents)</li> <li>• Staff acting as bridge-not always successful </li> <li>• Trust, acceptance</li> <li>• Personalised, motivating and rewarding targets</li> <li>• Uncertainty about aims of NG</li> </ul>	<p>SUB-CATEGORY created through the axial coding process</p> <p><b>“Facilitated communication”</b></p>

**Figure 1: Illustrates the dynamic relationship between the sub-categories and the core category**



## **6. Discussion of results**

This section discusses the substantive theory. Properties of the categories and explanation of how the sub-categories support the core category are presented. Illustrative verbatim quotes from participants are included to demonstrate and explain concepts, and as a means of representing the voice of stakeholders involved in the research. Relevant theoretical literature, which is useful in supporting the constructed theory, is referenced. To ensure confidentiality the names of the young people have been substituted by a letter and number code. The NG leader is referred to as X and NG supporting staff as Y.

### **6.1 The core category: building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers**

Results suggest that this NG provided an environment in which nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers could be built and experienced. Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper (2004a) identified that primary aged children who attended NG valued the quality of interpersonal relationships with NG staff, thus supporting the findings of this study. However, in their work they did not offer information about how children's views were elicited, the aspects of the relationships they valued or how relationships were formed with NG staff and peers. Thus, as this study provides this information it extends previous NG research.

In terms of theoretical knowledge, NG literature identifies Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) as important to NG practice. Scott and Lee (2009, p.5) explain;

Attachment theory focuses on the importance of a child growing up in an environment where they are exposed to caring and trusting relationships with adults and where the adults provide consistency and a stable, structured setting where the child can develop in a nurturing environment.

Data analysis demonstrated that the young people felt they were exposed to trustworthy and caring adults in the NG, with whom they were able to form nurturing and rewarding relationships. The finding that the young people were able to build rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers is encouraging because academics note the importance of positive relationships in school settings (Daniels, 2001). Cooper (2008, p.18) asserts that 'the importance of relationships in the educational context has long been recognised' and Visser (2002) discusses links between different approaches for young people with SEBDs and the achievement of successful outcomes. He notes that it is the building of positive relationships that is crucially important.

The young people recounted properties of NG staff which supported them in building relationships. They considered NG staff as advisors or mentors, felt they were interested in them, provided them with emotional safety and acceptance. These are qualities which Porter (2000) explains effective relationships with children with SEBDs should provide. Most importantly the young people expressed that they could trust NG staff. This finding supports Cooper (1993b) who explains that young people in SEBD specialist provision stated having trusting relationships with adults was important in developing positive self

image, and enabled them to work towards managing impulsivity and academic disengagement.

The six principles which NGs should adhere to are presented in Appendix 10. The 3<sup>rd</sup> principle explains that ‘nurture involves listening and responding’ (Nurture Group Network (NGN), 2009). The young people expressed how NG staff listened and responded to them;

In NG if you had problems you could talk to X and Y about it. They would help you and listen.... Other teachers don't listen they just think it's you but X and Y listen (B3).

X and Y know what's going on... they know how to deal with things and I can always talk to them. That's why I trusted them (C2).

NG staff (Y) acted as a bridge between the NG and other parts of the school. They would offer support in non NG lessons and sometimes take NG participants out of lessons to discuss issues with them on a one to one basis. The young people valued the NG support staff (Y) because they were a consistent presence in the school.

In some instances participants considered NG staff as friends. One young person was asked why she preferred to listen to X's advice rather than one of her subject or form teachers. She replied that;

X is more like a friend than a teacher.... you can have a good laugh with X (A2).

Another participant admitted that X was her ‘best friend’ (B1); when asked what this meant she expanded that she could communicate her problems to X and resolve them. The

young people felt able to relax with the NG staff and communicate openly with them, because they trusted them, enjoyed being listened to and felt understood.

Building trust in NG staff was a process. One young person discussed how she would test the water by talking about a non-threatening issue before she began to discuss personal issues. Opportunities to talk informally with NG staff, while enjoying fun and engaging activities was important in building relationships, as was realising success.

Success was experienced through the use of personal targets. The NG staff acting as advisors helped the young people to set individualised targets. There were instances within NG when the young people could practise their targets and act on advice given to them by NG staff. They, for example, resolved conflict with their peers over breakfast or practised facing personally challenging social situations. Receiving advice from NG staff, being able to practise the advice, and achieve success enhanced the young people's feeling of trust. The young people valued receiving token rewards such as credits and also emotional satisfaction through the praise they gained and activities they engaged with. They felt that X tried hard to make their school experience rewarding by organising motivating and creative activities in NG, as well as trips and experiences outside of the school setting. Thus, positive regard for NG staff allowed them to build relationships and establish trust in them.

Participants appreciated the help they received from NG staff. They discussed practical help such as X reading with them or teaching about 'capital letters, words and spellings' (A1). They also discussed more abstract concepts such as the NG staff being able to judge

their moods and recognise their needs, for example whether they needed someone to speak with, quiet time alone or would benefit from being introduced to other in-school interventions such as an anger management group or external support agencies. This supports findings by Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) who state that a consequence of children being involved in the NG intervention was staff members who were better able to identify what their needs were and seek to meet them themselves or through gaining support from appropriate external agencies.

Visser (2005) writes that positive relationships between teachers and students contribute to the formation of positive relationships between peers. Many of the young people, but not all, felt that they had made good friendships while in the NG;

It was really good (NG). We done artistic activities like painting and stuff. We done proper work, like in lessons, but it was better in NG group 'cos you had friends you could talk to. (B3)

Cooke et al. (2008) explain that during adolescence young people will gradually turn away from family and towards peers, who provide a sense of belonging. Building relationships with peers was achieved through sharing experiences of their life and building memories together by taking part in NG activities (see Section 6.3) and participants perceiving the NG as a 'safe base' (see Section 6.2). This allowed them to facilitate communication (see Section 6.4), express themselves and experience making, breaking and restructuring relationships with peers.

Contextual factors were helpful in supporting peer group dynamics. Howes et al. (2002) report that the size of the group, the age of the children and the mixture of emotional and behavioural needs were important factors contributing to the effective running of NGs.

Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) recognise the importance of having 2 full time members of staff. In this study the NG leader discussed how pupils were selected for the NG with consideration given to how the group would function as a whole. She stated that the NG staff needed to 'know their own limitations' when putting a group together and recognise that it may not be possible to include all children at a particular time, if they were successfully to meet the needs of the group. During NG sessions there were usually two adults present. Interestingly, there were approximately 7 pupils in the NG in this school, which is a smaller number than recommended by Boxall (2002), who describe groups containing between 10-12 pupils in primary school settings. Sessions were always regular and some young people knew each other from being in the same form or lessons.

Visser (2002) cites Cole et al. (1998), Daniels et al. (1998) and Ofsted, (1999) who discuss the importance of high but achievable expectations of behaviour and educational achievement. Dr. Sunderland speaking at a conference (Birmingham, City Council, 2008) explained clear rules and consequences could support emotional containment. These factors were in place. NG staff had high expectations of pupils' behaviour and the young people recognised this. Positive behaviours were role modelled by NG staff;

X would treat everyone fairly. If you were rude she would say it was wrong (B2).

The young people discussed either explicitly or through abstract reference NG rules such as; 'people would let you speak' (B1). This helped group cohesion and facilitated a safe environment.

Even with supportive processes in place, inevitably participants did not always get along or enjoy each others company;

A new boy came in NG.... he was rude. I wanted to be friends with everyone but I didn't know if I wanted to be friends with him. He hurt my feelings... told lies (C1).

(Name) got on my nerves and made me angry because she screamed and shouted. She talked too much (A1).

Perhaps occasional conflict within the NG is reflective of a normal family-like situation which Boxall (2002) expresses the NG should aim to create. In fact, the NG leader stated that the group personalities were representative of a microcosm of school, which would most likely involve some form of conflict at times. During observations the researcher recorded how conflicts which arouse during a session would be resolved, with support from NG staff, through the use of skilled problem solving conversations. Opportunities to practise conflict resolution may serve to support the young people when they are in other lessons. In any case, participants who discussed conflicts recounted how over time they were able to build good relationships with others in the group and a tolerance of particular individuals, even if this did not develop into a friendship. Conflict with peers did not mar the young people's enjoyment of the NG, and the relationships they built with peers, alongside the relationships with NG staff, remained the most valued memories of their NG experience.

Cooper (2008) explains that positive adult and pupil relationships can act as a protective mechanism for pupils with SEBDs and Georgiou et al. (2008) note that relationships with unrelated adults can minimise negative effects in young people's development, because they can provide an alternative attachment figure. Soucy and Larose (2000) found that

young people who had developed a secure attachment with mentors showed greater academic and emotional adjustment and Resnick et al. (1997) found positive relationships with teachers more important than classroom sizes or the level of teacher training, because if pupils felt connected to school they were less likely to partake in risk behaviours. The remit of this research was not to explore whether the attachments made with staff and peers were secure, but from the perspectives of the young people they formed valued and rewarding relationships, which appeared nurturing, perhaps suggesting that some of these benefits may be available to the young people in this sample.

## **6.2 The role of the safe base**

The NG leader recognised the challenges of creating a feeling of safety within the NG;

It's very difficult, when you have lots of children with real difficulties with their behaviour and really unusual behaviour, to create a safe environment in the sense that they will experience the group as safe. The group is not always safe, but hopefully what they will experience is the relationships they have with the adults are safe, and the nurture base is a safe base to come to.

However, results indicate that this NG achieved the 2<sup>nd</sup> principle of NGs (NGN, 2009). It did appear to offer a safe base which contained anxiety.

There are links between the secure base discussed in Attachment literature (Bowlby, 1988, Holmes, 2001) and the safe base aspect of this NG. Bowlby (1988) purports that a secure base is provided by a person who encourages, is available and supports when needed, but does not intervene unnecessarily. Bartick-Ericson (2006) argues that during adolescence important adults can provide a secure base which supports exploration and autonomy in the young person. She states that security of attachment is important for adolescents because

they face new challenges such as increased expectations of independence and academic challenges.

The NG staff and the properties they possessed, which were discussed in the previous section, were integral to the creation of a safe base. NG staff supported the young people in NG but also facilitated opportunities for them to explore and develop skills through the range of diverse activities they organised (see Section 6.3).

During an interview with the NG leader the NG ethos was explained to the researcher, and this ethos may have supported the creation of a safe base;

The nurture base is a safe base to come to and whatever happens they are accepted and valued. (A5)

As well as valuing relationships with NG staff and peers the young people valued the NG environment, which has been described in Appendix 4. They conceptualised the NG as a concrete and visible safe base which existed even when they were not attending a NG session. They explained that they could come to the NG if they were experiencing problems in school outside of sessions.

In this case, the NG differed somewhat from NG recommendations (Cooper and Lovey 1999) because it did not have a dining/kitchen area or a sofa within the space. It also was used as a passage way for staff and children to access another room. Although the environment may not have been ideal the young people felt that the NG was a safe place where they could calm down. Participants commented that the NG was a ‘space to get

away from people (B3)', where they could 'come down and release out the emotion and anger and everything (A3).' Many young people expressed that they thought the NG offered an environment which was quieter than the classroom and provided them with opportunities to think and be calm, supporting findings from Cooper (2004a) who also reported that primary aged children in NG expressed feeling a sense of calmness.

Having areas within the NG which they could use to work on their own was valued. Participants referred to 'X's room,' which was a separate room within the NG space which they used as a retreat to have personal conversations with the NG staff, or as a space to spend time on their own when they needed to. Holmes (2001) discusses how the secure base in traditional attachment thinking refers to the caregiver to whom a child would turn when distressed. However, Holmes (2001, p.7) explains that for adults, as well as people representing a secure base, it can be 'a representation of security within the individual psyche.' He discusses an internal secure base which can be used when people are in need of affect regulation, and provides examples of activating the internal secure base through favourite food, places, books and television programmes.

In NG, participants could achieve a feeling of having their own space in which they felt calm and secure, even if they were physically in the same room as other people. This was facilitated by NG activities. One young person reported that he liked writing stories in the NG because he could do this on his own, it was quiet, and he could think. Many participants valued craft activities;

making things helped me to calm down and relax and think about what had happened and think about my feelings and let off steam by making things... that's what I really liked..... (C2)

Engagement in a range of diverse activities helped young people to perceive the NG as a safe base because the activities allowed them to reflect, relax, and in this way build relationships with NG staff and peers. This finding may suggest that adolescents can access an internal secure base, in the way Holmes (2001) reports that adults can. Further research in this area would be beneficial.

### **6.3 The role of experiencing fun, diverse and engaging activities**

NG activities were diverse and included for example: having breakfast together, maths, literacy, language, emotional literacy and craft activities as well as trips outside of school. Participants discussed their enjoyment in being involved in the school radio station, listening to stories, using filming equipment, computers and digital cameras. Some participants expressed that they enjoyed working towards an Arts Award. Involvement in academic activities was also discussed;

We did proper work like writing tasks or a story, usually in lessons it's really boring but in NG I done it and it was alright ...Learning activities gave me more ideas so when I went to English and we had creative writing task or something I would think about what I wrote down here (NG) and what X had said to me and it would help me get a good level in my creative writing (B3).

The young people thought activities were fun and that they achieved at them. This sense of enjoyment and achievement created an atmosphere which was conducive to building trusting relationships. This supports Visser (2005) who discusses the importance of creating a fun learning atmosphere, where the classroom is perceived as an enjoyable place. He explains that having fun is a key feature in building relationships. The activities which the young people engaged in maintained their interest and this, as well as the rules

and boundaries, meant that the young people had less opportunity to engage in negative behaviours than they might do in the classroom.

I didn't do none of them in Nurture (inappropriate behaviours) 'cos I didn't have the time to do it and I was having more fun (A2).

Whenever I have fun I be more good (C1).

Morning sessions began with breakfast, and participants recognised the opportunities for building relationships through communication;

The best thing was eating breakfast with friends .... eating and talking nicely (C1).

Breakfast was good because you get a chance to talk to people and make friends (B3).

Breakfast was one of many activities which facilitated the building of relationships with peers and NG staff;

The radio station was a good activity... coming down as a group. I didn't know everyone at first but we got to talk with everyone and make friends (B3).

It was good making things, and being with friends while making things (C2).

Some activities did challenge participants. One person expressed, in reference to an activity which called for her to think about her experience of being bullied, identify feelings and reflect on her emotions and the emotions of others involved in the situation;

I was just amazed at what we had to do... it was really hard to think about it (A3).

However, she recognised that the activity had benefited her and she could do it because it was carried out in the NG (a safe base).

The young people and NG staff went on trips outside of the school setting. Analysis shows that they were important to the young people's experiences because they provided a process through which they were able to build and share experiences, important in forming relationships;

The trips helped loads because before I would always be at the back but now I want to go into the group and be near the centre of the group so that I've got loads of people (B1).

Another participant stated that when she went on trips she 'had a laugh with her friends' and it gave her 'more time to bond with them' (A2). When the young people described the trips they discussed feeling happy and relaxed and enjoying sharing time together. NG activities worked towards the young people being able to perceive the NG as a safe base and use their time to think about personal issues, find out more about themselves and others. Although some activities were emotionally challenging the majority of activities were perceived as fun.

## **6.4 The role of facilitated communication**

The 4<sup>th</sup> NG principle, 'language is understood as a vital means of communication,' (NGN, 2009) explains that informal communication opportunities are as important as formal language lessons. NG staff seemed to apply this NG principle to their practice. Observations of the NG showed that they facilitated opportunities for informal communication with the young people which allowed the young people to build relationships with them, which in turn supported the young people in communicating more readily about personal issues. During interviews, the young people reported talking with NG staff about a range of subjects such as their thoughts and feelings, difficulties at home and school, their favourite things, issues such as how best to learn, as well as run of the mill events.

Greenhalgh (1994) and Visser (2002) discuss the therapeutic effect of having challenging and achievable targets. NG targets concerned behaviour at school and home and often facilitated communication with peers, parents/carers or teachers. The young people found it motivating and rewarding to have targets;

The targets aren't the same for everyone. I could focus on things that I had to do to make me improve my attendance and everything (A3).

They discussed how attendance at NG and NG targets could facilitate communication with their parents/carers. They reported discussing NG activities, positive NG experiences, and sharing their NG targets with them.

Having chains of communication was a property of this category. For the young people to attend the NG consent needed to be gained from their parents/carers. This allowed communication to be initiated between NG staff and parents/carers. Participants discussed how the NG leader sometimes shared positive news about the achievements they had made at school with their parents/carers, and discussed difficulties they were experiencing at home and school. Participants who spoke about this communication welcomed it but did not always want to be a part of it.

One young person spoke of how her parents would phone X to discuss difficulties they were experiencing at home with her, and X would then speak with her or offer advice to her parents. The young people sometimes used NG staff to facilitate communication with other school teachers. In this way NG staff acted as a bridge between home and school, and NG and school. This was recognised by the young people and served to build trust in NG staff because they felt they cared about them.

Attempts at facilitating communication were not always successful but participants appreciated that NG staff had tried and believed this showed they cared;

They didn't really speak to my mum and dad. They got XXXX and social workers involved, but it didn't really help because my dad is an alcoholic. They sent the social workers to the house but it didn't help because ever time they came he was drunk and would swear at them or something. I'm glad they sent them to try and help but it didn't really help with anything (B3).

When some of the young people shared their family situations with the researcher it was clear that they were living with difficult situations, often not of a transient nature, such as

alcohol dependent parents, parental separation, divorce and bereavement. The same young person shared her understanding of the aim of NG;

It was about getting young kids together and making them try and improve in lessons (B3).

This participant also expressed that she thought the NG was to try and ‘fix’ or reform her. This theme was not explored in depth, and it may be necessary to explore further how best to address issues of NG referral with the young people and how to communicate intended NG outcomes with them. In order to do this each NG intervention would have to have a clear rationale of why the young people had been selected for the group and what NG staff hoped to achieve with them. Explaining NG rationale may help some young people who are experiencing school as a difficult place to realise that perhaps the NG’s purpose for them is to provide access to positive relationships, support and respite, because of their family situation, rather than to fix difficulties which they may assume are an inherent part of their character.

#### **7. Using the Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to explore consequences of the core category**

The Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was used, as explained in Section 4.3, to help saturate theoretical categories by using it to aid data analysis. Also, through using the Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin 1990, see Appendix 7) consequences of theoretical categories can be explored.

In terms of this research, from participants' perspectives they had made personal gains, but the gains they made varied. Examples of gains were: having hope about school being enjoyable, having fun while in NG and feeling relaxed and calm. The young people communicated that they had made friends with their peers in NG, but also had more confidence as a result of attending NG, and so had made more friends in general. These findings fit well with other qualitative NG findings (see Pintilei 2009a, Sanders 2007, Cooper, 2004a and Cooper et al. 2001). Having friends in the NG, and engaging in diverse NG activities helped the young people feel that they wanted to come to school and increased school attendance for some participants. Another consequence of building relationships was an increase in communication with peers, school staff and family members.

Rhodes et al. (2000) comment that mentoring relationships can influence the quality of a child's relationships with parents, which in turn affects the child's self worth and the value the child gives to school. This in turn, can positively affect academic achievement. Some participants expressed improvements in their academic work;

I'm proud because I get better levels and my handwriting is neat, before it was messy because I was getting my anger out. I'm not worried about bullies and can concentrate (A3).

As the young people built trusting relationships with NG staff they felt able to listen to their advice, which led to changes in behaviour at home and school. One participant used strategies to stop feeling so angry which resulted in him being kinder and another felt able to communicate her feelings to teachers and her family. Observations of one young person,

with whom the researcher had completed educational psychology casework, showed progress with her understanding and use of abstract language.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Nurture Group principle (NGN, 2009) states ‘transitions are significant in the lives of children’. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) found that some primary aged children experienced challenges once NG placement had ended, such as the increased difficulty of tasks and less explicit instructions. In the current study, once NG placements had ceased, school was perceived as a more challenging place for some of the young people. Some participants expressed they missed the NG environment, the close contact they had experienced with NG staff and the friends they had made in the NG. For some young people positive changes were not always sustained once the NG intervention had ended;

NG did help because I was ok going to lessons when I was in NG, but when I stopped going I went back to being bad again. When NG stopped I’d rather stay at home than go to school (B3).

I used to talk to friends, all my friends were there and I used to make stuff. I felt a lot happier during NG but after it finished it got worse again. It was all good but then it stopped (NG) (C2).

The NG leader seemed to recognise the difficulties of school life without NG attendance and some processes were put in place to sustain relationships. There were after school clubs run by NG staff and counselling appointments were offered to some young people. Targets were still in place for some and the promise of motivating activities such as a trip ice skating upon completion of their targets.

Most young people continued to recognise NG staff, particularly the supporting staff (Y), as a support mechanism for them once their placement in the NG had ended. However some felt alone;

I was supposed to get help once I left NG but I couldn't find X (C2).

The NG staff created a sense of hope and trust in participants. In order for the young people to continue to view the established relationships as safe and trustworthy careful thought needs to be given to transition back into school on a full-time basis. Holmes (2001) offers useful guidance, although he writes in relation to adults involved in psychotherapy. He explains that the aim of therapy is to help to create a secure base, once this is created either as a reality or internal representation then it is possible to have a 'good ending' to therapeutic intervention. He notes that even in these instances there may need to be several trial terminations, where the participant reengages and disengages from therapy with support. This may suggest the benefits of a gradual reduction in NG support.

NG guidance recommends that placements in the NG are between 2 and 4 terms. In this case all participants, with the exception of one attended the NG for 2 terms. Scott and Lee (2009) suggest that longer term provision may be necessary for older children because they may need to unlearn behaviours and difficulties may be more deep seated. Doyle (2001) explains her use of a Reintegration Readiness Scale, which assesses pupils' readiness to return to mainstream class on a full-time basis. An adapted version may be useful for secondary school NGs.

## **8. Conclusion**

This research generates new knowledge because secondary aged pupils' views and experiences of their involvement in a NG intervention have not previously been explored. Findings from this study indicate that young people with SEBDs attending a secondary school NG valued their time in the NG, and felt they benefited from it. They particularly valued opportunities to build and experience rewarding and nurturing relationships with NG adults and NG peers, and supportive processes were in place for this to occur. They felt that these were: having a safe base, experiencing fun, engaging and diverse NG activities and opportunities for facilitated communication.

Ofsted (2008) found that good practice in re-engaging young people with SEBDs in secondary school involved staff sharing a commitment in helping students to achieve, communication with students and their families, enabling students to feel listened to and options for specific support such as temporary withdrawal from class. This study has demonstrated that this particular NG intervention was capable of providing these opportunities. It should be noted that the specific context of this NG in terms of staff training, skill repertoire and the structure of the NG intervention may be specific variables which enabled this NG to be valued by the young people involved. The NG leader for example, was a qualified youth worker with a qualification in counselling (see Appendix 4 for contextual information).

Findings from this research support findings from other qualitative research which has gained the views of primary aged pupils who have attended NGs. Cooper et al. (2001) and

Cooper (2004a) report that primary aged children valued the quiet and calm environment, the physical attributes within the NG environment, and the engaging nature of activities. Bishop and Swain (2000) interviewed only 2 primary aged children but found that they enjoyed the support they received, the activities they engaged in and the ‘respite’ they experienced from being away from mainstream class. Cooper and Tiknaz (2005) report other factors affecting the success of the NG were: pupils’ relationships with one another, individual staff members’ skill repertoire, target setting to ensure pupil progress, and interactions between staff and pupils. Interestingly, Cooper and Lovey (1999) surveyed 35 practitioners whom they considered had NG expert knowledge of NGs. Anticipated outcomes for pupils attending NGs included the expectation that children would become more confident, be able to develop trusting relationships and feel secure, supporting findings from this study.

Relevant research and theoretical literature drawing on the attachment theory domain, particularly in relation to the benefits of young people forming relationships with adults based in the school setting, has been identified and explored. However, further in-depth exploration is warranted. In addition, future research is needed to explore how schools are able to continue to support young people with SEBDs once their NG placements have ended.

As discussed previously, Holmes (2001) argues that it is possible for adults to form “secure base representations.” This study found that the young people in the study were able to engage with a range of activities within the NG setting and experience feelings similar to those described by Holmes (2001). More specific research on whether it is possible for

adolescents to form “secure base representations” would be useful. Finally, this research noted that some young people held the expectation that NG was to reform them in some way. Exploration of how NG objectives can be clearly discussed with older children seems necessary.

Kvale (2007) writes that in qualitative research validity is concerned with whether an investigation researches what it intended to research. He explains that researchers must convince readers that their claims are credible and arguments should be based on carefully gathered data. The aim of this research was to build a substantive theory which represented the views and experiences of secondary aged pupils involved in a NG based in one secondary school setting. In order to support credibility the researcher has described how data have been collected, worked with and analysed using grounded theory methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Charmaz, 2006). Quotes from participants have been presented verbatim to illustrate category concepts. As discussed previously, it could be argued that the theoretical categories are not fully saturated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, Charmaz, 2006). In view of this further exploratory research, which explores the views and experiences of secondary aged pupils’ involvement in a NG, would be useful. This could also contribute towards production of a formal grounded theory rather than a substantive one (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It is hoped that this research study can contribute towards enhancing NG provision in secondary schools, and allow young people’s views and experiences to be shared with the academic domain.

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**APPENDIX 1: Explanation of NG Variants** (Adapted from Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)

<b>NG Variant</b>	<b>Key Features</b>
<b>Variant 1 Classic ‘Boxall’ NG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Match, in totality, the NG model established by Marjorie Boxall.</li> <li>- An inclusive educational provision, which usually involves a pupil attending for 9 out of 10 half day sessions, which meets the individual’s developmental needs and promotes educational progress.</li> <li>- Staffed by a teacher and teaching assistant and are made up of between 10 to 12 pupils with a range of needs.</li> <li>- Provides a holistic curriculum incorporating the National curriculum with a curriculum which addresses social, emotional and behavioural factors which underpin the child’s academic learning.</li> <li>- The setting incorporates soft furnishings and a predictable routine which includes curricular activities, free play and social activities, for example eating breakfast together.</li> <li>- Pupils remain on roll with their mainstream class and register with them. They also attend one lesson a week with their mainstream class.</li> <li>- The aim of the NG is for pupils to return to mainstream class on a full time basis after 3 or 4 school terms but where appropriate this can take place after one or two terms.</li> <li>- Placement, target setting and monitoring of pupils progress takes place using the Boxall Profile.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 2 New Variant NG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on principles underpinning Variant 1 and contain core features such as small group size, staffing by a teacher and teaching assistant have a developmental and holistic curriculum emphasis.</li> <li>- May differ from Variant 1 in structure and/or organisational features, the amount of time pupils attend the NG, serve a group of schools rather than an individual school, be located in a special school and vary in the age range of pupils they include, for example, catering for pupils in Key Stage 3.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 3 Informed by NG principles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May bear the name NG but differ from the organisational principles of Variant 1 and 2. For example, take place at lunch times, after school or break times.</li> <li>- Groups may be run by a single member of staff who may not be a teacher.</li> <li>- Activities will focus on social and development issues but not have an academic emphasis as Variant 1 and 2.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 4 Aberrant NGs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are called NGs but distort principles of Variant 1.</li> <li>- Lack an educational and/or developmental emphasis and serve to emphasise control and containment.</li> </ul>

## **Appendix 2: Literature reviews which form part of grounded theory research**

Smith and Biley (1997) contrast literature reviews conducted as part of grounded theory research with literature reviews which precede quantitative research. In the latter, the first step would be to conduct a detailed literature review enabling testable hypotheses to emerge from the literature. However, for grounded theory research it is important that researchers begin data collection without having made theoretical assumptions. This is because grounded theory epistemology values knowledge which emerges from data collected during the research process. It is in this way grounded theory is discovered (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Therefore, literature reviews in grounded theory research usually take place during and after data collection.

However, amongst grounded theory approaches there exist contrasting opinions concerning at what point literature should be reviewed. Strauss and Corbin (1994) maintain that literature can be reviewed once theories have begun to emerge but Glaser (1978) disagrees, writing that researchers should only access literature when theory has emerged from the data. Hence, a literature review occurs at an even later stage.

The literature review approach used by the author follows guidance from Smith and Biley (1997, p.357) who concede that ‘general reading of the literature may be carried out to obtain a feel for issues at work in the subject area, and identify any gaps to be filled using grounded theory.’ Hutchinson (1993, cited in Cutcliffe, 2000) agrees with the approach advocated by Smith and Biley (1997) and adds that literature reviews can help to provide a

rationale for the research study and help to establish whether grounded theory methods are appropriate.

In terms of the literature review presented as part of the Volume 1 thesis, general reading was carried out to better understand the subject area, identify suitable gaps for further research and establish whether grounded theory methods were appropriate. It should be noted that before in depth analysis of qualitative Nurture Group literature took place the author had begun data collection, analysis and coding. Therefore, following Strauss and Corbin's (1994) approach the qualitative Nurture Group literature was reviewed once theories had begun to emerge from data collection.

**APPENDIX 3: Relevant information from the University of Birmingham's Ethics Form which was submitted prior to the research being undertaken**

**PROPOSED PROJECT TITLE:**

- **An investigation of secondary aged pupil's views of their involvement in a Nurture Group**

**BRIEF OUTLINE OF PROJECT: (100-250 words; this may be attached separately)**

This piece of exploratory research hopes to gather and explore what secondary aged pupil's views of nurture groups are and how their experiences of a nurture group fit with the psychological theory upon which nurture groups are based.

Questions will be asked which focus on gaining data on participant's perspectives of:

- How the nurture group helped /did not help them at school.
- What they enjoyed/didn't enjoy about the nurture group.
- Whether they perceived that they had changed pre and post nurture group and how
- Exploration of other changes in their environment during the time of the nurture group for example change in tutor group, family circumstance, a change of teaching assistant etc.

Methods used will involve semi structured individual interviews with a cohort of pupils who attended the first Nurture Group intervention (pupils now in Year 8) and the current cohort of pupils who are attending the Nurture Group who are in Year 7. Data gained will be mapped/coded onto the psychological theory, which Nurture Groups are informed by.

As little has been done to investigate the impact of Nurture Groups on secondary aged children this research will provide an original contribution to knowledge. It is hoped that this qualitative research will add depth and breadth to current research and increase understanding in the area of Nurture Groups. The data gained from this research can be used to supplement the mostly quantitative studies in the field of Nurture Groups.

**MAIN ETHICAL CONSIDERATION(S) OF THE PROJECT (e.g. working with vulnerable adults; children with disabilities; photographs of participants; material that could give offence etc):**

Ethical issues in terms of working with pupils, gaining their views in an ethical way, ensuring they understand what the research involves and feel that they can withdraw at any time and ensuring confidentiality will be important issues in this research.

Other issues of importance are ensuring that informed consent is gained from the school's head teacher, staff involved in running the Nurture Group intervention, pupils involved in the intervention and their parents/carers. It is important to ensure that terms of involvement are clearly explained, and issues such as the participant's right to withdraw. It will be important to consider status relationships, how to ensure confidentiality and data ownership.

**RESEARCH FUNDING AGENCY (if any):**

**Not applicable**

**DURATION OF PROPOSED PROJECT (please provide dates as month/year):**

**One year**

**DATE YOU WISH TO START DATA COLLECTION: July 2008**

Please provide details on the following aspects of the research:

1. What are your intended methods of recruitment, data collection and analysis? [see note 1]

*Please outline (in 100-250 words) the intended methods for your project and give what detail you can. However, it is not expected that you will be able to answer fully these questions at the proposal stage.*

The methods for this piece of research will involve purposive sampling of a group of pupils involved in a Nurture Group in one secondary school. All pupils involved in the first cohort of the intervention and those in the current cohort will be asked for their involvement in the research. Pupils who consent to be involved in the research and return a written consent slip from their parents will be included in the research.

All pupils who are approached to participate in the research will receive an explanation of the research purpose and procedures, issues around how confidentiality will be ensured and their right to withdraw. Information will be discussed verbally and they will receive it in a written format which they can keep for reference.

The interviews will be carried out in the school setting. They will be semi structured and last up to one hour. They will be carried out with each of the participants on an individual basis. Interviews will be held in a room in the school setting which is familiar to the pupils involved in the research. The door of the room will be left open so that pupil's feel more relaxed. A staff member involved in Nurture Group training will be available to the researcher and the pupil through the course of the interview session should this be necessary.

Interviews will be recorded and notes will be made by the researcher during the interview. After the interview the researcher will check out the notes they have made with the pupil to help ensure credibility. Following the interviews the researcher will analyse the data for key themes and code these in order to explore the research questions.

***2. How will you make sure that all participants understand the process in which they are to be engaged and that they provide their voluntary and informed consent? If the study involves working with children or other vulnerable groups, how have you considered their rights and protection? [see note 2]***

In terms of the hierarchies of consent needed the school (head teacher and/or other pastoral staff), parents and pupils will need to be informed of the purpose of the research, what it will be used for, confidentiality issues, storage of data information and the data's publication/dissemination. The head teacher will be written to and the research outlined. This will be supplemented by discussion, if appropriate.

The research will be discussed with the full cohort of pupils in Year 8 and Year 7. Year 7 and Year 8 children will receive talks in separate groups to help them feel comfortable in the group so they can ask questions. Pupils will be given told and be given opportunities to ask the researcher about the research and what the information they provide will be used for. The researcher will explain all aspects of the research which are relevant to the pupils including for example, why she deems the research important, the importance of ensuring participant anonymity and how the research will be shared with staff/parents or others. All pupil's involved in the research, their parents, the school and school staff will be told that the research may be published in an academic journal but that they will not be identifiable as individuals or by the school (which will remain confidential).

Pupils will be given letters for themselves and their parents which explain the research and pertinent information relevant to the research project, as outlined above. They will be given 7 days to reflect on whether they want to be involved in the research and gain parents/carers written permission. They will be asked to return permission slips to the Nurture Group leader who will pass them onto the researcher.

Once permission slips, which have been signed by parents/carers and returned to the researcher, a further discussion will take place with pupils. During the group discussion they will be provided with opportunities to ask the researcher questions and they will be informed when they will be interviewed.

Consent has already been gained from the Educational Psychology Service, where the researcher is employed as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. In order for this consent to be gained a detailed 3, 000 word research proposal was submitted. This outlined the focus of the research and justifications for carrying out the research. General research questions and an outline of methods was also provided.

### **3. How will you make sure that participants clearly understand their right to withdraw from the study?**

The researcher will discuss participant's right to withdraw from the research when they are explained the purpose of the research and what it will entail. This information will also be included in a letter which they share with their parents and can retain. A period of at least 7 days will be given to participant's to think about whether they wish to engage with the research and a letter of consent will be needed from their parents/carers.

Also before the researcher engages in an individual interview with the participant the researcher will remind the pupil of his/her right to withdraw at any time during the interview, the purpose of the research in broad terms and confidentiality issues, as this may have been forgotten. Practical examples of using their right to withdraw will be given to the pupils. For example, they will be told they can get up and leave the room at any time, they can say pass to a question or shake their head to indicate they do not want to answer a question. If they want the interview to stop but want to continue talking to the researcher they can put the palm of their hand in a raised 'stop' position.

Nurture Group staff will be able to support pupil's who have been interviewed and will speak to all pupils about their interview experience to make sure the pupil's feel happy with what has been shared and do not feel upset by the interviews. If pupils do feel upset by the interview they will be given opportunities to talk about this with the researcher or Nurture Group staff.

**4. Please describe how you will ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Where this is not guaranteed, please justify your approach. [see note 3]**

During and after data collection, data will not be left unattended thus preventing unauthorised people gaining access to it. When transcribing any part of an interview, names of school staff, the school and pupils will be changed to ensure anonymity of participants. The school name will be changed when the research is written up so that confidentiality is ensured.

Photographs of participants will not be taken and no other identifiable information will be obtained.

**5. Describe any possible detrimental effects of the study and your strategies for dealing with them. [see note 4]**

Participants will not be identifiable and so no detrimental effects will evolve in this respect.

There is a possibility that some participants may feel they need to spend more time talking about issues which arise during the interview session. In order to provide this a familiar key member of pastoral staff will be made known to participants in case they wish to discuss anything with that member of staff after the interview.

Nurture Group staff will also be aware of the research and will be able to provide support to pupils following their interview, in case pupil reflections suggest need for adult support of a pastoral nature. Pupils will be informed of this prior to their interview and during the initial discussions which were held about the research. Participants will be informed that they may withdraw at any time if they feel uncomfortable during the interview.

The researcher is also the visiting trainee educational psychologist for the school and will be able to arrange follow up sessions with participants should this be necessary.

**6. How will you ensure the safe and appropriate storage and handling of data?**

The interview cassettes will be kept in a locked cabinet until the research has been completed. They will then be destroyed. During the transcription of interviews all personal information will be changed so that participant, school staff and the school will be ensured anonymity.

**7. If during the course of the research you are made aware of harmful or illegal behaviour, how do you intend to handle disclosure or nondisclosure of such information? [see note 5]**

The researcher will report any harmful or illegal behaviour to the designated person be this the Head teacher or the designated person for child protection.  
If, at any time, the researcher is unsure whether to disclose information guidance will be sought immediately from the researcher's line manager.

**8. If the research design demands some degree of subterfuge or undisclosed research activity, how have you justified this and how and when will this be discussed with participants?**

The research design is transparent and does not demand subterfuge or undisclosed research activity

**9. How do you intend to disseminate your research findings to participants?**

The accessibility of the research will be made clear to all stakeholders before they begin involvement and when the project has ended so they are able to gain access to the research should they choose to.

More specific feedback will be provided to the participant's on a one to one basis once the interviews have been completed. This will involve the researcher reading back the notes they have made during the interview and verifying their accuracy with the participant. The participant will be encouraged to verbally share any changes they wish to make to the researcher's notes. This will help to ensure that the researcher's understanding of pupil's views is accurate and credible.

After the interview a written letter in child appropriate language will be sent to each of the participants and a letter will be sent to their parents/carers informing them that their child had participated in the interview and thanking them for their involvement. They will be told that after the researcher has analysed the information the findings from the research will be verbally reported to them.

Once the interviews have been coded the researcher will meet with the group of participants and feedback key themes which have been discovered from the research. Anonymity to individual participants and school staff will be ensured.

A report will be provided to the school which summarises research findings.

The finished research project will also be made available to the school and will be housed in Birmingham Education Library. As the research will be written to journal specification it is hoped that it will be published in a journal and so contribute to knowledge for academics and professionals who work in the fields of education and psychology.

#### APPENDIX 4: Contextual information pertaining to the NG

Feature	Information
Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban local authority in the West Midlands</li> </ul> <p>An interview with NG co-ordinator informs that there are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 30 settings with NGs in place</li> <li>• There are 3 NGs based in secondary school. A further 3 secondary schools will be establishing NGs in the near future</li> <li>• NG co-ordinator support and training available</li> </ul>
School context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A West Midlands voluntary aided, co-educational, inner-city comprehensive secondary school.</li> <li>• The age range of pupils is 11 to 16.</li> <li>• Ofsted (2006) indicate that the school had 620 pupils on roll, was smaller than average, with a higher proportion of boys than girls.</li> <li>• The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups was approximately 58% and those for whom English is not their first language equaled 22%.</li> <li>• Eligibility for free school meals was well above the average.</li> <li>• The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is also described as above average.</li> </ul>
NG Admission procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All school staff were briefed about the NG intervention</li> <li>• All staff in a year group were involved in referring pupils whom they were concerned about to the NG leader for further assessment.</li> <li>• Observations of these pupils were undertaken by NG staff to evaluate the extent of behaviours and further information about the young person's difficulties was gathered, as appropriate.</li> <li>• Diagnostic and evaluative tools, including the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998) and the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) (parents' views also gained) were used by NG staff to inform selection and to act as a baseline measure.</li> <li>• A baseline of National Curriculum attainment on entry was also recorded.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The balance of the group was considered, taking account of age, gender balance, type of difficulty and diagnostic assessment scores. Young people who would benefit from being in the group were selected.</li> <li>• NG leader discussed NG with prospective parents/carers</li> <li>• The young people and their parents consent was gained before entry into the NG</li> </ul>
Length of time established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the beginning of the research the NG was entering its 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and the 4<sup>th</sup> NG was in session.</li> </ul>
NG characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The NG was an area housed within the main school setting.</li> <li>• The NG area was not a classroom, rather a space which was cornered off from a main corridor with heavy curtains and two steps which led down to the space.</li> <li>• The area contained a large table, cabinets and displays of young people's art work.</li> <li>• The NG leader's office led off from the space and was often used by the young people attending the NG. It contained a desk and soft chairs.</li> <li>• The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator's (SENCo) room was adjacent to the NG area and staff members or visitors would need to cross through the NG space to access this room or the NG leader's room.</li> <li>• The NG area did not have a kitchen area or a sofa, thus, detracting from NG recommendation (Cooper and Lovey, 1999) However, the young people could access a sink in the SENCO's room or in a nearby home economics classroom.</li> <li>• There were 3 NG sessions per week which were 2 mornings and 1 afternoon. They lasted at least 2 hours.</li> <li>• The researcher has classified the NG as a Variant 2 NG (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)</li> </ul>

Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staffed by one NG leader and a learning mentor</li> </ul>
NG leader Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Received local authority NG training</li> <li>• Received support from local authority NG co-ordinator</li> <li>• Is a qualified Youth worker who had recently gained a diploma in Counselling</li> </ul>
Support staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They worked in the school as Learning Mentors</li> <li>• They had not attended Local Authority NG training</li> </ul>

## **APPENDIX 5: Information letter to the Head teacher of the selected secondary school**

Dear Mrs XXX

I would like to introduce myself. I am currently employed by Birmingham Educational Psychology Service as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, as part of this training route I am completing a doctoral degree at the University of Birmingham. This academic year I have been working in XXX with XXX the school's Educational Psychologist and XXX XXX and will continue to work in the school next year.

Towards the end of this academic year and the Autumn term of next year I am interested in researching how secondary aged pupils respond to Nurture Group interventions, particularly in terms of gathering pupil's points of view. I would like to conduct this research in XXXX as the school is one of only a few secondary schools in the authority who have managed to successfully establish a Nurture Group intervention.

I have discussed my research ideas with XXX and asked her for ideas of the kind of research she would find useful. One of XXX ideas was to collect pupil's perceptions of the Nurture Group and school life once they have stopped attending the group. XXX thought this research could be useful in understanding what pupil's had gained from the intervention and also how they found school life after the intervention had ended. I also hope to collect the perceptions of Year 7 pupil's currently experiencing the intervention. I would then map pupil's perceptions of Nurture Groups onto the psychological theory underpinning Nurture Group interventions.

I hope to conduct this research at the end of the Summer term 2008 and the beginning of the Autumn term 2008. The research aims to be as unobtrusive as possible and would not draw upon school resources. It would involve interviewing a group of pupils who were involved in the first Nurture Group intervention and those involved in the current Nurture Group. This would be done once informed consent has been obtained from parents/carers and pupils. Interviews should last up to one hour and can be carried out at times of the day which, are deemed appropriate by school staff. In order to carry out the research an ethics form will be complete and will be approved by the university's ethics committee prior to data collection.

The design of this qualitative research project will be supported by XXX Educational Psychology Service and the University of Birmingham. Pupils who have been interviewed and the school will remain anonymous should the research be published in an academic journal. I would also produce a report of findings for the school, which can be used to support Nurture Group/SEN development work in the school as well as bids for further funding.

To date no research investigating secondary aged pupil's views of Nurture Groups has been carried out. Therefore, XXX would be helping to add an original contribution to

knowledge for interventions which are used to support adolescents with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, as well as developing Nurture Group work for the future.

I do hope that you will find this research useful for school development and provision for pupils with additional needs.

Could you please let me know whether you would be happy for me to carry out this research in the school? I would be pleased to discuss the research further at a time convenient to yourself and I can be contacted on XXXXX.

Many thanks

Aruna Pintilei  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

**APPENDIX 6: Examples of interview questions (adapted from Charmaz, 2006) which were sometimes used during initial interview(s) before theoretical categories were constructed.**

NB: These questions were used flexibly, if at all. If the participant felt comfortable speaking about their NG experience questions which led naturally from their conversation were asked.

- Can you tell me about what you did in the NG?
- What was your time like in the NG?
- What was a good day like for you?
- What was a challenging day like for you?
- How did you feel about being in the group?
- When did you feel happy? Sad?
- Was anything helpful/ unhelpful?
- What kinds of things did people in the group do that you thought were helpful/ unhelpful?
- What did you think of school before NG?
- What do you think about it now? What made you change your mind?
- Did any thing else change maybe at home or at school because you have been involved in the NG?
- What positive changes have occurred since being in the NG?
- What negative changes have occurred since being involved in the NG?
- As you look back on your time in NG does anything stand out?
- What was most memorable?

- Can you describe it?
- How did you come to be involved in the NG?
- Could you describe anything you learnt from being in the NG?
- Is there anything that may have occurred to you during the interview that you want to share?
- Is there anything else you think I should know to understand NG more?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Other probes and techniques used:

- Could you say a bit more?
- Why do you say that?
- Really.....
- Ok....
- I see
- Is that right?
- Are you saying that.....?
- How is that?
- Why do you think that was?
- When?
- How?
- What?
- Why?
- Rephrase
- Summarise
- Silence

## APPENDIX 7: The Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

The Paradigm Model can be used to support theoretical saturation of categories. The table below presents definitions of key terms. These terms were used to help the researcher explore data in-depth.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Causal conditions	Events, incidents, happenings that lead to the occurrence or development of the phenomenon.
Phenomenon	The central idea, event, happening, incident about which a set of actions and interactions are directed at managing, handling, or to which a set of actions are related.
Context	The specific set of properties that pertain to the phenomenon.
Intervening conditions	The structural conditions bearing on action/interactional strategies that pertain to a phenomenon. They facilitate or constrain the strategies taken within a specific context.
Actions/interaction (PROCESS)	Strategies devised to manage, handle, carry out, respond to the phenomenon under a specified set of perceived conditions.
Consequences	Outcomes or result of action and interaction.

**APPENDIX 8: Examples of questions used to inform theoretical saturation of the core category**

- Have all aspects of the Paradigm Model been accounted for?
- Is the constructed theory dynamic and processes discussed?
- How do the sub-categories interact with the core category?
- What were the relationships with staff and peers like?
- How were they formed?
- What is it about the relationships that make them special?
- How are they helpful?
- How do they work?
- What are the difficulties?
- What other factors affect the relationships?
- What are the benefits?
- Why are they rewarding?
- What supports the relationships?
- How are they sustained?

## **APPENDIX 9: PUBLIC DOMAIN BRIEFING: Sharing findings with the young people involved in the research**

Dear

I wanted to share the findings of my Nurture Group (NG) research with you.

As you know, I was interested in finding out the views and experiences of young people who attended the NG. Some of the main findings were:

- You valued and enjoyed your time in NG.
- The most important things were building good relationships with NG staff. You felt they understood you and you could trust them. You also enjoyed spending time with other people in the group - even though sometimes people didn't always get on well - you did have fun together and many of you made friends.
- Having a range of fun, different and motivating activities was really important. They helped you enjoy coming to NG, helped you feel safe and supported you in talking to NG staff and other young people in the group.
- You valued having the NG area because it was a safe place for you to go to, relax and think. You knew it was always there for you even if you weren't actually attending a session.
- You appreciated having time to talk with NG staff and other people in the group. Sometimes you talked about general issues like what activities you were involved in but sometimes you talked about personal targets and difficult issues at home and school.
- Everyone said they enjoyed going to NG and most people explained how they benefited from the group.
- Some people said school became more difficult for them when they stopped going to NG. They wanted it to continue for longer.

- Some people weren't sure about why they were going to NG in the first place and what they would gain from it.

My research explores the ideas above, particularly how you were able to form valued relationships with NG staff and each other. I discuss for example, how the size of the group was important, the behaviour of the NG staff towards you and how the activities were important in helping you to enjoy yourself at NG and feel comfortable enough to talk to NG staff and each other.

I have discussed these findings with XXX and I will be sending her a copy of my research. I will also send a copy of my research to XXXXX.

I would be really happy to hear what you think about the findings and if you have any thoughts you can tell me about them today or let XXX know.

Most of all, I would like to thank you for taking part in the research. I really appreciated you spending time talking with me and sharing your experiences and views of NG. I was really impressed that you were able to express yourself so well and tell me so much useful information. It can be difficult to talk to someone that you don't know well - so thank you very much!

Best wishes

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Trainee Educational Psychologist

## APPENDIX 10: The Principles of Nurture Groups

Taken from The Nurture Group Network website (2009)

<p><b>1. Children’s learning is understood developmentally</b></p> <p>In nurture groups staff respond to children not in terms of arbitrary expectations about ‘attainment levels’ but in terms of the children's developmental progress assessed through the Boxall Profile Handbook. The response to the individual child is ‘as they are’, underpinned by a non-judgemental and accepting attitude.</p>
<p><b>2. The classroom offers a safe base</b></p> <p>The organisation of the environment and the way the group is managed contains anxiety. The nurture group room offers a balance of educational and domestic experiences aimed at supporting the development of the children's relationship with each other and with the staff. The nurture group is organised around a structured day with predictable routines. Great attention is paid to detail; the adults are reliable and consistent in their approach to the children. Nurture groups are an educational provision making the important link between emotional containment and cognitive learning.</p>
<p><b>3. Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem</b></p> <p>Nurture involves listening and responding. In a nurture group ‘everything is verbalised’ with an emphasis on the adults engaging with the children in reciprocal shared activities e.g. play / meals / reading /talking about events and feelings. Children respond to being valued and thought about as individuals, so in practice this involves noticing and praising small achievements; ‘nothing is hurried in nurture groups’.</p>
<p><b>4. Language is understood as a vital means of communication</b></p> <p>Language is more than a skill to be learnt, it is the way of putting feelings into words. Nurture group children often ‘act out’ their feelings as they lack the vocabulary to ‘name’ how they feel. In nurture groups the informal opportunities for talking and sharing, e.g. welcoming the children into the group or having breakfast together are as important as the more formal lessons teaching language skills. Words are used instead of actions to express feelings and opportunities are created for extended conversations or encouraging imaginative play to understand the feelings of others.</p>
<p><b>5. All behaviour is communication</b></p> <p>This principle underlies the adult response to the children's often challenging or difficult behaviour. ‘Given what I know about this child and their development what is this child trying to tell me?’ Understanding what a child is communicating through behaviour helps staff to respond in a firm but non-punitive way by not being provoked or discouraged. If the child can sense that their feelings are understood this can help to diffuse difficult situations. The adult makes the link between the external/internal worlds of the child.</p>

## **6. Transitions are significant in the lives of children**

The nurture group helps the child make the difficult transition from home to school. However, on a daily basis there are numerous transitions the child makes, e.g. between sessions and classes and between different adults. Changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable children and need to be carefully managed with preparation and support.

**APPENDIX 11: Perceptions and reasons for the young people’s referral to the NG**

**(YP = young person’s perspective, NL= NG leader’s perspective)**

<b>Participant</b>		<b>Reasons for referral</b>
<b>A1</b>	<b>YP</b>	‘I felt angry in the classroom.’
	<b>NL</b>	Withdrawn, erratic moods, difficulties at home
<b>A2</b>	<b>YP</b>	‘Getting angry, being excluded for fighting and swearing at teachers and recording fights on my phone.’
	<b>NL</b>	Concerns regarding self-acceptance (gender)
<b>A3</b>	<b>YP</b>	‘Being bullied, people punching me in corridor and throwing things.’ ‘I was angry at home- people got on my nerves.’ ‘I was timid, rolled up in a ball and didn’t want to come out of my shell –like a turtle.’ ‘I didn’t complete work – I could do the work but wouldn’t complete it.’
	<b>NL</b>	Very withdrawn, difficulties at home
<b>B1</b>	<b>YP</b>	I wouldn’t want to talk to anybody...I wouldn’t do my work, or my homework.’ ‘Before I couldn’t explain how I was feeling.’ ‘I’d move away from the group and distance myself.’ ‘I didn’t co-operate with people I didn’t know.’
	<b>NL</b>	Socially isolated, school attendance concerns, difficulties at home
<b>B2</b>	<b>YP</b>	‘Being cheeky.’ No other comments made
	<b>NL</b>	Parental bereavement, angry outbursts
<b>B3</b>	<b>YP</b>	‘I had a few problems at school with my behaviour and all this and it’s basically to reform children and make them good in school... see what they can do and that...’ ‘I wouldn’t do my work or something... just sit there and not take my coat off or something.’
	<b>NL</b>	Withdrawn, socially isolated, poor attendance, difficulties at home

<b>C1</b>	<b>YP</b>	YP: 'I was bullying: scared, unhappy, crying and angry because I didn't have friends.'
	<b>NL</b>	Socially isolated, attention seeking behaviour, conflict with peers
<b>C2</b>	<b>YP</b>	'I used to get bullied. The other teachers flagged up NG and made a referral but there were no spaces in year 7 and so I went in year 8. I wanted to let steam off about what was happening in my family...mum and dad arguing and then they split up and I never saw my dad and my cat died and mum was pregnant at the time... that was the only thing that was good.'  'I couldn't tell people how I felt... I used to ignore my mum and cry and write notes in my diary.'
	<b>NL</b>	Socially isolated, very low school attendance, difficulties at home

**APPENDIX 12: Illustrative examples of comments from young people involved in the research study which informed coding and category formation**

**Table 1.2: Some illustrative examples of comments from young people which led to open codes and formation of the core category ‘Building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers.’**

*NB: This category interrelates with the sub-categories presented in Tables 1.3-1.5 and so illustrative quotes presented in those tables are also applicable to this category.*

<b>ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	<b>OPEN CODES AND CATEGORY PROPERTIES</b>	<b>CORE CATEGORY</b>
<p><i>X and Y were the leaders (C2).</i></p> <p><i>There were 7 in the group (C2).</i></p> <p><i>There was one person in the group who was saying rude comments but now we get on with each other. It made feel like I didn't want to be in NG for 2 days but the X and Y sorted it out (A3).</i></p> <p><i>It used to be on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesdays. We would have breakfast and then get on with our work (A3).</i></p> <p><i>There was a mixture of boys and girls...some of them were in my form but not all of them (A3).</i></p> <p><i>*** always used to get on my nerves. The others were ok... they don't make me angry and thing. *** talks too much and shouts and screams (A1).</i></p> <p><i>A new boy came in NG... he was rude. I wanted to be friends with everyone but I didn't know if I wanted to be friends with him. He hurt my feelings... told lies (C1).</i></p> <p><i>Everyone would sit around the table eating breakfast sometimes there was conflict like with *** and *** or *** and ***. They didn't really get on but it was good at NG (C2).</i></p>	<p><b>Contextual features of the group</b></p> <p>(Staffing, Size of group, Group dynamic and NG environment)</p>	<p><b>“Building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers”</b></p>

<p><i>*** got on my nerves and made me angry because she screamed and shouted. She talked too much (A1).</i></p> <p><i>NG is different from class you can talk to your friends without getting in trouble and choose what you want to do (C2).</i></p> <p><i>Doing stories was the best because it was quiet (A1).</i></p> <p><i>NG was quiet...sometimes loud. I like it quiet. (C1).</i></p> <p><i>Young people's work on display. A1 and I look together at NG environment. A1 points out his puppets and stories he wrote while in the NG.</i></p>		<p><b>“Building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>In NG if you had problems you could talk to X and Y about it. They would help you and listen.... Other teachers don't listen they just think it's you but X and Y listen (B3).</i></p> <p><i>X and Y were the leaders... you could always talk to them...I could talk to them because I trusted them rather than going off to talk to other teachers (C2). Discussions about how C2's trust developed in X and Y... well it was because sometimes I'd tell them (X and Y) about typical days at school...like how I don't like going into lessons...I don't like going into school...like all that stuff and they'd say they used to have problems like that at school. Then I'd get more into it like say sometimes I want to stay at home like this and this (Interviewer: so how did the trust develop?... )just me like telling them stuff and them communicating back and saying well yes I know that and he or she did this and this and then I'd try and that and then go back to them and see what else I could do. Then that went on to seeing Y regularly and seeing X but not as regularly. Y was always there (C2).</i></p>	<p><b>Properties of NG staff</b></p> <p>(trustworthy, helpful, identify and judge young people's needs, considered knowledgeable, staff listen and respond, caring, fun, positive, consistent but creative in their approach to young people)</p>	

<p><i>X helped me to write my stories better. She taught me about capital letters and words and things (A1).</i></p> <p><i>Y was always there and had time to talk (C2).</i></p> <p><i>X and Y would treat everyone equally (B2).</i></p> <p><i>I used to go to a place called 'XXX' and talk to a woman about my feelings. X told us (C2 and mum) about it. (C2).(Identifying need)</i></p> <p><i>X is important otherwise I wouldn't be able to express my feelings I'd just be like rolled up in a ball and tight and not come out and release what I felt in myself and what people said so NG has really, really helped me (A3).</i></p> <p><i>If I was in a mood X could tell I was in a mood and X would say stay here or go in the other room so that I wasn't walking out like I would do in Maths (B1). (Identifying need)</i></p> <p><i>Y brought me to the anger management group and I started going at dinner time.(A1) (Identifying need)</i></p> <p><i>If it wasn't for X there would be no NG, trips or targets to help us (B1).</i></p> <p><i>X and Y know what's going on... they know how to deal with things and I can always talk to them. That's why I trusted them (C2).</i></p> <p><i>X is more like a friend than a teacher.... you can have a good laugh with X (A2).</i></p> <p><i>X and Y help you with work. They are nice and pleasant (B3).</i></p>		<p><b>“Building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>When I'm in NG I can talk openly about my feelings (C2).</i></p> <p><i>When I came down to NG X would ask are you alright do you need some time in my room and I really appreciated that she understood that I</i></p>	<p><b>Feelings of acceptance from NG staff</b></p>	

<p><i>needed that (A3).</i></p> <p><i>Most teachers don't know what you are on about but X and Y know like they've had kids talk to them about things and so they know what's going on with people (A2).</i></p> <p><i>We know that if we can't talk to anybody we can talk to X about that thing (B1).</i></p>		<p><b>“Building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>People respect each other in NG and let people speak- X said if you don't have respect you would loose a target or not get a reward (B1).</i></p> <p><i>We would get credits (B1).</i></p> <p><i>NG saves me from getting negative comments in other lessons. I used to get in trouble for chewing, talking. I'd get sent to time out. I didn't do none of them in Nurture. I didn't have the time to do it and I was having more fun (A2).</i></p> <p><i>If I complete my targets I got to go ice skating (A2).</i></p> <p><i>I achieved my targets and it helped in class because I would remember what I did in NG and what X said (B1).</i></p>	<p><b>Success/rewards</b></p>	
<p><i>It was really good (NG). We done artistic activities like painting and stuff. We done proper work, like in lessons, but it was better in NG group 'cos you had friends you could talk to. (B3)</i></p> <p><i>Goin' on trips and all that...like when we went to the museum in town. It was good because you could have a laugh with all your friends (friendships made in NG). NG gave me more time to bond with them... when we were doing teamwork...like when we had to cut out celebrities' faces an' all that. I chatted with everyone. (A2)</i></p> <p><i>Everyone started talking and sharing what had happened inn their life (C2).</i></p>	<p><b>Building and sharing memories with NG staff and peers</b></p>	

<p><i>I used to talk to friends, all my friends were there and I used to make stuff (C2). We done proper work, like in lessons, but it was better in NG group 'cos you had friends you could talk to (B3).</i></p> <p><i>It was good in NG to be with friends and learn more about them (A2).</i></p> <p><i>It was good going on the trip. You could have a laugh with your friends (Interviewer: were they your friends before NG) No (A2).</i></p>	<p><b>Friends</b></p>	<p><b>“Building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
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**Table 1.3: Some illustrative examples of comments from young people which led to open codes and formation of the sub-category ‘Having a safe base.’**

<p><b>SOME ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE</b></p>	<p><b>OPEN CODES AND CATEGORY PROPERTIES</b></p>	<p><b>CATEGORY</b></p>
<p><i>NG was a space to get away from people (B3).</i></p> <p><i>Coming to NG helped me to calm down get a bit of space away from the person (A3).</i></p> <p><i>X is more like a friend than a teacher.... you can have a good laugh with X (A2).</i></p> <p><i>I like doing stories in NG because it's quiet (A1)</i></p> <p><i>It was loud in the classroom...I felt angry. I felt normal in NG (A1).</i></p>	<p><b>Feeling of belonging (safe, space, calm- can relax and feel comfortable with NG staff, quiet)</b></p>	<p><b>“Having a safe base”</b></p>
<p><i>Y was always there and had time to talk (C2).</i></p> <p><i>X and Y were there and gave us advice. Y is like the same as X. Like a friend (A2).</i></p>	<p><b>NG staff present</b></p>	

<p><i>If I spoke about something no-one else would talk unless I'm finished but in other lessons if I'm talking other people would talk or start laughing. In NG everyone has respect for everybody. If I'm upset about something no-one else would laugh (B1).</i></p> <p><i>People respect each other in NG and let people speak- X said if you don't have respect you would lose a target or not get a reward (B1).</i></p> <p><i>X would treat everyone fairly. If you were rude she would say it was wrong (B2).</i></p> <p><i>If someone was rude Y would tell them to calm down and would make it stop (A3).</i></p>	<p><b>Rules/ High expectations</b></p>	<p><b>“Having a safe base”</b> <i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>In NG I could talk about my feelings (C2).</i></p> <p><i>I think making things helped me to calm down and like relax and think about what had happened and think about my feelings and let off some steam like when making things 'cos I really like making things (C2).</i></p> <p><i>It helped me to be better with people and not be moody (from doing NG activities in NG.) It helped me to calm down (A3).</i></p>	<p><b>Time to think and talk, release emotions</b></p>	
<p><i>If I had a problem I could talk to X and Y and they would help me and listen (B3).</i></p> <p><i>The other people (from class) weren't in NG and so I got a chance to get a bit of space and get away from them and relax and</i></p>	<p><b>NG and NG staff provide emotional safety</b></p>	

<p><i>spend time with X and calm down (A3).</i></p> <p><i>It (NG) helped me to control my anger and I didn't get angry so easily (B3).</i></p> <p><i>X knows that I like music. I like animals. I like work. I can trust X. I can talk to X and Y about things in NG and school (B1).</i></p> <p><i>People and well I felt really happy in the NG and if I was upset everyone would know. They would ask what's the matte? They would let you speak and share what happened to them. You can share your opinions (B1).</i></p>		<p><b>“Having a safe base”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p>See Table 1.4</p> <p><i>It was good because I get to work on my own sometimes like stories (A1).</i></p>	<p><b>NG activities including activities they can do on their own</b></p>	
<p>See Table 1.2 Open codes and category properties section on building and sharing memories with NG staff and peers</p>	<p><b>Building and sharing memories</b></p>	
<p><i>If I was in class and thirsty and needed water I could ask could I go to NG area and get a drink (B2)</i></p> <p>Descriptions of NG from young people. Use of X's room to calm down e.g. <i>If I was in a mood X could tell I was in a mood and X would say stay here or go in the other room so that I wasn't walking out like I would do in Maths (B1).</i></p>	<p><b>NG is concrete and visible</b></p>	

**Table 1.4: Some illustrative examples of comments from young people which led to open codes and formation of the sub-category ‘Fun, diverse and engaging activities.’**

SOME ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE	OPEN CODES AND CATEGORY PROPERTIES	CATEGORY
<p><i>When I was in NG I felt really happy and it was because I enjoyed NG, unlike my lessons I hated them (B3).</i></p> <p><i>We would do games but more like educational games...so if it was Maths we would do things to do with Maths...like we might use the internet and go onto Maths games...we would do something different all the time (B1).</i></p> <p><i>NG is fun...making things (A1).</i></p> <p><i>NG was fun... 'cos you got to do arty things sometimes you would do writing about comics and things (A3).</i></p> <p><i>We used to have a little breakfast and I used to talk to my mates and we'd do activities like making things which I really like (C2).</i></p> <p><i>I remember doing fun stuff in NG and you get into the work more quickly (A2).</i></p>	<p><b>Fun , Diverse, Engaging – well-paced and interesting</b></p>	<p><b>“Fun, diverse and engaging activities”</b></p>
<p><i>... and then we'd be making something exchange ideas of what we were going to do. X would give us options and we would think that looks good but what about this and we'd all work together to see what we were going to do.(C2)</i></p> <p><i>NG gave me more time to bond with them (peers in the NG)... when we were doing</i></p>	<p><b>Facilitated group work</b></p>	

<p><i>teamwork...like when we had to cut out celebrities' faces an' all that. I chatted with everyone (A2).</i></p>		<p><b>“Fun, diverse and engaging activities”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>The radio station was a good activity... coming down as a group. I didn't know everyone at first but we got to talk with everyone and make friends (B3).</i></p> <p><i>We did proper work like writing tasks or a story, usually in lessons it's really boring but in NG I done it and it was alright ...Learning activities gave me more ideas so when I went to English and we had creative writing task or something I would think about what I wrote down here (NG) and what X had said to me and it would help me get a good level in my creative writing (B3).</i></p> <p><i>We did role plays and used a camera (A3).</i></p> <p><i>NG was good because I got to make things...puppets and things (A1).</i></p>	<p><b>Great range of activities including use of ICT</b></p>	
<p><i>(Names peer) was with me at the radio station. (A1)</i></p> <p><i>It was good making things, and being with friends while making things (C2).</i></p>	<p><b>Peers/friends and NG staff are resent</b></p>	
<p><i>The trips helped loads because before I would always be at the back but now I want to go into the group and be near the centre of the group so that I've got loads of</i></p>	<p><b>Trips outside of school setting</b></p>	

<p>people (B1).</p> <p><i>Goin' on trips and all that...like when we went to the museum in town. It was good because you could have a laugh with all your friends (friendships made in NG). NG gave me more time to bond with them... when we were doing teamwork...like when we had to cut out celebrities' faces an' all that. I chatted with everyone. (A2)</i></p> <p><i>It was fun going on trips (A2).</i></p>		<p><b>“Fun, diverse and engaging activities”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>Breakfast was good because you get a chance to talk to people and make friends (B3).</i></p> <p><i>It (breakfast) wakes you up and you could talk to people about things instead of just starting the session (A3).</i></p>	<p><b>Eating breakfast with friends</b></p>	
<p><i>I think making things helped me to clam down and like relax and think about what had happened and think about my feelings and let off some steam like when making things 'cos I really like making things (C2).</i></p> <p><i>I'm proud because I get better levels and my handwriting is neat, before it was messy because I was getting my anger out. I'm not worried about bullies and can concentrate (A3).</i></p> <p><i>We used to do calming down exercises like pick a spot like in this room. In X's office and pick a spot where it was comfortable where you could relax and close your eyes and imagine a scene and she'd like read out a description of a place and we had</i></p>	<p><b>Feeling calm</b></p> <p><b>Time to think</b></p>	

<p><i>to imagine it and it would calm us down (C2).</i></p>		<p><b>“Fun, diverse and engaging activities”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>I was just amazed at what we had to do... it was really hard to think about it. You had to put yourself in someone’s shoes...read a passage about how they were bullied and then do a role play and put yourself in people’s shoes and then think about your own situation. (in reference to an activity which called for her to think about her experience of being bullied, identify feelings and reflect on her emotions and the emotions of others involved in the situation) (A3).</i></p> <p><i>...I didn’t like walking into different classes but in NG we had to...like if say we had to get something for an Art class and there was a class in there full of older kids then we’d have to go in there and get what we needed and come back out so it was kind of like practice and kind of benefited us in a way (C2).</i></p> <p><i>X would say ‘right B1 what target do you want to do at home’ and I would say and then X would say ‘what about changing this little bit to make it a bit harder’ (B1).</i></p>	<p><b>Some activities challenging</b></p>	

**Table 1.5: Some illustrative examples of comments from young people which led to open codes and formation of the sub-category ‘Facilitated communication.’**

SOME ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF COMMENTS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE	OPEN CODES AND CATEGORY PROPERTIES	CATEGORY
<p><i>NG gave me a chance to talk to people about what was happening in my lessons (B3).</i></p> <p><i>I started talking to X, X (peers in NG) and then X, X started talking to me (peers in NG) and then everyone started sharing stuff (peers in NG) about themselves about like what had happened in their lives and all that stuff (C2).</i></p> <p><i>... when we were doing teamwork...like when we had to cut out celebrities’ faces an’ all that. I chatted with everyone (A2).</i></p>	<p><b>Informal talking opportunities often facilitated by NG activities which NG staff incorporated into sessions</b></p>	<p><b>“Facilitated communication”</b></p>
<p><i>I told her about all the problems at home like how everyone was stressed out at home and everything and she printed off the sheet and give it to me and said do that with your mum and see how it helps and I did it with my mum whose calmer now (C2).</i></p> <p><i>I think one time X gave me some stuff to do over the holidays with my brother and that and like wed like get along more and he likes making stuff as well and X gave me like masks and stuff like that to do over the holidays and now me and my brother are closer than we were before (C2).</i></p> <p><i>One of the teachers had noticed that I was uptight in a ball and I didn’t want to tell no-one nothing and she probably told X about it</i></p>	<p><b>Chains of communication</b></p> <p><b>(e.g. NG staff and parents/carers, NG staff and other teachers, peers and peers, NG staff and young person, young person and parents)</b></p>	

<p><i>and that's how I got into NG (A3).</i></p> <p><i>I told mum that one lesson (in NG) I did statements about what had happened about bullying and how we had to discuss other people's views (A3).</i></p> <p><i>Mum knew what my targets were 'cos I wrote them down and showed her (A3).</i></p> <p><i>Mum came in to school a few times to speak with X. I was alright about this... 'cos X could tell her what's annoying me (A2).</i></p> <p><i>I would say dad will you help me with the targets... (B1).</i></p> <p><i>My dad or mum would 'phone X and then X might talk to me and say talk to your dad about this (B1).</i></p>		<p><b>“Facilitated communication”</b></p> <p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>Y came into my lessons (B2).</i></p> <p><i>I still see Y and have got targets (A3).</i></p> <p><i>If I spoke to Y about something he would sort it out ASAP. I would go to Y because he is more...he can go anywhere in the school... but X sometimes can't so I spoke to Y and he talked to the teacher and sorted it out (B1).</i></p> <p><i>They didn't really speak to my mum and dad. They got XXXX and social workers involved, but it didn't really help because my dad is an alcoholic. They sent the social workers to the house but it didn't help because ever time they came he was drunk and would swear at them or something. I'm glad they sent them to try and help</i></p>	<p><b>Staff acting as bridge- not always a success</b></p>	

<p><i>but it didn't really help with anything (B3).</i></p>		<p><b>“Facilitated communication”</b></p>
<p>See Table 1.2 Sections ‘Properties of NG staff and Feelings of acceptance from NG staff ’</p>	<p><b>Trust, acceptance</b></p>	<p><i>continued</i></p>
<p><i>The targets aren't the same for everyone. I could focus on things that I had to do to make me improve my attendance and everything (A3).</i></p> <p><i>X might set targets for home like be kinder to my family, if I'm in a mood don't slam the door and stop shouting (B1).</i></p> <p><i>My targets helped. I never used to co-operate with anybody apart from *** now I do and that helped me make friends (B1).</i></p> <p><i>In NG I liked that I met all my targets...to communicate more with other people, if I'm in a mood not to walk out the class just handle it (B1).</i></p>	<p><b>Personalised, motivating and rewarding targets</b></p>	
<p><i>It was about getting young kids together and making them try and improve in lessons (B3).</i></p> <p><i>Not sure(B2), Don't know(A1)</i></p> <p>In response to a question about why they were in NG</p>	<p><b>Uncertainty about aims of NG</b></p>	

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

### **1. Introduction**

This concluding chapter offers the researcher's reflections on issues such as reflexivity, methodology, and the grounded theory generated in Chapter 3. Information on how findings from Volume I, have been disseminated to stakeholders is also discussed.

### **2. The importance of reflexivity**

The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2008) recognises that qualitative research requires researcher reflexivity where researchers outline their role in the research process and are reflexive about their methodological approach and the bearing this has on research findings. Chesney (2001) explains that it is important to examine issues of reflexivity because this allows the researcher's position to become clear, thus supporting research transparency and Finlay (2002, p. 532) adds that reflexivity allows 'public scrutiny of the integrity of the research.'

#### **2.1 Reflections on the methodological approach**

Robson (2002) discusses various research paradigms including contrasting positivist and interpretive approaches. The research study in Chapter 3 followed an interpretive paradigm and used qualitative research methods. Cohen et al. (2000) write that the interpretive paradigm is concerned with trying to understand the subjective world of human experience. In order to do this it advocates the researcher becoming actively involved in

the research rather than “standing outside of it” and observing. This is in contrast to positivist approaches where the researcher is thought to be independent of the research. In positivist approaches Usher (1996) writes that the researcher is considered value neutral and that there is a distinction between fact and value.

Key features of an interpretive paradigm are that events and individuals are unique, people are able to interpret events hence the focus on questioning participants and valuing their perceptions, there are multiple interpretations of events therefore reality is complex and many events are not reducible to simplistic interpretations or generalisations. In this paradigm there is less emphasis on creating generalisations and methodologies are largely qualitative. This contrasts with positivist views of determinism and reductionism.

Robson (2002) recognises that there has been on-going debate about the value of different research paradigms. Giddens (1976) writes that positivist approaches are criticised because they fail to recognise how humans differ from the natural world in their ability to construct theories and interpret experiences. Gage (1989, cited in Cohen et al. 2000) views the positivist paradigm as preoccupied with technical knowledge and the interpretive paradigm preoccupied with hermeneutics. Carr (1986) asserts that the strengths of the positivist approach are the weaknesses of the interpretive approach and vice versa.

As discussed in Chapter 3, an interpretive approach was adopted for the research study because it fits well with the aims of the research in terms of exploring the views of young people involved in the Nurture Group (NG) intervention. This meant that qualitative

research methods were adopted. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.19) explain the value of qualitative methods;

Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known....Also, qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods.

Flick (2007p.ix) explains that it is increasingly difficult to find a common definition for qualitative research because it is no longer simply, 'not quantitative.' Rapley (2007) agrees that qualitative approaches are made up of a range of theoretical, methodological and epistemological approaches. He argues that because of this it is challenging to find a definition which is accepted by all but asserts that there are binding factors in qualitative approaches. These are summarised in Table 1.0 and are applicable to the epistemology underpinning the research in Chapter 3.

Features of Qualitative Research Adapted from Rapley (2007, p. xi-x)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explores the world in its natural setting</li><li>• Can involve analysing the experiences of individuals and groups by exploring everyday knowledge, accounts and stories</li><li>• Interested in understanding how people make sense of the world</li><li>• Resists setting up well defined concepts of what is being studied</li><li>• Resists formulating hypotheses in order to test them, instead concepts are developed through the research process</li><li>• Researchers bring their own experiences to the research</li><li>• Contexts are important for understanding issues in a study</li><li>• Involves transforming complex social situations into texts</li></ul>

Table 1.0: shows features of qualitative research which are applicable to the epistemological assumptions inherent in this research study

The adopted research paradigm has implications in terms of how research findings can be interpreted. Robson (2002, p.21) points out that researchers will not always see the same thing when analysing a reality. He writes:

What observers “see” is not determined simply by the characteristics of the thing observed; the characteristics and perspectives of the observer also have an effect.

Gadamer (1975) also holds this position, arguing that it is impossible for researchers to detach themselves from their own interpretive framework which exists and is affected by cultural and historical contexts. Gadamer (1975) argues that the interplay between an interpretive framework and the events that they are trying to understand is how knowledge is developed.

Therefore, in relation to research findings Rapley (2007) maintains that it is not possible to discover one truth in qualitative research rather researchers seek to make clear versions of the truth and explain how they came about. This is what the study in Chapter 3 aimed to do. The message in the data gathered from young people in one setting who had experienced the NG intervention was gained and interpreted by the researcher. Contextual information pertinent to the NG was supplied (see Chapter 3, Appendix 4) and it is within this context that findings are most applicable. However, as discussed in Chapter 3 in order to work towards enhancing the credibility of interpretation the researcher gained precise descriptions during data collection and verified her understandings and interpretation with participants. Moreover, the use of grounded theory methods, as discussed in Chapter 3, helped to ensure data was worked with in a consistent manner using constant comparison methods and theoretical categories were explored in depth through use of the Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

## **2.2 The impact of stakeholders on the research findings**

Robson (2002) encourages researchers to reflect on the political hierarchy they may be involved with, the political milieu for conducting research and identify gatekeeper's interests. As explained in Chapter 1 the researcher was a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) employed by a Local Authority Educational Psychology Service (EPS) which was endorsing Nurture Groups (NGs) through the work of Educational Psychologists (EPs) whose remit was to raise awareness of the intervention in the Local Authority and offer support and training to interested parties. This could have potentially influenced the researcher's response to data collection perhaps making her look for the positives of the NG intervention in order to support Local Authority initiative.

It should be noted that, as explained in Chapter 1, the research was not a commissioned piece of work and the researcher was not completing the research to demonstrate the effectiveness of NGs - this is was not the aim of the research. The aim was to explore the views and experiences of the young people involved in the NG intervention. Thus, this exploratory rather than explanatory research aim may have mitigated any sub-conscious pressures on the researcher to produce particular findings. Also, the school setting did not commission the research for example to demonstrate findings in order to commission funding and the researcher gained informed consent from the NG leader and Head teacher who were happy with the fact that the aim of the research was to gather young people's perspectives. These factors helped to ensure that the researcher was not implicitly pressurised to produce particular findings.

### **2.3 Reflection on the researcher's value stance**

Robson (2002) discusses the importance of reflexivity, encouraging researchers to reflect on their value stance and consider personal reasons for undertaking research. Chapter 1 explained how the research was negotiated, pointing out that the research needed to be completed within a particular time frame in order to fulfil university course requirements. It was noted in Chapter 1 that the conceptual domain of NGs was not in fact the first pursued area of research but for various reasons, including issues of research feasibility, this conceptual domain was chosen. The researcher did not have prior knowledge of the NG intervention or strong views about it before researching the area to inform work in this Volume. Therefore, the researcher considers that there were no 'hidden agenda' from her perspective other than seeking to make an original contribution to knowledge and valuing the voice of the child and wanting to communicate this in a fair and accurate way.

Upon further exploration and reflection of the NG approach, in order to identify a suitable research aim, the researcher's value stance altered somewhat to include a hint of scepticism about the benefits of this type of intervention. When NG literature was reviewed the researcher found that she shared similar concerns expressed by Bailey (2006) and Howes, Emanuel and Farrell (2002), who criticise NGs by stating on a day to day basis the model is not inclusive because young people can be withdrawn from their class over a long period of time. Moreover, it seemed that the theoretical underpinnings of the approach had not been examined with rigour; for example although links with Bowlby's Attachment Theory were being claimed (Bowlby, 1965, 1969, 1980 cited by Boxall, 2002 and Colwell and O'Connor, 2003) research which explored this link was not found. In fact it was noted by

Howes et al. (2002, p.110) that 'at present it could be argued that Attachment Theory, on which Nurture Groups are based, is little more than a theoretical fig leaf to cover the absence of adequate explanations of the effect of Nurture Group membership.'

The researcher recognised that although she was not taking a hard-line stand against the NG intervention her slightly sceptical view might present as researcher bias and affect her collection and analysis of data. She knew that she would need to be open to receiving data and construct theory from data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to minimise the threats of any bias and adhere to grounded theory approaches. Much more entrenched than her initial scepticism of NGs, was the belief that it was important to provide a platform for young people who had attended secondary school NGs so that their voice could be accurately represented; because they had first hand experience of the intervention.

When the story of unequivocal value was communicated by the young people the researcher was somewhat surprised. Although some less favourable comments were made about the intervention these were concerned with support after the intervention had ceased and the make-up of the group in terms of characteristics of the other young people in the group, and not the intervention itself. Issues of inclusion may still be of importance (see Chapter Two). However, this study found that the young people valued their time in NG and it helped them to feel happier about school. A story of them feeling excluded from peers as a result of attendance at NG was not being communicated and in fact some young people reported that as a consequence of NG they felt more confident at school and able to make more friends. Some young people reported increasing their school attendance which would also support ideas of inclusion. The core theoretical category constructed from data

collection and analysis was that they most valued building and experiencing nurturing and rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers, and this research may suggest that links with attachment theory literature may be justified, placating in part the harsh criticisms about the lack of evidence-based information about the effects of NG membership (Howes et al. 2002).

#### **2.4 Reflexivity during data collection**

Corbin and Strauss (2008) write that reflexivity during data collection and analysis is an important aspect of qualitative research. The researcher needs to be aware and understand their possible effects on the data. They explain that during data collection often subconsciously the researcher will react to data and this may influence participants' responses. They suggest that because of the interaction between participants and the researcher data collection is constructed between these parties. Obviously in regards to points made in the previous section, research findings will have been impacted by the choice of research methods. Limitations of interview and observation methods were discussed in Chapter 3, one of the most salient of these being power imbalances which exist between the adult interviewer and the child interviewee which may affect what information the young person feels able to share (Robson, 2002). Measures were taken to mitigate the effects of power imbalances and these were discussed in Chapter 3.

The constant comparison method of data collection and analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) helps to ensure that the constructed theory emerges from data. The data are returned

to several times to search for key concepts and emerging categories. Different participants' interpretations of categories are also gathered. Thus, meaning is constructed through this process which arguably helps to enhance credibility.

### **3. The impact of access to theoretical information**

One question open to debate in grounded theory approaches is: at what point in the research process should theoretical literature be accessed? There are contrasting views on this issue and these have been summarised elsewhere in the Volume (see Chapter 2 Appendix 1, Chapter 3, Appendix 3). Chapter 3 explained that grounded theory methodology aims to construct theory from data collected during the research process and advocates of the approach (for example, Strauss and Corbin 1990 and Charmaz 2006) assert that researchers should not be overly influenced by existing theory in the academic domain prior to the emergence of their own theoretical categories.

Although literature was explored prior to data collection for the research study, the researcher did not examine in depth the theoretical underpinnings of the NG approach. Instead, the researcher began work for the literature review by concentrating on quantitative research and the implications of research designs on research findings. Qualitative research was reviewed at a later stage once data collection had begun and theoretical categories were being constructed from data. University requirements suggested that a literature review be completed first and a research paper follow this. In retrospect it may have benefited the research process and demonstrated a greater allegiance to grounded

theory methodology if the researcher had approached the University and requested that she complete her research paper first.

It could be argued that the constructed theoretical categories are similar to other theoretical ideas within the NG domain. The Nurture Group Network (NGN, 2009) for example, presents six core principles two of which were similar to the categories produced as a result of this research: ‘the classroom offers a safe base’ and ‘language is understood as vital means of communication.’ The pertinent question in relation to this issue is whether the researcher was overly influenced with prior theoretical knowledge which coloured her view when analysing data and resulted in the formation of categories which represented extant theoretical knowledge rather than the views of the young people in the study.

The BPS (2008) recommends that research includes clear descriptions of analytic frameworks and discusses how themes and categories are generated from data. This helps to make clear how the researcher’s insights and reflections map onto data and validate claims. The research study (see Chapter 3) illustrates the properties of open codes which were generated and how these formed theoretical categories. The study also provides verbatim quotes from the young people which illustrate the categories. In-depth explanation and the provision of concrete examples in the ‘discussion of results’ section also serve to evidence the theoretical categories. It is argued that this evidence together with explanation of methods and data analysis helps to demonstrate that categories were constructed from data.

The discovery that the findings from this research support theoretical knowledge in the NG domain is positive for NG practitioners. In the case of the NG under study it may indicate that practitioners are abiding by NG principles and producing positive results. The strength of this research is that findings are based in evidence: the collected views and experiences of the young people. In addition, the constructed theory illustrates how categories link with each other and elements of process such as how trust is built and communication facilitated are explored (see chapter 3). This has not been explored in other NG research.

#### **4. Time constraints on data collection**

It is believed that time constraints presented the biggest limitation to the research study presented in Chapter 3. As explained in Chapter 1, the research study was not commissioned and therefore a conceptual domain had not been identified for the researcher when she began employment at the EPS and was required by the university to begin work for this Volume of the thesis. It took six months for a suitable research area to be found and agreed upon by stakeholders. Further time was spent gaining informed consent from young people and their parents. This proved to be a challenging task for simple but frustrating reasons such as the researcher not being in the school setting to remind the young people to bring back signed consent forms. In view of these issues which are common within the world of educational research (Robson, 2002) the time to collect data was reduced.

In grounded theory methods it is important to continue data collection until theoretical categories are saturated. This is when no new theoretical concepts emerge from the

research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that data collection can continue even until the final stages of writing up a research paper. Data collection in terms of the research study presented in Chapter 3 needed to be curtailed to meet time demands presented by the university course. Nevertheless methods were in place such as the use of the Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 see Chapter 3) to try and ensure that theoretical categories were ‘full.’

If more time had been available the researcher would have liked to feed back her theoretical categories to the young people in more detail and develop these further. Closer examination of theoretical literature could also have been engaged with, particularly analysis of how the constructed theory fits with Attachment theory ideas (Bowlby, 1965, 1969, 1980). This follow on work could be completed in the future.

## **5. Dissemination of research findings**

Ideas from this Volume of work have been disseminated in several ways thus far; for example:

- Discussions and the presentation of a letter to the young people involved in the research in order to gain their views on research findings
- A letter written to the Head teacher of the school in which the research took place
- Discussions and the presentation of an information pack to the school in which the research took place

- Discussions with the NG leader of the school in which the research took place because she was asked to consult with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and chose to discuss the research findings with them.
- A presentation to EPS colleagues at a whole service Continuing Professional Development (CPD) day
- Discussions with the NG co-ordinator of the Local Authority
- Discussions with an EP from a different Local Authority who was interested in completing qualitative research on NGs and possibly extending the work presented in this Volume

In terms of feeding back to the young people involved in the research, this was done informally in a small group setting with the researcher and five young people present. Three of the young people were not in school on the day the meeting was organised. Opportunities were presented for the young people to communicate their views in the small group or on a one to one basis with the researcher or the NG leader. The young people reported that they agreed with the research findings and did not offer any additional thoughts. In retrospect perhaps a meeting should have been arranged to feedback results on a one to one basis with the young people. However, time constraints prevented this.

University course requirements specified that two public domain briefings needed to be included in this Volume. The remit of these briefings was to feed back findings from the literature review (Chapter 2) and research study (Chapter 3) to stakeholders involved in the research process. The two public domain briefings which have been included in this

Volume are a power point presentation which summarises key findings from the literature review and research study. This was presented at a whole service CPD day (see Appendix 1) to approximately 60 EPs. The letter presented to the young people involved in the research project is included in Appendix 2.

## **6. Final thoughts**

Critiques of the interpretive paradigm would question its value because it is unable to make wide ranging generalisations (Carr, 1986). The aim of this study was not to make wide ranging generalisations but to explore actions and interactions in one setting and through this process produce a substantive theory which Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.174) explain ‘evolves from the study of phenomena situated in one particular situational context.’ However, Pring (2000) discusses the concept of “uniqueness fallacy”. He states that uniqueness in one respect does not mean uniqueness in all respects and points out that qualitative approaches should be able to make at least some level of generalisation.

As explained previously, contextual information about the NG under study in Chapter 3 has been presented (see Chapter 3, Appendix 4). It is hoped that practitioners will find this information useful when considering how this NG fits with the NG in their settings. Ideas from the research study, in particular the views of what young people valued, could be shared with young people in other settings to explore whether they matched or whether the discussion process generates other helpful information. It is hoped that issues discussed in Chapter 3, such as the need to think about how to offer continuing support to young people

once NG placements have ended, and how to communicate NG referrals with the young people, are useful issues to examine further in order to enhance NG practice.

Chapter 2 recognised that there are 4 variants of NGs and some NGs, such as the NG under study in Chapter 3, involve pupils spending a number of sessions per week in NG but the majority of their time with peers in their class. Cooper, Arnold and Boyd (2001) note that a key characteristic of NGs (as discussed in Chapter 2) is that they should be fully integrated into mainstream schools and Local Authority structures, with policies to avoid their being an exclusionary form of intervention. However, it has been observed that extant literature pertinent to NGs often refers to children's 'reintegration to mainstream class' and in Chapter 2, when exploring extant NG literature this language has been used to mirror the literature. Terminology such as 'reintegration' and 'mainstream' may stem from reference to Classic NGs (Variant 1) where pupils spend up to 95% of the school week in the NG (Cooper et al. 2001) but is also being used in reference to other NG variants. It seems important that academics think about the language they use when discussing NGs to avoid positioning them as an exclusionary intervention. All pupils who attend a NG should remain on roll with peers in their 'mainstream' class and should attend some lessons of the week with them. Pupils should be included in the life of the school and classroom and not be perceived as a separate group (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007).

This chapter concludes by recognising that there are limitations to the research study presented in this Volume. These limitations have been discussed in this chapter and Chapter 3. Future research would benefit from seeking to overcome these limitations. In addition, theoretical ideas brought to the forefront warrant further exploration. It is

considered that the work presented in this Volume begins the important process of gathering the views of young people, who attended a secondary school NG intervention, and sharing these views with relevant stakeholders

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**APPENDIX 1: Public domain briefing: a presentation to the Educational Psychology Service**

**Nurture Groups**  
**An in-depth examination of extant literature  
pertinent to Nurture Groups and an exploratory  
study, using grounded theory methods, of young  
peoples' views and experiences of a secondary  
school Nurture Group**

**Presentation by Aruna Pintilei**

**10<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

Background information:

Trainee educational psychologists (TEPs) employed by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) were asked to deliver a presentation of their research at a whole service Career Professional Development day. Approximately 60 Educational Psychologists were present. An overview of salient information from the literature review and research study was presented.

## **Aims**

- **Background information on NGs in the Local Authority**
- **Explanation of what NGs are**
- **A whistle stop tour of Volume I of my thesis**
  - **A brief review of extent NG literature**
  - **An overview of my NG research study**

- Difficult to know where to pitch. I know some people will have a lot of knowledge of NGs, and others less so
- I'll begin by presenting an overview of NGs in the Local Authority and background explanation of what they are
- Recently the intervention has received national media coverage: on television programme "Dispatches" (2009)
- Lots of academic research on the effectiveness of NGs and I will offer information on this
- Discuss my NG research which has contributed towards my doctorate

## **NGs in XXX**

- Approx 30 settings with NGs in place
- 3 running in secondary schools
- NG co-ordinator support and training available
- Contacts in Local Authority:
  - NG co-ordinator
  - NG consultants

- NGs seem to be popular in the Local Authority
- There has been a steady growth over recent years
- Now there are approximately 30 settings with NGs
- Settings include: Children's Centres, nurseries, primary and secondary schools
- Mostly for primary aged pupils. However, secondary school NGs becoming more popular
- Currently 3 NGs in secondary schools in the Local Authority
- A further 3 secondary schools will be establishing NGs in the near future
- There are EP colleagues in the local authority who raise awareness of the intervention within the Local Authority and offer support and training to schools

## What are NGs?

- Intervention to meet the needs of children and young people with SEBDs
- In-school resource
- Homely environment
- Emphasis on education *and* social, emotional and behavioural needs

- An in-school resource for primary school children whose emotional, social, behavioural and formal learning needs cannot be met in mainstream class.' (Boxall, 2002, p.1)
- Developed by educational psychologist Marjorie Boxall in the 1960's
- Boxall (2002) explains that in the 1960's, when the first NGs were established East London was experiencing social upheaval because large numbers of families were resettling in the area.
- Schools reacted to the influx of children with SEBDs by excluding them, and/or referring large numbers of children for psychiatric assessment.
- Boxall (2002) goes on to explain that when these children were assessed it was recommended that they would benefit from referrals to resource bases, within education, that could offer opportunities to develop personal relationships and provide emotional outlets for them.
- Principles on which NGs are based did not stem from attempts to work within existing theories but over the years connections between theories became apparent. (Boxall 2002, p.ix)
- Boxall (2002) writes that the NG process has links with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1965, 1969, 1980)
- Therefore, NGs were established in school settings as a preventative approach that aimed to integrate children with SEBDs into school settings and avoid them being excluded.
- Designed to be homely, containing a kitchen/dining area where children can have breakfast, a comfortable seating area and an area for more formal work (Cooper and Lovey, 1999).
- Emphasis on education *and* emotional and social needs (Cooper and Lovey, 1999)

## **What are NGs? (see handouts)**

- Different variants of NGs
- NG characteristics
- NG principles

- Four variants of NGs have been discussed by Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper and Whitebread (2007)
- Refer to handouts
- Discuss classic NG
- Variant 1 and 2 NGs can be viewed as genuine NGs
- Variant 2 differs in terms of structure and organisation: in some secondary school NGs pupils may spend less time in the NG = Variant 2
- Unfortunately, guidance on NG variants (Cooper et al. 2001, Cooper and Whitebread, 2007) does not make clear how great a departure from Variant 2 can be made before the NG becomes a Variant 3
- Variant 3 NGs provide social and emotional support but a limitation is that the educational element of NGs is minimised or absent.
- Variant 4 NGs do not follow NG principles (Cooper and Whitebread 2007). Therefore, not actually NGs!
- Handout supplied which summaries key characteristics of NGs
- May be useful information to share with settings who are considering setting up a NG

## **Literature review (see handout)**

- Key debates
- Quantitative research
- Qualitative research

### Key debates:

- I was sceptical about NGs and this was because of comments I had heard about interventions and provision for children with SEBDs and debates which exist in the academic domain. In terms of NGs there is debate which centres on Inclusion: are they an inclusive intervention or are they not? (Bailey, 2007, Howes et al. 2002)
- Issues about attributing SEBDs to 'within child' status perhaps without recognising environmental variables
- Also debate about the use of assessment tools with children with possible SEBDs

### Quantitative:

- Focussed on using pre and post measures to measure changes in pupils behaviour using the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999) and the Boxall Profile (Bennathan and Boxall, 1998)
- Usual limitations of 'quasi-experimental' research: it is difficult to find control groups and match participants, the use of tools can be criticised, research design, attrition

### Qualitative:

- Range of research which is qualitative: illuminative. Focussed on exploring the experiences and perceptions of NGs from the perspectives of parents, school staff and children.
- Scope for further research with clear methods
- Research which gains secondary aged pupils perspectives of the intervention
- Binnie and Allen (2008) demonstrate that NGs have a positive impact on the wider school environment and argue that this is a defining feature of NGs which distinguish them from other interventions.
- Cooper et al. (2001) and Cooper (2004a) note that having a NG increased staff awareness of developmental issues and knowledge of how social and emotional factors impacted on learning.

## **Conclusions from literature review (see handout)**

NG literature generally points towards NGs having the potential to be an effective intervention to meet the needs of children with SEBDs, as well as, the needs of the wider school community

See handout:

- I have provided a handout which summaries key findings from the research
- Obviously these findings need to be interpreted with caution. I have alluded briefly to limitations of extent NG research. As with all research, limitations of research design and method impact on research claims and so need to be taken into consideration.
- Nevertheless, it provides a useful overview of salient findings.
- Although there is a wealth of information there are gaps of knowledge within the domain
- Hence my research

## **Research study**

- **Aims**
- **Methodology**
- **Method**
- **Results**
- **Conclusions**

### Rationale:

- As NGs were originally established for children in primary school settings there is very limited research which provides accounts of NGs for secondary aged pupils or collect their views of the intervention.
- Cooper and Whitebread (2007) include pupils of secondary school age in their sample but they do not explore their views of the intervention.
- Cooke et al. (2008) provide an account of a NG for secondary aged pupils. However, their purpose is to demonstrate how NG theories and principles have been adapted for use with adolescents.
- Importance in government legislation of gaining the views of children and young people.

### Aims:

- This research study generates new understanding by using grounded theory methods to explore a research area which has been unexplored until this time.
- The initial aim was to explore the experiences and views of secondary aged pupils, who attended a secondary NG provision.
- As theoretical categories emerged from data collection, coding and analysis, the aim became focussed on exploring the salient properties of these categories, and the development of a core theoretical category, which constitutes the grounded theory

## **Methodology: theoretical analysis of methods**

- Epistemology = Qualitative
- Methods: Grounded theory (Charmaz 2006, Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

- This research aimed to gain knowledge of the experience and views of young people who had attended a NG based in their secondary school setting and so a qualitative methodology was used.
- Grounded theory methodology is concerned with developing theory from research so carry out research first and then link to existing theory

This method is appropriate when:

- little is known about the research area
- to get the perspectives of individuals without being overly influenced by theory

## Method

- Overall sample
- Initial sampling
- Theoretical sampling
- Observation - 'participant as observer' (Robson, 2002)
- Interviews - intensive interviewing (Charmaz, 2006)

- Unlike quantitative research, where a sample size may be decided from the onset, a grounded theory approach means that the size of the sample is not usually decided before the research begins (Smith and Biley 1997). This is because the collection of data is dependent on theoretical sampling.

Overall sample:

- 3 observations of NG sessions in the school. The sessions were up to 2 hours  
Observation approach was 'participant as observer' (Robson, 2002)
- 11 interviews including 8 young people who had attended the NG, NG leader and NG co-ordinator
- Intensive interviewing- allow young people to tell their own stories and take the lead. Discuss what they think is important- very open ended questions asked when needed

### Initial sampling

- Point of departure to get the study started (Charmaz, 2006)
- Secondary school NG chosen because had been established for the longest time 2 years
- Age of children attended a year 7 and 8 NG and were in year 8 and 9 when I interviewed them
- The first 2 young people (participants A1 and B1) to return their consent forms were selected for initial sampling
- An interview with the NG leader and the NG co-ordinator and an observation of an afternoon NG session also comprised the initial sampling
- NG features: 3 sessions per week, approx 2 hours each, describe NG area, children's difficulties were identified by NG leader as: withdrawn, erratic moods, socially isolated, school attendance concerns, attention seeking behaviour, conflict with peers, parental bereavement, angry outbursts

### Theoretical sampling- sample concepts and categories not data

- In grounded theory research, 'theory' is generated through theoretical sampling
- This involves starting with the data, constructing tentative ideas about the data, and then examining these ideas through further empirical inquiry
- As questions and gaps in the data arise, Charmaz (2006) explains that the researcher seeks out further data from appropriate sources
- Theoretical saturation is achieved when no new theoretical concepts emerge from the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)
- Involved interviewing a further 6 pupils, observations of the NG in the morning and afternoon, and an interview with the NG leader

## **Coding and analysis**

- Involved moving between data collection, coding, focussed data collection and memo writing (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)
- Open, axial and selective coding
- Use of the Paradigm Model to saturate categories

- Memos = analytic notes written about codes, comparisons and other ideas which the researcher felt were important (Charmaz, 2006).
- Key messages from the data: open codes such as ‘fun’, ‘space’ ‘targets’, ‘belonging’ and ‘personal growth’
- Axial coding: a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. This is done by utilising the Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)
- Selective coding: The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development

Paradigm model:

- helps to saturate categories as look for: causal conditions, contextual information, action/interactional strategies (processes) and consequences
- links subcategories to a category and helps to give the categories density
- Through the processes of selective coding, and the use of the Paradigm Model (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) a core theoretical category was identified, which told the analytical story of the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

## **Threats to validity/credibility**

- **Difficult to achieve theoretical saturation**
- **Interviewing young people**
- **Limitations of methods**

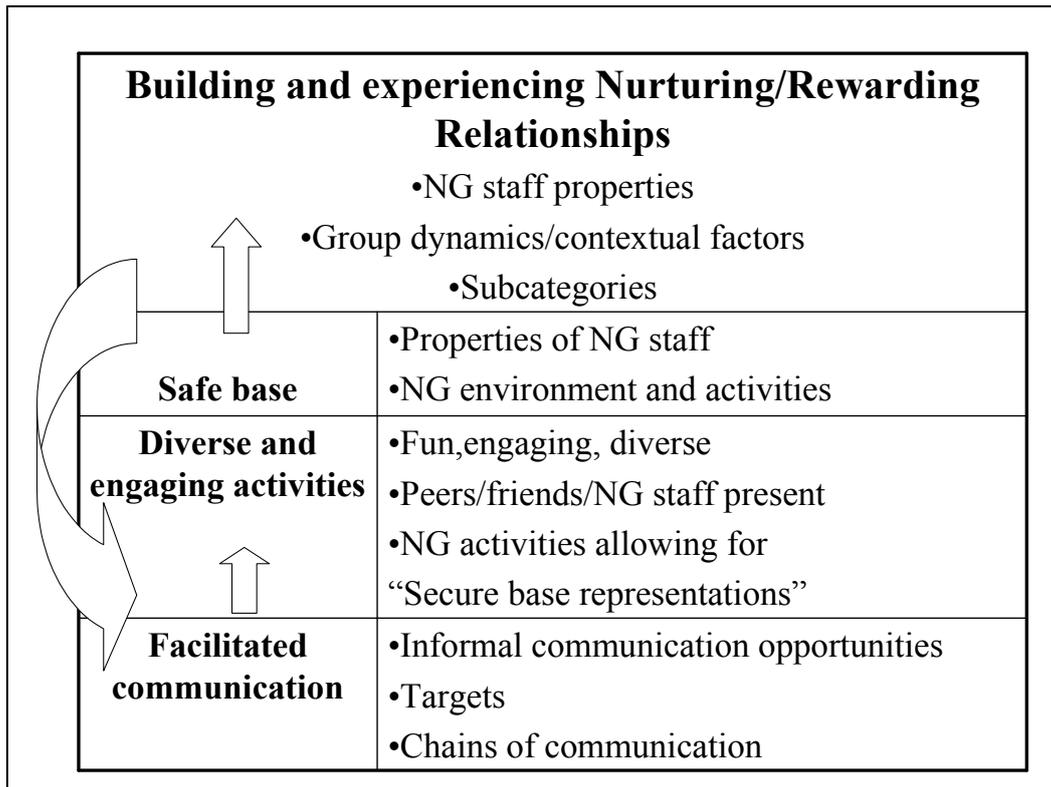
- Time limits on data collection presented as a constrain in terms of achieving theoretical saturation
- Difficult to return to participants- because research not commissioned by the school
- Ethical issues/power imbalances/ young people reporting what they want researcher to hear (?)
- Fidelity in terms of the use of the grounded theory approach, for example the point in which the literature was reviewed. This may have impacted on data analysis and theory formulation in that the literature may have constrained or overly influenced new theory formulation
- However, it should be noted that the review of qualitative literature was completed at the same time as data collection once initial interviews had been coded and themes had begun to be generated. This followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) suggestions.

## Results

What did the young people most value from their time in the NG?

<b>Core category</b>	Building and experiencing Nurturing/Rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers
<b>Subcategories</b>	A safe base Experiencing diverse, fun and engaging activities Facilitated communication

- Once initial data was collected and analysed the research aim changed to exploring what the young people valued about NGs
- This was because during their interviews the young people communicated a story of valuing the NG
- It was found that the young people most valued the relationships they build with NG staff and peers
- Subcategories which supported the core category were: ‘having a safe base’, ‘engaging in a range of diverse, fun and engaging activities’ and ‘facilitated communication’



- Diagram illustrates the formulated grounded theory
- Important to note that the categories are dynamic and all categories are needed to support the core category

*Go to next slide to explain core category*

In terms of supporting categories:

- NG considered a ‘safe base’ because of properties of NG staff, environment and activities
- Literature argues that during adolescence important adults can provide a secure base which supports exploration and autonomy in the young person.
- NG staff supported the young people but also facilitated opportunities for them to explore and develop skills through the range of diverse activities they organised.
- In terms of NG environment: concrete and visible
- But also evoked feelings of a sense of calmness and safety at an emotional level

*Activities next slide x2*

Communication

- Through activities, targets, NG staff communicating with parents
- NG staff bridge between NG and school

## **Core Category: building and experiencing Nurturing/Rewarding relationships**

- “In NG if you had problems you could talk to X and Y about it. They would help you and listen.... Other teachers don’t listen they just think it’s you but X and Y listen.” (B3)
- “X and Y know what’s going on... they know how to deal with things and I can always talk to them. That’s why I trusted them.” (C2)
- “It was really good (NG). We done artistic activities like painting and stuff. We done proper work, like in lessons, but it was better in NG group ’cos you had friends you could talk to.”(B1)

- Quotes show verbatim some properties of this category:
- Young people considered NG staff as advisors or mentors, felt they were interested in them, provided them with emotional safety and acceptance
- Also considered NG staff as friends
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> NG principle (NGN, 2008) explains that ‘nurture involves listening and responding’. The young people expressed how NG staff listened and responded to them which the quotes above highlight
- Importantly the message that they were able to TRUST NG staff emerged from the data
- Group dynamics and the supporting subcategories were important in building relationships with peers

In terms of literature

- Fits with what Scott and Lee (2009, p.5) say about attachment
- “Attachment theory focuses on the importance of a child growing up in an environment where they are exposed to caring and trusting relationships with adults and where the adults provide consistency and a stable, structured setting where the child can develop in a nurturing environment”

- Finding that the young people felt they were able to build rewarding relationships with NG staff and peers is encouraging
- Academics note the importance of positive relationships in school

For example:

- Relationships with unrelated adults can minimise negative effects in young people's development, because they can provide an alternative attachment figure (Georgiou et al. 2008)
- Young people who had developed a secure attachment with mentors showed greater academic and emotional adjustment (Soucy and Larose 2000)
- Positive relationships with teachers more important than classroom sizes or the level of teacher training, because if pupils felt connected to school they were less likely to partake in risk behaviours (Resnick et al. (1997)
- Also links well with extant qualitative NG literature findings

### **Subcategory: Diverse, fun and engaging activities**

- **“Breakfast was good because you get a chance to talk to people and make friends.” (A3)**
- **“We did proper work like writing tasks or a story, usually in lessons its really boring but in NG I done it and it was alright ...Learning activities gave me more ideas so when I went to English and we had creative writing task or something I would think about what I wrote down here and what X had said to me and it would help me get a good level in my creative writing.” (B3)**
- **“Making things helped me to calm down and relax and think about what had happened and think about my feelings and let off steam by making things.. that’s what I really like.....” (C2)**
- **“The trips helped loads because before I would always be at the back but now I want to go into the group and be near the centre of the group so that I’ve got loads of people. “(B1)**

- Fun, engaging, diverse: breakfast, learning activities, craft activities, trips
- Diverse activities provide opportunities to relax and form relationships, communicate and perceive NG as a safe base
- Young people felt secure and calm and happy when engaged in activities
- “Secure base representations” (Holmes, 2001)
- He says that traditional Attachment thinking refers to the caregiver who a child would turn to when distressed
- However, Holmes explains that for adults, as well as people representing a secure base, it can be also be
- ‘a representation of security within our minds’
- He provides examples of activating the internal secure base through favourite food, places, books and television programmes
- Seems NG activities for these young people within NG environment may have been an internal safe base representation

## Future research

- Purpose of exploratory research is to find hypotheses which can then be explored in greater detail
- How does research and theoretical literature, particularly in relation to the benefits of relationships with adults based in the school setting, fit with young peoples' perceptions of the value of NGs in other settings?
- “Secure base representations” (Holmes, 2001)
- How to support transition back into school without NG
- Explanation of referral reason and intended outcomes

- Potential areas for further exploration could be:
- How does research and theoretical literature, particularly in relation to the benefits of relationships with adults based in the school setting, fit with young peoples' perceptions of the value of NGs in other settings? (This research has only been carried out in one setting how can we extend this?)
- Can children and young people form secure base representations and what does this process involve?
- Explore how best to support transition to school life without NGs: the young people in this study received support through the NG staff bridging the gap between NG and lessons, there was also an after school club for them to attend. However, some pupils still found school difficult when they weren't attending the NG.
- One child when explaining about why she attended NG gave the impression she thought it was to fix or reform her
- Do we need to think about how we explain NG placement to older pupils so they are an equal part of the process?

# Conclusions

From the young people involved in this study it seems that NGs do offer (considerably) more than tea and toast!



- State core and subcategories
- Findings indicate that young people attending a secondary school NG valued their time in the NG, and felt they benefited from it
- From participants' perspectives they had made personal gains, such as:
  - Having hope about school being enjoyable
  - Having fun while in NG and feeling relaxed and calm
  - Making friends with their peers in NG, but also they had more confidence, as a result of attending NG, and so had made more friends in general
  - Having friends in the NG, and engaging in diverse NG activities helped the young people feel that they wanted to come to school and increased attendance for some participants
  - As the young people built trusting relationships with NG staff they felt able to listen to their advice, which led to changes in behaviour at home and school
  - Another consequence of building relationships was an increase in communication with peers, school staff and family members
- Ofsted (2008) found that good practice in re-engaging young people with SEBDs in secondary school involved:
  - staff sharing a commitment in helping students to achieve,
  - communication with students and their families,
  - enabling students to feel listened to
  - options for specific support such as temporary withdrawal from class
- This study has demonstrated that the NG in this setting was able to provide these opportunities

Handouts

# Nurture Groups

Presentation to XXX Educational Psychology Service

on 10.06.09

by Aruna Pintilei

**Explanation of NG Variants (Adapted from Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)**

<b>NG Variant</b>	<b>Key Features</b>
<b>Variant 1 Classic 'Boxall' NG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Match, in totality, the NG model established by Marjorie Boxall</li> <li>- An inclusive educational provision, which usually involves a pupil attending for 9 out of 10 half day sessions, which meets the individual's developmental needs and promotes educational progress.</li> <li>- Staffed by a teacher and teaching assistant and are made up of between 10 to 12 pupils with a range of needs.</li> <li>- Provides a holistic curriculum incorporating the National curriculum with a curriculum which addresses social, emotional and behavioural factors which underpin the child's academic learning.</li> <li>- The setting incorporates soft furnishings and a predictable routine which includes curricular activities, free play and social activities, for example eating breakfast together.</li> <li>- Pupils remain on roll with their mainstream class and register with them. They also attend one lesson a week with their mainstream class.</li> <li>- The aim of the NG is for pupils to return to mainstream class on a full time basis after 3 or 4 school terms but where appropriate this can take place after one or two terms.</li> <li>- Placement, target setting and monitoring of pupils progress takes place using the Boxall Profile.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 2 New Variant NG</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on principles underpinning Variant 1 and contain core features such as small group size, staffing by a teacher and teaching assistant have a developmental and holistic curriculum emphasis.</li> <li>- May differ from Variant 1 in structure and/or organisational features, the amount of time pupils attend the NG, serve a group of schools rather than an individual school, be located in a special school and vary in the age range of pupils they include, for example, catering for pupils in Key Stage 3.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 3 Informed by NG principles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May bear the name NG but differ from the organisational and principles of Variant 1 and 2. For example, take place at lunch times, after school or break times.</li> <li>- Groups may be run by a single member of staff who may not be a teacher.</li> <li>- Activities will focus on social and development issues but not have an academic emphasis as Variant 1 and 2.</li> </ul>
<b>Variant 4 Aberrant NGs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are called NGs but distort principles of Variant 1.</li> <li>- Lack an educational and/or developmental emphasis and serve to emphasise control and containment.</li> </ul>

## **Characteristics of NGs**

(Adapted from Cooper et al. 2001)

1. A NG is an agreed part of school and/or Local authority provision for Special Educational Needs and is an integral part of a school or a resource for a group of schools.
2. The curriculum in the NG includes the National Curriculum and takes account of school policies.
3. Staff work towards a child's return to mainstream classes.
4. Children attend the NG for a substantial part of each school day or for regular sessions usually for between 2 to 4 school terms.
5. Two adults work together and model good adult relationships in a structured and predictable environment which fosters trust and learning.
6. A setting where missing or insufficiently internalised early learning experiences are provided.
7. The NG supports positive social and emotional growth and cognitive development by responding to the child at a developmentally appropriate level for the individual child.
8. Language development through intensive interaction with an adult is emphasised.
9. The group is created with social learning through co-operation and play being a central theme.
10. Staff involve parents/carers as early and fully as possible and have a positive attitude towards them.

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## Nurture Group Principles

Taken from The Nurture Group Network website (2009)

### **1. Children's learning is understood developmentally**

In nurture groups staff respond to children not in terms of arbitrary expectations about 'attainment levels' but in terms of the children's developmental progress assessed through the Boxall Profile Handbook. The response to the individual child is 'as they are', underpinned by a non-judgemental and accepting attitude.

### **2. The classroom offers a safe base**

The organisation of the environment and the way the group is managed contains anxiety. The nurture group room offers a balance of educational and domestic experiences aimed at supporting the development of the children's relationship with each other and with the staff. The nurture group is organised around a structured day with predictable routines. Great attention is paid to detail; the adults are reliable and consistent in their approach to the children. Nurture groups are an educational provision making the important link between emotional containment and cognitive learning.

### **3. Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem**

Nurture involves listening and responding. In a nurture group 'everything is verbalised' with an emphasis on the adults engaging with the children in reciprocal shared activities e.g. play / meals / reading /talking about events and feelings. Children respond to being valued and thought about as individuals, so in practice this involves noticing and praising small achievements; 'nothing is hurried in nurture groups.'

### **4. Language is understood as a vital means of communication**

Language is more than a skill to be learnt, it is the way of putting feelings into words. Nurture group children often 'act out' their feelings as they lack the vocabulary to 'name' how they feel. In nurture groups the informal opportunities for talking and sharing, e.g. welcoming the children into the group or having breakfast together are as important as the more formal lessons teaching language skills. Words are used instead of actions to express feelings and opportunities are created for extended conversations or encouraging imaginative play to understand the feelings of others.

### **5. All behaviour is communication**

This principle underlies the adult response to the children's often challenging or difficult behaviour. 'Given what I know about this child and their development what is this child trying to tell me?' Understanding what a child is communicating through behaviour helps staff to respond in a firm but non-punitive way by not being provoked or discouraged. If the child can sense that their feelings are understood this can help to diffuse difficult situations. The adult makes the link between the external/internal worlds of the child.

## **6. Transitions are significant in the lives of children**

The nurture group helps the child make the difficult transition from home to school. However, on a daily basis there are numerous transitions the child makes, e.g. between sessions and classes and between different adults. Changes in routine are invariably difficult for vulnerable children and need to be carefully managed with preparation and support.

## Summary of findings from quantitative and qualitative research

### **NGs have been found to be effective in:**

- Identifying children's needs (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005)
- Supporting academic gains (Sanders, 2007)
- Being enjoyable for children (Bishop and Swain, Cooper et al, 2001, 2004a, Sanders, 2007)
- Providing respite to class teachers, peers and parents (Bishop and Swain, 2000, Cooper and Tiknaz, Cooper et al. 2001, Cooper 2004a, Binnie and Allen, 2008)
- Improving parent and school relationships (Sanders, 2007)
- Reducing Statutory Assessments (Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997)
- Being cost-effective (Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997)
- Maintenance in the longer term of at least some gains (O'Connor and Colwell 2002, Iszatt and Wasilewska, 1997)
- Providing positive outcomes at a whole school level (Lucas,1999, Doyle, 2004, Cooper et al. 2001, Cooper 2004a and Sanders 2007, Binnie and Allen, 2008)
- The majority of parents feeling that the same amount of progress would not have been made without attendance at NG (Cooper et al. 2001).
- Generalising improvements made in NG to the mainstream setting; especially for pupils with global SEBDs and anti-social and disruptive behaviours, as identified on the SDQ (Goodman, 1997, 1999)(Cooper 2004a, 2004b)
- Improving behaviour in the home context (Binnie and Allen, 2008)
- Raising self-esteem (Binnie and Allen, 2008)

### **Less positive findings are that:**

- Pupils with social and emotional difficulties and hyperactive behaviours tended not to generalise improvements. (Cooper 2004a, 2004b)
- There are class teacher concerns that children may not make academic gains. (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005)
- Class teachers felt less able to assess academic attainment. (Sanders, 2007)
- Pupils attending NG could boast about their experiences in NG which made some of their peers jealous. (Sanders, 2007)
- Teachers commented that they felt they knew the NG children less well. (Sanders, 2007)
- NGs are not an inclusive intervention. (Bailey,2007, Howes et al. 2002)
- Some parents were disappointed with the rate of progress. (Cooper, 2004a)

### **Other findings and suggestions are:**

- NGs which have been in place for 2 or more years are more effective than NGs which have been established for less than 2 years (Cooper and Whitebread, 2007)
- The support of the head teacher, school staff, the age of children, the gender balance and the mixture of externalising and internalising difficulties children within the group exhibit are important variables for effective NG provision. (Cooper and Tiknaz, 2005 and Howes et al. 2002)
- The failure of sub-groups of pupils to generalise gains made in the NG may highlight the context dependent nature of their difficulties (Cooper, 2004b)
- Attention should be made to promoting NG principles in schools. (Cooper, 2004a)
- Although significant improvements were made between terms 1 and 4 the greatest improvements in SEBDs were in the first two terms (Cooper, 2004b)

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## **APPENDIX 2: Public domain briefing to the young people who were interviewed**

Dear

I wanted to share the findings of my Nurture Group (NG) research with you.

As you know, I was interested in finding out the views and experiences of young people who attended the NG. Some of the main findings were:

- You valued and enjoyed your time in NG.
- The most important things were building good relationships with NG staff. You felt they understood you and you could trust them. You also enjoyed spending time with other people in the group - even though sometimes people didn't always get on well - you did have fun together and many of you made friends.
- Having a range of fun, different and motivating activities was really important. They helped you enjoy coming to NG, helped you feel safe and supported you in talking to NG staff and other young people in the group.
- You valued having the NG area because it was a safe place for you to go to, relax and think. You knew it was always there for you even if you weren't actually attending a session.
- You appreciated having time to talk with NG staff and other people in the group. Sometimes you talked about general issues like what activities you were involved in but sometimes you talked about personal targets and difficult issues at home and school.
- Everyone said they enjoyed going to NG and most people explained how they benefited from the group.
- Some people said school became more difficult for them when they stopped going to NG. They wanted it to continue for longer.
- Some people weren't sure about why they were going to NG in the first place and what they would gain from it.

My research explores the ideas above, particularly how you were able to form valued relationships with NG staff and each other. I discuss for example, how the size of the group was important, the behaviour of the NG staff towards you and how the activities were important in helping you to enjoy yourself at NG and feel comfortable enough to talk to NG staff and each other.

I have discussed these findings with XXX and I will be sending her a copy of my research. I will also send a copy of my research to XXXXX.

I would be really happy to hear what you think about the findings and if you have any thoughts you can tell me about them today or let XXX know.

Most of all, I would like to thank you for taking part in the research. I really appreciated you spending time talking with me and sharing your experiences and views of NG. I was really impressed that you were able to express yourself so well and tell me so much useful information. It can be difficult to talk to someone that you don't know well - so thank you very much!

Best wishes

Aruna Pintilei  
Trainee Educational Psychologist